

# Understanding Otherness: Student's Learning Experiences in Intercultural Groups

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## Abstract

*The ability of members of intercultural learning to successfully adapt, communicate and collaborate in an intercultural environment demonstrates an individual's interculturalism. This ability can help to successfully adapt in the learning environment. [1] Byram, Nicols and Stevens (2001) argue that the acquisition of intercultural competence depends on the cultural environment, where cultural experience happens. There is an inevitable continuing dialogue in the process of intercultural learning, which encourages people to refuse stereotypes or assumptions about other cultures. It is important to note that the cultural environment can promote intercultural learning and interfere with it. Therefore, the main problem of this research is related to higher education studies and the aim of the research is to find out how the learning process takes place in an intercultural learning environment. All of this presupposes the main research questions: What types of learning emerge? What are the factors that promote or hinder learning in a non-traditional learning environment where only a national language is used? Such a problem as the lack of language skills forms a new learning process. The purpose of this study is to identify factors of intercultural learning in the empirical context.*

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, cultural interactions have become a part of our daily life as a result of accelerating globalization processes. Within the context of globalization trends, the integration of foreigners and the intercultural interaction are becoming inevitable; society has, therefore, to face new challenges and seek the positive results of integration [2]. Acceptance of differences, otherness and diversity is important in the context of higher education, as it is essential to create an open and changing culture of studies. Intercultural learning has become a key aspect for the coexistence of cultures, citizenship, anti-discrimination, conflict resolution and religious dialogue [3] [4]. For this reason, it is important to develop key competences that would

help young people to work and learn in intercultural situations and to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. One of these competences is intercultural competence, which opens the way for people of different cultures to intercultural dialogue, constructive communication and collaboration. Intercultural competence is not innate; therefore, it should be developed and improved throughout life [5]. In this context, the development of interculturalism plays an important role, the purpose and content of which are related to the issues of tolerance, equality, acceptance of cultural differences, respect [6] and the promotion of cultural diversity in educational settings [7]. As globalization has expanded the frequency and nature of international contacts, society's approach to "one's own" and "another person's" ethical and cultural identity and the development of students' intercultural sensitivity should change [8]. Therefore, what becomes important is understanding of the meaning of cultural identity, which is revealed through students' experiences in the context of the analysed object, taking into consideration meanings of intercultural learning, changes brought about by intercultural learning and the evaluation of these changes in terms of one's own cultural identity, advantages and disadvantages of interculturalism and results determined by them and also conditions for the development of the above-mentioned aspects at a university. Accordingly, at a scientific level, intercultural learning should be explored in order to reveal the influence of cultural identity on intercultural learning, i.e. intercultural learning should be seen in a local context. It is important to note that strong cultural identity can both promote and hinder intercultural learning. For this reason, there is a need for research that would allow us to gain a better understanding of the specificities of intercultural learning and enlarge our understanding that intercultural learning can be not only a form of learning but also a means helping to avoid misunderstandings and promote understanding between people of different cultures. Intercultural learning can take place as students acquire knowledge of other cultures indirectly and interact with people from other cultures directly. However, students often feel constrained and experience

discrimination and culture shock in the learning process. Aspects that are analysed by highlighting an individual student's experiences can reveal what shapes a student's learning in the best way, what approaches used to stimulate a student's understanding can be revealed by a teacher and what happens when learning takes place in a foreign language.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Due to an increase in "temporary stays in another culture," the interest in what constitutes a culture, its deep roots and its difficult-to-describe assumptions has grown in recent decades. Studies are contextualized in different research literature describing the nature of intercultural and cross-cultural experiences of learners exposed to their own and foreign culture during the adaptation process [9]. According to the authors, the terms "cross-cultural" and "intercultural" are used interchangeably in scientific literature. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, although these terms are not incompatible, they focus on different aspects. [10] Landreman (2003) claims that cross-cultural experience emphasizes boundary crossing, whereas intercultural experience covers domestic and international contexts and refer to the interaction of nations. [11] Hofstede (2001) highlights the importance of cultural divergence claiming that, in the context of globalization, societies tend to retain their uniqueness, lifestyle and values. It is argued that cross-cultural is a part of intercultural. In different cultural environments, people can undergo both cross-cultural and intercultural experiences at the same time; tensions that arise from their efforts to cope with cultural differences are more difficult to overcome at the stage of intercultural experiences. Thus, the ability of a person to successfully adapt, communicate and collaborate in an intercultural environment demonstrates his or her interculturalism, which is understood as an effective communication through interaction between different students [12] [13] cultural sensitivity of an individual, knowledge and skills, values and attitudes that enable effective learning in a diverse environment [14]. Various studies [15] [16] [9] show that intercultural experience can be a transformative learning process that leads on a journey of personal growth and development. For this reason, learners can develop good abilities of self-expression and meeting various social needs in the host culture [17], at the same time feeling a sense of boundaries or "otherness" stemming from conflicting values and beliefs. This area of tension between one's own position and the existing otherness and a sense of alienation in an intercultural context presupposes a perception of

