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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE TRAINING FOR THE PURPOSE OF MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE. INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL AWARENESS COURSE

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Abstract:

This article briefly reviews chosen forms and methods of intercultural competence training for military and civilian personnel of the Ministry of Defence. Special attention is put to Internet Communication Technology (ICT) for academic purposes in form of e-learning platforms. Teaching modules or simulation software help teachers build more attractive content and more convinced messages. The example of such a solution is the NDU's Introduction to Cultural Awareness e-learning course, which was tasked by the Individual Training and Education Developments NATO Training Group in 2012. The authors of the article were fully engaged in the course development process and worked with the Poland ADL Partnership Lab team. The aim of the article is to present the e-learning course, which, by its design, can support the acquisition and development of intercultural competence.

Keywords:

intercultural competence, e-learning, Advanced Distributed Learning, intercultural awareness

INTRODUCTION

On the wave of growing interest in subject of multiculturalism in the world of business, politics, international NGOs, marketing or education also the Ministry of Defence extended its educational offer by introducing intercultural competence training. By developing this type of competence, the Ministry of Defence intends to adequately pre-



pare personnel participating in missions all over the world. This intercultural competence training was run in different countries with many different methods. The results of efforts in this matter were questionable. We were - and still are - facing many controversies, as it usually happens while using science and technology in the scope of military safety. One of the methods of combining aims and means of civil and military activities are multimedia courses such as Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL), which make possible to abolish the time and space boundaries. This education method is based on widely understood application of informative and communication technology in didactics. One example of application of these technologies in didactics is the e-learning course on intercultural awareness made in National Defence Academy. It was assumed that the course in this form will improve the dissemination of knowledge in this field and will favour its acquisition and consolidation. Moreover, the interactive tool that was used can be applied both in asynchronous and synchronous mode of education¹. Also it may be used in e-learning only and mixed methods².

It is worth to mention that transferring educational contents into the virtual reality became common since 1997 thanks to the Advanced Distributed Learning initiative that was established on the motion of *Office of the Under Secretary of Defence for Personnel and Readiness* of the US Defence Department. Its aim was create new and effective educational methods for civilian and military personnel³. The ADL initiative joins partnership laboratories within the web⁴ and is responsible for e-learning standards that include so called *Next Generation Learning Environment*⁵.

This article treats about methods of studying intercultural competence. The concept of supporting the conventional studies is stated. The e-learning course on intercultural awareness is one example of it. At the same time, the design of study content is described. It covers three levels of e-learning process: acknowledgement, influence (emotional), psychomotor. Model of the course allows the designer to build an educational tool that is intuitive, keeps students' attention and forces them to put in some educational effort.

1. METHODS OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE TRAINING

The theoretical deliberation on intercultural competence for the purposes of Ministry of Defence should begin with defining basic terms of it. Knowledge about cultural studies, intercultural awareness and intercultural competence is not widely spread and it is often misled. Helpful in this matter may be the combination made by the American Psychological Association that set three critical spheres for effective intercultural

¹ Asynchronous mode - in any time, synchronous mode - in real time.

² [online]. [available: 12.12.2013]. Available on the Internet: <http://www.adlnet.gov>.

³ [[online]. [available: 12.12.2013]. Available on the Internet:<http://www.adlnet.gov>.

⁴ In 2012 National Defence Academy became a partner of this program and since then it actively participates in popularizing of such tools for civil and military needs.

⁵ This concept emphasizes the meaning of this platform in exchanging experience in field of mobile and remote learning, usage of interactive and intelligent educational tools, virtual worlds and development studies in this field.



communication: awareness of own culture, opinions, beliefs, convictions that influence our perception of the world and different cultures; intercultural awareness that focuses on knowing and understanding regional culture mechanisms in material and non-material aspects; and finally, the universal cultural competence that enables us to use the first two resources of knowledge⁶. It is especially important while approaching the key division between specific cultural knowledge that concerns specific part of the world (including regional competence that is useful only in specific part of the world with its social groups and cultures) and the universal abilities that let us operate in foreign culture (intercultural competence) even if we lack full ethnographical knowledge concerning the given region. These universal competences are “strategic capabilities that let us act effectively from strategic to tactical level. The specific cultural knowledge and the ability to participate in different culture is used in one specific operation”⁷.

