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A Blended Learning System within the Cybergogy Paradigm

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Abstract

The paper is focused on the development of the students' transversal competences, such as communication in foreign languages and intercultural dialogue skills. The research has valorized Anderson's and Krathwohl's taxonomy, and proposed a conceptual model, articulating various dimensions: foreign languages knowledge, communication, cultural/intercultural approach and organizational culture. The conceptual framework has been implemented using an online platform, according to both cybergogy and andragogy paradigms. The methodological approach encompasses, besides the desk research, two surveys aiming at identifying the students' views and needs in order to validate and refine the model and the pilot blended-learning system.

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1. Introduction

The paper summarizes the concepts and the methodological approach implemented for the design and development of a blended-learning system, aiming at increasing the young people's employability through transversal competences acquirement, such as: foreign languages and cross-cultural competences. Moreover, language learning is seen as a way for the learner to develop his or her personality (Council of Europe, 2001).

The theme addressed is well positioned within the framework of the global knowledge society, where, besides the specialization in various fields, the capacity to interact in a multicultural environment increases the young graduates' chances for a better social insertion. The actual globalisation trend refers not only to the business transactions but also to people, knowledge, technology, and even cultures (Penbek, Ş., Şahin, D.Y., Cerit, A.G., 2012).

The research has been centered on finding efficient tools and a methodological approach for supporting the foreign languages teaching/learning process and increasing the intercultural sensitivity. The articulation of the theoretical approach with a pragmatic innovative view has created the premises for designing an efficient learning module, according with the main paradigms in adult education, such as andragogy and cybergogy.

The main contribution of the paper consists in the development of a conceptual model for the foreign languages teaching/learning and intercultural skills development and its implementation as a blended-learning system. Though the initial approach aimed at the development of an e-learning system, the survey conducted has demonstrated the students' interest in having also "face to face" courses, with direct interactions with their professors and colleagues.

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Finally, the pilot platform has been integrated in a blended-learning system.

These findings represent partially the main achievements of a Romanian research project: “*Educational portal for interactive foreign languages learning and for a better insertion in a multicultural environment*” – eMulticult.

2. Identification of the Young People’s Needs Related to Cross-cultural Competences

The research addresses the actual young people’s needs to cope with the plurilinguism and interculturalism challenges in the fieldwork. In order to identify the young people’s opinion concerning the foreign languages knowledge and the intercultural sensitivity development, as transversal competences, the research team conducted one survey within a research project framework.

The pilot survey has been conducted in May 2010, and has involved 153 subjects (students and non-students). The main hypothesis of the survey has been represented by the importance of the intercultural sensitivity for a better social insertion.

The spectrum of the research subjects covered students of foreign languages and foreign economic relations departments from Romanian major academic centres, Romanian master students who were studying abroad, employees of multinational companies in Romania and participants to lifelong learning courses for foreign languages acquisition. Age, profession, levels of education and various occupations increased the diversity of the subjects’ perceptions. The questionnaire focused on the determination of the citizens’ interactions and adaptation in a multicultural environment, by identifying the main elements which could facilitate intercultural dialogue, as well as the accuracy of understanding the multicultural environment concepts. The explorative analysis for establishing perception and behavioral elements, revealed a stratification of the sample on two lots, as it follows: lot A – people that are integrated in a multicultural environment, representing 52.9% of the sample, and lot B – people that are not involved directly in a multicultural environment. Aiming at conclusive results, a heterogeneous sample was selected, taking into account the profession, age, occupation or socio-professional group. The most important results of this survey refers to:

- the auto-defining capacity, absolutely necessary in the context of globalization, (the answers to this question shows that 77% of the respondents can define themselves, and have generally an idea/opinion versus the ethnic group they belong to);
- the positive perception of the differences (72,8% from the lot A, and 59,7% of lot B);
- the capacity to understand the others’ behaviour (91,3% from lot A, and 88,1% from lot B);
- the utility of the organizational culture elements (97% of the respondents of the lot A grant a higher importance to knowing elements of cultural organization and specific elements of oral/written communication, as well as of cultural values that could generate different interpretation; answers of the lot B score 18,1% lower).

The hypothesis regarding the intercultural sensitivity has been confirmed, as over 90% of the participants mentioned that this competence is crucial for a better social insertion, especially in a multicultural environment. Interest was displayed also in understanding different behavior and availability to accept other cultural values. An increased sensitivity has been displayed by the lot A, demonstrating the importance of the intercultural dialogue for the people living or working in a multicultural environment.

For identifying the main instruments considered necessary in a foreign language learning process, for facilitating the integration in a multicultural environment, answers to the specific questions were analyzed, and the following conclusions have arisen:

- 71,24% consider very useful specific oral/written communication elements;
- 47,71% consider very useful static/dynamic images which could shed light on stance and behavioral elements based on specific cultural values;
- 57,52% consider to be useful to understand cultural organizational elements presented comparatively for different cultural contexts.

The analysis of the answers obtained to this question indicated that the majority (over 70%) declares unequivocally the importance of knowing specific oral and written communication elements for a better and easier adaptation to a multicultural organisational context. The results of the survey guided our research team in the training engineering processes, aiming at designing the educational model, the pedagogical methods and the specific tools to be implemented through the virtual educational platform.

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