cultural space that orients a learner to the relation with another.

In order to define what intercultural learning is, [18] [19] Portera (2005, 2011) distinguished the following two concepts: multicultural learning and intercultural learning. According to the author (2005), the concept of multicultural learning emphasizes cultural diversity of human societies, seeks to raise learners' awareness of cultural differences and promote their anti-discriminatory attitudes. Meanwhile, intercultural learning, which, as noted by [18] Portera (2005), is referred to as "the Copernican revolution in Education," diverts learners' attention away from the stereotypical perception of cultures and cultural differences to the dynamic perspective of interacting cultures, intercultural relations and intercultural competencies. This model stems from the specificity of a global society and can be regarded as the response of education to the challenges of cultural migration. As explained by the author, intercultural education can be defined as an applied social science that encourages dialogue between cultures and civilizations and also as support for the development of democratic multicultural societies.

According to another researcher, [20] Otten (2003), intercultural learning does not take place without difficulties since it requires certain prerequisites and clearly defined aims. This concept can be understood at different levels when it comes to the process of the acquisition of individual knowledge and the development of attitudes or behaviour related to the interaction between different cultures. Thus, intercultural learning is understood not only at the individual level but also as an open-ended process and integral learning. [21] Rey-von Allmen (2011) asserts that intercultural education recognizes that a true understanding of differences and similarities of another culture is necessary in order to lay the foundations for working together with Others, which contributes to the promotion of intercultural dialogue, appreciation of diversity and cultural exchange.

However, in order to understand the essence of intercultural learning, two different concepts – multiculturalism and interculturalism together with their similarities and differences – should be analysed. These concepts pose different challenges to culture and relations. In the European context, interculturalism manifests itself through the global integration process by involving not only migrants or representatives of minority cultures but also individual members of society, developing sensitivity to cultural diversity and reducing discrimination against Others. Interculturalism emphasizes the importance of the interaction between different cultures, which is revealed through the desire to bring cultural communities together and the desire to change their understanding of the fact that we have

separate identities and intertwined identities [22]. In other words, interculturalism points to a close micro-social environment, relations and daily life of communities [23]. This concept implies that, through direct communication, people of different cultures experience interdependence, transcending cultural or other differences and identities, which could contribute to the unity in cultural diversity. It is common cultures, traditional culture and its elements [24] and identity forming an individual's self-awareness, i.e. interaction and integration as an outcome of interculturalism, that become important in the context of cultural diversity.

Interculturalism is based on the notion of heterogeneity in society, i.e. on the national, racial, gender, social status and linguistic basis, emphasizing the acceptance of cultural diversity as a value based on tolerance and respect for otherness. Knowledge of cultural diversity is formed through the collaboration with representatives of different groups, through their experience of knowing their traditions, values, attitudes, differences and similarities and when using this knowledge to communicate with one another. Thus, in the context of learning, interculturalism changes attitudes towards and understanding of the Other by emphasizing different things; efforts are made to strengthen awareness despite differences.

Multiculturalism and interculturalism should be viewed as two overlapping concepts that share certain similarities and differences. These concepts focus on understanding of cultures of modern societies, communication between representatives of different cultures, cultural diversity and openness [25]. Both concepts highlight cultural diversity, the promotion of dialogue, interaction and the change of attitudes. In terms of learning, these concepts manifest themselves as a process during which changes that take place through personal development and that are related to learning processes can be observed. In this process, there is a constant improvement of knowledge of Others, inner achievements, external achievements and attitudes. Meanwhile, learners change highlighting their interculturalism: they are able to successfully adapt themselves, communicate and collaborate in an intercultural environment, they recognize differences between countries, become open to otherness and accept differences, as the multiple dimension and change of cultural identities provide the basis for dialogue and sharing of commonalities despite differences.