The problem arises because in nowadays cultural trainings for defence purposes, both in homeland and abroad, the main effort is put to the specific culture knowledge of a specific region where the operation will be conducted. Such an approach leaves a few space for intercultural competence development. Abilities for adaptation in constantly changing socio-cultural environment are also limited and they are absolutely essential while facing stressors or unpredictable events. We should be prepared for conducting operations which lack the time for preparation and internalization of acquired knowledge. In such a situation those competences are priceless.

Intercultural competence training may be divided into following segments: universal intercultural competence training (conducted by means of experimental and didactic methods) and training of competences that may be useful in a specific culture or region (also conducted by means of experimental and didactic methods). To anchor these methods of intercultural competence training in the military methodology we may assume that subject and object methods belong to didactic methods, while practical and problematic methods are experimental⁸. This is depicted below:

Universal intercultural competence training done by means of didactic methods may be conducted by:

- lectures and discussions concerning general mechanisms leading cultures (best if done with multimedia presentations);
- movie projections: anthropological and ethnological documentary films;

⁶ A. Der-Karabetian, C.T.H. Liang, C. Gams, *Handbook of Multicultural Measures*, “Multicultural Competence Measures”, Sage Publications Inc: Black Oaks, 2011. [online]. [available: 12.12.2013]. Available on the Internet: <http://www.sage-ereference.com>.

⁷ J. Glicken-Turnley, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups: Why SOF are the way SOF are* JSOU Report11-1, Joint Special Operations University, Tampa 2011, p. 33.

⁸ The complete concept of intercultural competence model training for the purpose of Polish Armed Forces is described in (among others) K. Trochowska, *Uniwersalne kompetencje międzykulturowe w kształceniu Polskich Sił Zbrojnych*, [in:] “Kwartalnik Bellona”, 1/2014, Redakcja Wojskowa, Warszawa 2013.



- self-studies of literature and books on intercultural awareness (e.g. Culture Matters by Peace Corps), internet sources or courses like ADL.

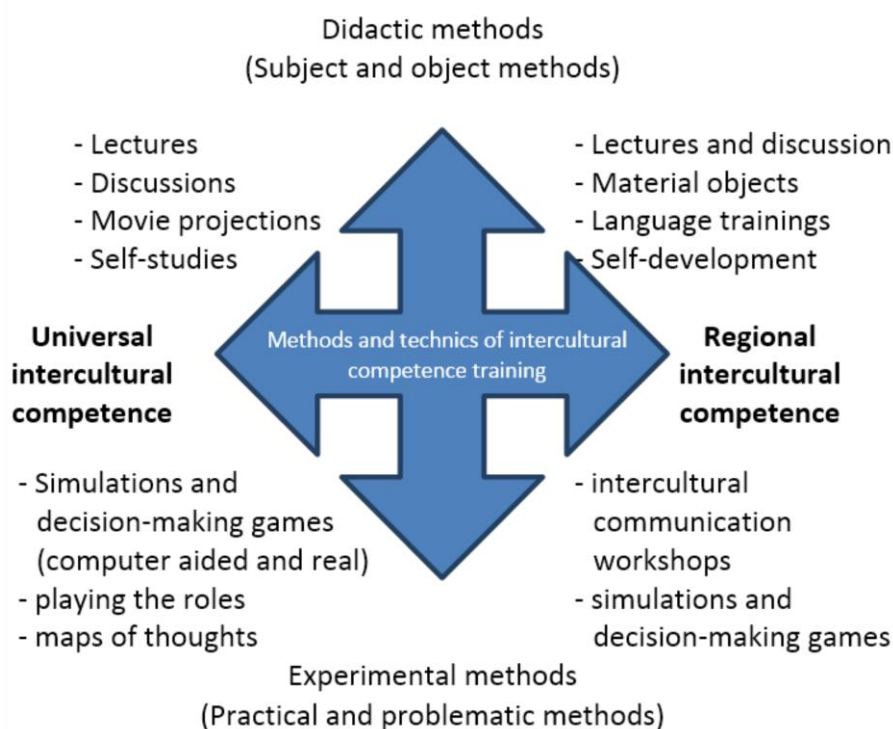


Fig. 1. Methods of intercultural competence training

Source: Own work based on: D. Landis, M. and J. Bennett, *Handbook of Intercultural Training*, Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, 2004 (p. 39-40).

The experimental methods in this matter are used to create the cultural relativism. They include:

- a) Simulations and decision-making games conducted both by means of computer programs as well as during direct interaction of students. Problems of intercultural interaction may be raised by:
 - provocation methods - the tool for creative thinking (according to de Bono) the aim of which is to reverse the frames of thinking and to consider completely new situations that widen the creativity;
 - mental maps that consist of visual representation of given subject by means of drawings, pictures, photos, newspaper cuttings, symbols, ideograms and short, dynamic keywords, (the set point is any complex problem).
- b) Shaping own intercultural awareness by exploring stereotypes of own culture, developing the network or mandalas of connections with other cultures or creating the profile of own identity based on cultural features.
- c) Acquiring intercultural competence by interactions with representatives of different cultures or spending some time living or working in regions of different culture.

However, shaping the regional competence by means of didactic methods include:



- Lectures with multimedia support of the culture and its relations to other cultures;
- Discussions on the culture;
- Language training;
- Case studies on alternative scenarios;
- Self-studies with literature on the given region and culture, internet sources or courses like ADL that widen knowledge on the culture.

The range of experimental methods available in this matter is the key to shape the practical regional intercultural competence. This should, first of all, include:

- a) Intercultural communication workshop, best with presence of target culture representative.
- b) Processing the knowledge on the culture derived from didactic part of studies, mainly by creating maps or mandalas of historical, social or culture connections to the other culture or by confronting differences between cultures with scenarios such as “Poles in Kazakhstan”.
- c) Simulations and decision-making games, both computer aided and conducted among students, where problematic situations may be solved by:
 - decision tree method, based on stating the possible ways out of the problem;
 - decision table method, that allows the choice of specific solution from given criteria;
 - decision paths method that points out, which solutions may be available in future when the method of proceedings is chosen and decisions made;
 - negotiation method;
 - conflicts map method that teaches to define the conflict, demands, needs of both sides, and redefines conflict with possible solutions;
- d) Role playing and other methods of culture schemes internalization.
- e) Acquiring intercultural competence by interactions with target culture representatives, spending some time, living or working in regions of different culture⁹.

Effective training on intercultural competence covers the obligatory component of general competence studies. Only then regional competence studies may be applied with different experimental and didactic methods. The whole educational process may be diversified with the use of ICT, which - while smartly used - support the acquisition of universal and regional intercultural competence.

⁹ [online]. [available: 12.12.2013]. Available on the Internet: http://www.ceo.org.pl/sites/default/files/newsfiles/slady_metody_pracy_w_educacji_wielokulturowej.pdf, and author's own didactic experience.



2. E-LEARNING IN INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE TRAINING. CASE STUDY.

One example of supporting the ICT studies is applying the interactive e-learning course on shaping the intercultural awareness. The course designed in 2012 in National Defence Academy: *Introduction to Cultural Awareness*¹⁰ is aimed at wide range of audience. While its issues are very general, they may be used both by military and civil personnel or even students¹¹. In the didactic process, the course may be:

- the medium to learn new situations, phenomena and processes;
- used to supplement observations made by other didactic means;
- illustrate oral information given by the teacher;
- used to organize operational exercises;
- supporting the examination of students' knowledge¹².

It is worth to mention that the course may also be used in programs of studies run in English. Due to its universal issues, the course fits many different teaching programs.

The main aim of the course is to widen knowledge about cultural differences as well as train effective functioning in the environment culturally diversified. The course is aimed especially at:

- enhancement of self-confidence, openness and ease towards the immigrants;
- understanding the behaviour of other culture representatives, which may be helpful in conflict situations caused by cultural differences;
- exercises in receptive skills in English (Figure 2).