### 3. Methodology

Following the interpretivist approach, a qualitative research paradigm was chosen, which is characterized by an in-depth approach to the object of research, the analysis of individual stories and life experiences [26]. According to the author, such

complex phenomena require a comprehensive approach, which is insufficient if subjective meanings and interpretations of individuals in their particular situations and from the perspective of their particular experiences are not considered. In addition, the choice of a qualitative paradigm is also based on the author's belief that an individual's knowledge of the world is mainly socially constructed through social interaction with Others.

The research strategy chosen in this study is constructivist grounded theory (hereinafter referred to as GT) proposed by [27] [28] [29] Charmaz (2006, 2008, 2012). GT is an inductive method that seeks to form theory by applying the systematic collection, synthesis, analysis and conceptualization of data. On the basis of GT, a researcher develops a theory that can be applied to the specific context of the activity. When constructing a grounded theory of students' intercultural learning, the focus was on their learning experiences, which served as a basis for the creation of a picture of the learning process, challenges and benefits of an intercultural learning environment.

In constructing a grounded theory of learning process that takes place in an intercultural learning environment, the research problem was, first of all, formulated and an outline of a semi-structured interview with students was developed. After formulating the research problem, free memo-writing was started, notes on the research and interview questions, the target group and the researcher and the researcher's relation to the research object were written.

The research was conducted from autumn 2016 to winter 2018. Theoretical sampling, proposed by Charmaz, was used in the research. This kind of sampling is based on the selection of the participants of the research, which allows the researcher to answer research questions, reflect group variation (diversity in the group) and help to uncover negative cases of the research. The targeted selection was based on the analysis of data provided by previous research participants, which indicated the need for further research subjects. Informants were sought who could supplement the data available so that the theory would be formulated in detail, since representativeness is important not to research participants but to theory being developed. Students who have at least a half year of study experience were purposefully selected, which means that those informants were sought who would have completed at least one semester of intercultural studies.

18 interviews were conducted with students representing 3 different disciplines (social science, humanities, and technologies) from 3 different universities. In the course of the research, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the strategy of data collection giving more freedom of development to the conversation, even though the researcher sought to analyse the research objectives, the

problem of empirical research and research questions in greater depth.

#### 4. Findings

Opinions of research participants based on grounded theory of intercultural learning differed: in the process of intercultural learning, some finally recognized the Other and learned together willingly, whereas the rest felt rejected and rejected Others. So, as a result, one part of the Lithuanian students recognized the Other, as they gradually realized that the Other tended to enhance learning, the students tried to adapt and adjust themselves. Research subjects admitted that they improved themselves when learning together with foreign students; although there was a linguistic moment that worried research subjects, they tried to learn individually in order to avoid it. The other part of research subjects felt the fear of talking, shame and, at the same time, the lack of confidence in themselves during intercultural learning. Without denying tolerance to the Other, this part of research subjects deliberately detached themselves and, as a result, suffered in the learning process. Research subjects tried informal learning through daily social interactions and diverse learning situations in different contexts of intercultural learning (see Fig. 1).

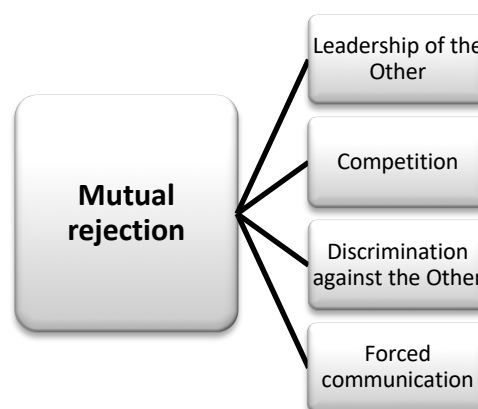
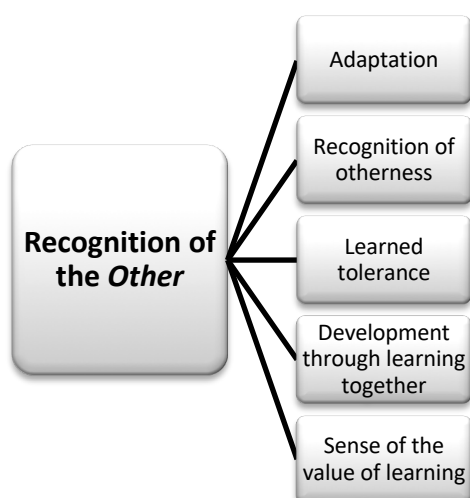