The form of decision making game with theoretical introduction causes, that the course does not resemble typical studies where contest is provided first and then knowledge is examined. The course participants are acknowledged with issues concerning intercultural awareness (Figure 3) and has to fulfil all the tasks to successfully complete the course (Figure 4).

According to the course scenario, solutions to the issues should give the participants appropriate patterns of behaviour and record habits that would be used in real life situations (Figure 5). The teaching module ends with knowledge examination.

It should be mentioned that the evaluation of studies in the course consists of completing all course elements and correct completion of all the questions (each question

¹⁰ B1 level of English is essential to attend the course, accordingly to Council of Europe standards: *Modern Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. A Common European Framework of Reference*, Strasbourg 1996.


¹¹ The course was published at the educational platform LMS ILIAS and it is available for registered users, [online]. [available: 12.12.2013]. Available on the Internet: https://ilias.aon.edu.pl/ilias.php?baseClass=iLSAHSPresentationGUI&ref_id=5674.

¹² Highlighted features are given on the basis of study made by K. Gębura from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, [online]. [available: 12.12.2013]. Available on the Internet: http://www.pdf.amu.edu.pl/l_d_i/srodki_dydaktyczne.php.



may be considered three times). The course may be paused at all times and participants are allowed to continue after the break.

About the Course



The aim of the course:

- » The aim of the course is to increase learner's awareness and understanding about the issue of cultural awareness as well as to present a mosaic of cultural issues that influences our everyday lives.

Lessons: from Monday to Saturday:

- » The structure of the course is based on six week days, from Monday to Saturday. Each day stands for one lesson.
- » Each lesson covers mixed topics presented in a form of case studies (questions with one answer correct).
- » According to the rules of experiential learning, the immediate feedback aims to teach you.
- » After each lesson/day you can see a questions overview.

Test and Resources:

- » The course ends with a Test of twenty questions.
- » Should you extend your knowledge, get acquainted with Resources.

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Fig. 2. Formal conditions towards course completion - screenshot

Source: Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON

What Influences Us?



Individual cultural identities are shaped by a variety of differing influences such as:

- » Geography and nationality, region, religion, ethnicity.
- » Discipline: profession, education.
- » Organizations: industry, corporation, union, function.
- » Social aspects: family, friends, social class, clubs.
- » Age, gender and sexual orientation.
- » Personality and individual features.
- » Degree of contact with other cultures: parents or spouse from different cultures, being from so called "global nomads" families (children of diplomats and other professionals traveling constantly), studying and working abroad for longer periods of time and so on.
- » Situational context.

” *Cultural identities must be then viewed as a personal and dynamic synthesis of multiple cultures to avoid harmful and simplistic stereotypes (Rosinski, 2003, pp. 20-21).*

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Fig. 3. An example of theoretical introduction - screenshot

Source: Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON




Your Task

The institution you work in has won a grant for conducting an international project on preparing and implementing an educational program on Cultural Awareness.

According to the project assumptions, **there is a necessity to organize a conference for participants almost from all over the world. Organizers and participants of the conference must face with different tasks.**

Because you are involved in the project, you must face with various unexpected situations throughout **one busy week including Saturday!**



! While your work, you will have to deal with civilian and military personnel.

Would you like to take up such a challenge?

No

Yes

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Fig. 4. A task to be fulfilled by the course participants - screenshot

Source: Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON

It's 11.00 am

One of the participants tells you about his experience made in Central African village: a crowd of village children was following his home as he waved them the U.S. "hello" sign (opening and closing the four fingers). All interested in the story wanted to hear an explanation. What was the reason for that?

This is normal behavior to greet foreigners.

The children treated this sign as an invitation to receive gifts.

The children wanted to show him that he is really nice.

Correct!

Of course, this sign was an invitation to receive gifts. Read more: [Cultural diversity in Africa.](#)



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Fig. 5. An example of issues with bullet answers - screenshot

Source: Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON




3. LEVELS OF E-LEARNING PROCESS

While planning this course, three basic levels of e-learning have been considered:

- acknowledgement level - behaviours and abilities that activate the thinking process. This is the action that causes the student to sense the need for gaining knowledge and abilities;
- influence level (according to the authors it may be also called the “emotional level”) - individual attitude, emotions, feelings that motivate the participant for further education;
- psychomotor level - responsible for causing the action and physical movement of the participant (by commands such as: “move”, “click”, “drop”, “enter”).

While designing the course, it was considered to include many layers of content – e.g. hiding details in interactive maps and tabs (Figure 6 and 7). This prioritization of content allows the participant to focus on what is the most important.

Gestures

 Be careful with gestures! A gesture that in one culture means O.K., in other might mean “sod off” to put it mildly. For best reference check the course’s special gestures section.

Look at the hand gestures below and check their meaning and history. See where you have to avoid them (the countries/regions will be shown on the map).



The screenshot shows an interactive learning object titled "Gestures". It includes a world map with several regions highlighted in blue, indicating where certain gestures are used or avoided. Below the map is a row of eight hand gesture icons, with the "OK" gesture highlighted in orange. To the right of the map is a scrollable panel with two sections: "A-Okay" and "History". The "History" section contains text about the oldest reference to the gesture in Roman rhetoric and its cultural variations.

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Fig. 6. Many layers of content applied in interactive objects (example by interactive graphics) - screenshot

Source: *Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON*

To facilitate the absorption of knowledge, the course consists of examples that affect the imagination of students. Examples that illustrate the theory are aimed at achieving the “...aha!” effect¹³ that may be observed while acquiring new knowledge. There are also number of control questions in the course, that are thought to teach by mistakes.

¹³ G. Knoblich, M. Oellinger, “The Eureka Moment”, [in:] “Scientific American Mind”, October/November 2006, p. 38-43.



Do You Know?


These are some explanations concerning the most frequently asked questions about cultural awareness issues.

Explore the Tabs by clicking on each title.



▼ The understanding of Cultural Awareness is important

▼ Cultures are different



...because societies living in different parts of the world developed different languages, beliefs, rituals and traditions because they had to cope with different every-day problems and climate. Hence, different cultures are rooted in biology and physiology.

People from different cultures inhabit different sensory worlds, so that experience as it is perceived by one culture is quite different from experience perceived by another.

▼ Boundaries between cultures disappear

Fig. 7. Many layers of content applied in tabs - screenshot

Source: *Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON*

Influence level (emotional level) is supposed to keep attention of students and encourage them for further research¹⁴. Energizing materials, interesting content and humorous accents in the course additionally motivate for gaining knowledge (Figure 8 and 9).

About Resources

In order to review issues mentioned in the course, optionally you may follow the Resources.

They are divided in nine topics referring to case studies presented in the course: Greetings and Farewells, Gender, Communication, Gestures, Social Etiquette, Eating Habits and Dining, Multicultural Interactions, Strictly Military, Varia.

They are presented as hints on how to think or behave when dealing in multinational environment.



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Fig. 8. Example of content presentation in the course - screenshot

Source: *Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON*

¹⁴ G. Isaken, P. A. Rarnberg, A. Berg-Nilsen, *Motivation & Online Learning*, Norwegian Defence Academy, Oslo 2004, p. 5.



Are We Really Culturally Aware?

Regarding the "traps", look at the maps of stereotypes and check what first thought may appear about your country or region you live in. See different perspectives.