Figure 1. Categories “Recognition of the Other” and “Mutual rejection”

Research participants highlighted moral values such as respect for each other, responsibility for learning, friendship and recognition, which is particularly important when interacting with Others and revealing the attitude towards Others. The learning environment in which students interact has an important role to play in highlighting learning in an intercultural group. This interaction is based on the attitude towards Others as being the same as we and the recognition of the development through learning together. Research participants mentioned that intercultural learning focuses on the Other, which means promoting the recognition, acceptance of the Other and understanding of otherness. As noted by research participants, the process of intercultural learning often focuses on a student of another culture.

The lack of cultural awareness was never mentioned in this research. Research participants expressed their opinions on learning in an intercultural group; there were no examples of intolerance for another culture or disrespect to foreigners. Research participants were willing to know other cultures and analyze them by comparing one with the other. However, in this research, the Lithuanian students described challenges of learning in an intercultural group. Even though such learning is based on tolerance for one another, at the same time, the participants felt existing differences and a reluctance to learn. This revealed that learning in an intercultural group is not smooth and does not differ from traditional learning, which actually demonstrated the instability of learning of research participants and their deliberate detachment from the group.

In any case, there are cultural differences between students, but students recognise each other’s differences and tolerate them when learning together.

Students understand that intercultural learning is about learning in cultural diversity and recognize it with equal respect for students from different cultures. Therefore, in this research, research participants stated that stereotypes and prejudices about other cultures or the recognition of students from other cultures and understanding of cultural diversity are not important for them; they consider learning in a foreign language as the main and the most important thing. Research subjects did not indicate the presence of different cultures as a negative factor; for them, the language in which learning takes place plays the most important role. Because of the language, students either recognise learning with the Other or are more likely to reject the Other.

#### 4.1. Recognition of the Other: “somehow it became natural”

In the context of intercultural diversity, the same as in intercultural learning, it is a necessary requirement to understand Others and to adapt, since through tolerance, preconditions are created for openness, which leads to the acceptance of negative things and recognition of otherness. It requires the ability to adapt to changes and innovations in the learning process. However, adaptation is not always sufficient. What is required is a willingness to learn in another language, because in order to adapt in an intercultural learning environment, verbal and non-verbal communication is inevitable:

*Communication in English at first was very strange because, when I entered the university, I did not use English for maybe three years, I did not use it for daily communication; it was difficult and seemed that you wouldn't be able to do anything and wouldn't be able to do homework. But then you somehow gather speed and realize that it is not so scary as it may seem, so you get used to English and it all seems natural. (AU, MA)*

The most important learning tool in intercultural learning is language, through which knowledge is conveyed; at the same time, language makes it possible to communicate with students about cultures. One of the common features of intercultural learning is communication in the same language. Thus, language helps to highlight difficulties faced by students:

*I feel really good because I wanted, first of all, to improve the language; this is motivation to me, forced motivation; the beginning was difficult, yes, in the first month, I felt great psychological discomfort and, when coming home from lectures, I couldn't say a word, I couldn't speak because I was too tired, it was difficult, but since people from different cultures had come, different accents, they spoke completely differently; there were students, I listened to them for a couple of months and couldn't understand a word*

*they said. (VI, MA)*

Openness to otherness and the recognition of the Other play an important role in intercultural learning as multiplicity and change of cultural identities encourage dialogue. The knowledge of cultural diversity is constructed through the collaboration with foreign students during lectures and preparation of joint assignments, through their experiences when getting to know differences and similarities in the learning process and when applying this knowledge for successful communication and fellowship. All this creates preconditions for students' understanding of their own culture and the culture of Others, integrating existing knowledge and sometimes behavioural norms, focusing not only on foreign students' otherness but also on visible commonalities between them. The awareness of cultural differences and otherness create preconditions for students' development. In this way, the importance of dialogue is emphasized, which promotes interaction and understanding among students and tolerance for otherness. Students who take part in the process of intercultural learning notice a lot of things they would like to learn from foreign students, but this only happens when they learn together and perform joint tasks:

*I could learn from them, what I really like is their time planning. You have a lecture, after it you plan your evening tasks and homework to do and probably the homework will be done the same day. They are very good at planning and I say I would like to learn this too, because I think it would be really useful. (SOC, MA)*

After learning together with foreign students for some time, research subjects understand that they cannot demand that Others adapt to the usual communication or behaviour of Lithuanians. On the contrary, the students notice that Others put considerable effort into the learning process, they like discussions and, if research participants want to learn together with them, they also need to change their approach to learning and communication. The change within the group indirectly helps research subjects to accept Others and their cultural differences, and, at the same time, allows them to see things that they all have in common, namely, the willingness to learn and competition:

*When we sit in lectures, it seems to me that we are all equal and the same, you do not actually feel that other culture. We communicate, we learn something, and those cultural differences are not evident. They are very sociable, very talkative; I think it's because they are from another country as Erasmus students, so they are very hard-working. (GI, MA)*

As noted by research participants, increasing importance is attached to cultural identity expressed through the mother tongue and its change during these studies, which influences the modern formation

of students' culture with particular emphasis on cultural differences among students in the learning process. Intercultural learning should promote the recognition of Others and intercultural dialogue between students aimed at tolerance, acceptance of cultural differences and respect. Intercultural learning strengthens students; later, they are able to notice cultural differences in a particular area. As stated by research participants, the difference can be noticed in collaborative work, especially as regards communication. They are convinced that it would be much easier to work in homogeneous pairs, i.e. a Lithuanian with a Lithuanian:

*We had to do work together; of course, there are personal qualities and differences in how that person organizes work and everything else, but, automatically, the understanding of work itself, let's say, we need to talk a lot about it, so sometimes you simply are unable to meet the deadline, among your other work, but, for example, if you worked with a Lithuanian, you would meet and prepare a presentation for the teacher and everything would be good. Communication and extra energy are needed to figure everything out and it becomes even worse if that person is prone to maximalism and wants high grades. (AU, MA)*

Research subjects also mention the difference in attitudes to learning. Those Other students who come to study from other countries feel more relaxed in the learning process and it seems that they have more time, whereas research participants are made to stop and have to adjust, which takes more time than working with a Lithuanian student:

*When it comes to doing something together, for example, preparing projects, you can feel the difference in attitudes to work, time management and prioritization; it is very interesting to watch and sometimes it even disturbs balance; you want to plan everything accurately, but you see that the person thinks differently, has different interests and needs more time, and sometimes it hinders the process, but you somehow need to coordinate and discuss everything and try to arrange things. (JOA, MA)*

When learning in an intercultural environment, Lithuanian students try to recognize Others and work in teams. However, there are cases when not only attitudes to work but also personal qualities differ. It is true that research subjects try to see every person, who is influenced by cultural, social and personal factors, as unique. These experiences of the Lithuanian students enable them to take personal responsibility for their future learning actions, which in turn can change their learning process:

*Everything was presented in English and she was a student of English philology; she had only one subject here because other subjects were somehow not suitable for her. We got the assignment and had to discuss it in the group, and she didn't understand*

*it at all. She didn't understand the task even though I tried to explain her. Then, she came up with her own idea of doing things and it was difficult to communicate with her. I don't know whether it is a cultural thing or a personal quality, when a person wants everything to be the way he/she understands, and other opinions are not acceptable. (JOA, MA)*

The perception of cultural identity through the mother tongue reveals itself as the recognition of the Other in the learning process, which is understood as an outcome of intercultural learning. Research participants try to adapt to learning and admit that they are improving at the same time, but very often, not only cultural differences in learning but also different attitudes to learning may be noticed. These contradictions are the basis for determining students' cultural identity and revealing what promotes it when learning takes place together with the Other and when differences in the learning process become obvious. In other words, the recognition of the Other as different and the existence of different attitudes and cultural differences become an important factor in the development and definition of research participants' cultural identity, which is expressed through their mother tongue. Thus, it can be stated that intercultural learning centers on Others, familiarity with them, their recognition and acceptance and awareness of cultural differences. In this way, the learning process focuses on a person from another culture who is nearby.