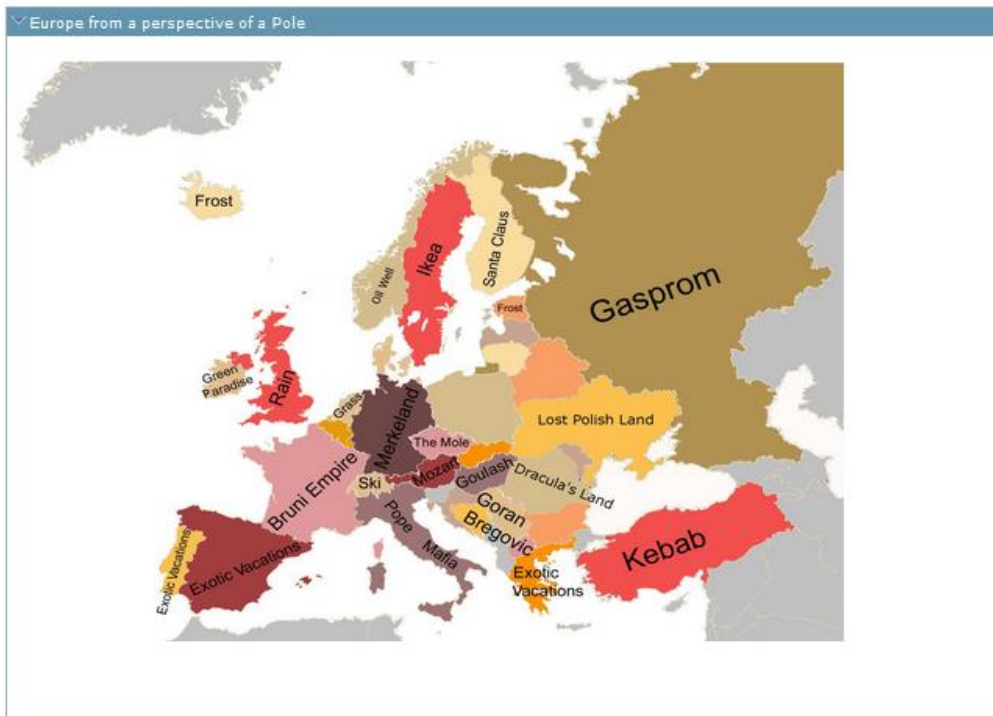


Fig. 9. Example of content presentation in the course (humoristic elements) - screenshot

Source: Introduction to Cultural Awareness Course ADL AON

Psychomotor level concerns on task planning in a way to ensure eligible concentration level by fulfilling tasks such as “drop”, “drag”, “mark”. This level may also concern abilities for group learning using additional functions, such as chat, forum and blog. So called social learning let us increase the learning effectiveness because it enables the learner motivating contact with the teacher and other course participants.

4. PILOTAGE AND USAGE

Initial cost of didactic value of the course has been estimated in the end of April and beginning of May 2012. For this purpose the pilotage research had been done¹⁵. In this research 16 respondents from international environments (Switzerland, Belgium, Serbia, Denmark, Norway, Italy) were asked to evaluate the following course aspects: scenario, graphic illustrations, language of instructions, additional sources of information, utility of the course in respondents’ environment and general course attractiveness.

Questions and answers are illustrated by the following table:

¹⁵ [online]. [access: 12.02.2014]. Available in the Internet after logging in to ILIAS: https://ilias.aon.edu.pl/ilias.php?ref_id=4105&cmd=maintenance&cmdClass=ilsurveyparticipantsgui&cmdNode=op:os&baseClass=ilObjSurveyGUI.



Tab. 1. Pilotage course estimation Introduction to Cultural Awareness

Question	Response: YES	Response: NO
1. Does the idea of scenario increase the ability for passing the content of intercultural competence	13	2
2. Does the course graphics adequately illustrate the content of the course?	13	1
3. Are instructions and tasks in the course understandable?	13	2
4. Does the course consist of adequate amount of additional materials	11	2
5. Is the course useful in the respondents' environment	10	4

n=16

Question	Mark				
	1	2	3	4	5
6. How do you find the course attractiveness?			2	6	8

n=16

Source: Own elaboration

For the question if the idea of scenario increases the ability for passing the content of intercultural competence (Responses: YES/NO), 13 respondents replied affirmatively, 2 negatively. It maybe therefore considered that the decision making game formula used in the scenario is interesting for participants because it is beyond the content of a typical course.

The next question asking if the course graphics adequately illustrate the content of the course (Responses: YES/NO), 13 respondents replied affirmatively, 1 negatively (two respondents did not reply). Respondents' replies indicate that graphics and their layout are adequate towards the presented contest, which support effective studies.

In question on instructions and tasks in the course, 13 respondents replied affirmatively, 2 negatively (one respondent did not reply). Communication is of crucial importance for appropriate learning process. The language of prompts in cultural awareness course has been regarded positively, therefore the efficiency of information transfer enables undisturbed knowledge acquisition.

A number of materials and links to webpages supplement the course with additional issues, encourage curiosity and motivate for further research. In question about the course consistence of adequate amount of additional materials 11 respondents said YES, 3 - NO, 2 - did not reply. Nevertheless, the authors decided to leave the same amount of additional materials to avoid content overload and not to blur the presented content.

The next question concerned the usage of the course in respondents' environment of work (10 respondents replied YES, 4 - NO, 2 did not reply). It may, therefore, be as-



sumed that the course may be useful in international environment. It should be also emphasized that replies to the questions were influenced by an amount of knowledge gathered in the subject by those institutions.

The last question considered the general attractiveness of the course. This question had a five grade scale, where 1 was the lowest and 5 the highest mark. Within 16 replies: 8 replies was 5 points, 6 respondents marked 4 points, and the last two marks were 3 points. It may be, therefore, assumed that the course was received very positively by its participants. The attractiveness of the course is the motivating factor that encourages for gaining knowledge and exploring the issues presented herein.

The pilotage results showed that the course may be a valuable educational tool. In the same research participants were asked to point out possible changes that would improve the course both in methodical and content-related way. All additional notes were regarded and applied to the course.

After the series of trial tests and positive opinions from international group of officers and civil workers, the course *Introduction to Cultural Awareness* is used in training of domestic and foreign military and civilian workers that are logged in to the ILIAS platform. It is also used in the didactic process conducted in National Defence Academy. In didactic practice conducted in *National Security Faculty of National Defence University* it is one of the conditions of completion of the following courses: *Cross-Cultural Competence for the Security Sector*, *National Security Culture Comparative Strategic Cultures*. For now, the course has been awarded positive opinions from students, especially about its concept, forms of content transferred and practical appliance of entrusted tasks. It seems, therefore, to be an effective tool enhancing the training of universal intercultural competence, which is essential for the process of regional expertise acquisition.

CONCLUSION

In the time of constant ICT development, the introduction of innovations in intercultural education is a challenge that requires wide range of adaptive activities concerning all education participants and the didactics itself. Among such activities are creating and applying English language courses concerning intercultural awareness - *Introduction to Cultural Awareness* (the project run under the auspices of National Defence Academy). The aim of the course is to support the didactic process run in traditional form. Methodical and graphical arrangement of the course (illustrated herein by screenshots) consists of three dimensions of learning: acknowledgement, emotional and psychomotor.

Initial research concerning the course evaluation and its implementation to didactic process showed that it may be a valuable educational tool supporting intercultural competence acquisition and consolidation. This tool is economic - it may be reused with different groups, and it is universal - it may support different methods and techniques used in intercultural competence education.

The course may be extended by remote communication means such as forum and chat that avail exchange of opinions, experience and remarks. The content may be dis-



cussed by users in real time without delays. All endeavours concerning the enhancement of interaction facilitate students in knowledge assimilation and its implementation in the environment close to reality.

It is worth to mention that by using modern tools students develop their autonomy and responsibility for own education, especially when the learning process is self-guided - each educational activity is not bind to time and place. This mode of learning, based on self-guidance and autonomy prepares for active participation in still developing system of future education.

In the globalization era, the value of intercultural competence education increases. Advancing our knowledge and experience, making new and innovative didactic materials, making research on modern tools seems to be of crucial importance, also in wider perspective - for building positive relations and shaping the safety environment.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Kamila TROCHOWSKA, PhD, – lecturer at National Safety Institute at National Defence Academy. Awarded for her PhD thesis: *Culture operationalisation in conducting and preparation contemporary military operations*. Currently leading three projects concerning the use of culture on the tactical and strategic level (Ministry of Education) and culture operationalisation for means of overall military safety system (National Science Centre). Also participating in international projects: *Coping with Culture* conducted by Bundeswehre that concerns the decision processes in operations run at Swedish National Defence Academy and International Society of Military Sciences. She has also conducted infield research in range of safety studies, among the others in the Lakota Standing Rock Indians Reservations (South Dakota, USA 2008), Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp (Damascus, Syria 2010) and US Army War College and US Central Command (Carlisle and Tampa, USA 2012). She is the author of number of domestic and foreign publications concerning cultural aspects of military safety.

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