Students point out that, while learning, they also learn tolerance for each other by adapting to cultural diversity in lectures. During intercultural learning, research subjects seek to understand changes in the modern world and in personal identity and to accept cultural diversity by encouraging the recognition of otherness and expression of tolerance for each other. Intercultural learning becomes an inseparable part of tolerance; students state that they learn tolerance through this kind of learning, thus, intercultural learning becomes natural:

*I have learned to be more tolerant towards Others and more tolerant of their ideas, opinions and even gestures. Even a handshake or a head tilt, everything is different. We had one permanent foreigner who was constantly studying here. From the very beginning, there was a distance between us because neither she wanted to have a close contact with us and tell us something about herself nor we wanted to communicate with her; she was a stranger and constantly feels a stranger. (RA, MA)*

The learning of research participants together with Others reflects the process of growth and development through learning together because, as students gradually reconstruct their own cultural identities, they begin to feel that they are developing their linguistic skills and improving themselves every day. What is more, research subjects reflect on this and admit that it is one of the most important

components of the holistic learning process in intercultural learning:

*I have improved myself in several respects; certainly, language is such a thing that constantly requires knowledge; if you do not develop it, you will forget it and will not be proficient in that language. I am learning a specific language, so there is a particular vocabulary and terms, which helps me to improve on a daily basis. Last semester we had a lot of Erasmus students, so we had a lot of different people, different opinions and experiences, which, I believe, enriches life. (RA, MA)*

In any case, when studying in an intercultural environment, students mostly improve communication skills in a foreign language. For this reason, learning undoubtedly requires proficiency in a foreign language and constant improvement of foreign language skills. On the other hand, in the host country, the use of foreign languages is becoming a daily and significant means of self-expression, communication and representation. Research subjects are happy and feel the value of learning, as they can use a foreign language in daily learning activities; they feel that their horizons broaden and they state that *“this should be applied, without exception, to all levels, all students and all study programs” (NE, BA).*

The process of intercultural learning requires mutual recognition between oneself and the Other, which involves not only trying to accept Others, but also focusing on one’s own personal change, when not only attitudes but students themselves change, as they constantly improve, especially with regard to language skills. However, in order to recognise the Other, it is important to acquire cultural knowledge, which could help students to keep balance in the learning process. On the other hand, students’ cultural knowledge should not become a kind of filter that would encourage the division of Others. Research participants claim that, in the process of intercultural learning, the recognition of the Other is an essential factor, contributing to the promotion of dialogue between students, development of relations and adaptation.

#### 4.2. Mutual rejection: “feels rejected”

Lithuanian students often notice that, when studying in an intercultural group, the leadership of the Other is felt, especially in group work and joint discussions. Research subjects pointed out that the leadership of Others may be often felt because of their knowledge of the foreign language:

*I don’t even know, we somehow discuss this, but those foreign students who come, they are really very good. They always play first fiddle in all discussions, maybe because they don’t have a language barrier and speak fluently. We don’t have all lectures*

*together, only a couple or one lecture. In the first and in the second semester, they were really very active and always leaders in the group. (GI, MA)*

In the learning process, research participants often have to compete with Others, which plays a significant role in creating a learning atmosphere. Research subjects state that it is a challenge for them, as they need to adjust to Others and compete for better grades. It was often mentioned that foreign students often feel superior, and some Lithuanian students accept this as a challenge:

*Personally, I would be even more bored if we had only a group of Lithuanians and lectures were in Lithuanian; I think it would not be a challenge, but now we face a challenge. We have foreigners, so we need to adjust and to compete with them because, as I said, their academic achievements are quite high. (AUS, MA)*

As intercultural learning takes place, research participants deliberately detach themselves from the group and try to become “invisible,” as they are often affected by the perceived language barrier. Although research subjects try not to participate in joint activities with foreign students, they are forced to communicate in one way or another, as team work involves meeting with foreign students:

*Teamwork and group homework are the things that really oblige you because then you are forced to devote your time and meet those people or communicate with them at least in the virtual space. (SOC, MA)*

Intercultural learning can form a divide between oneself and the Other, which may lead to discrimination against the Other. They can also become objects in which stereotypes and prejudices about other cultures would be seen or formed. In the case of research participants, this is noticeable in relation to teachers, when it is obvious that teachers often avoid them. Thus, foreign students who come to another culture also experience stress, fear, exclusion, a lack of community of interests with Lithuanian students or even discrimination. Research participants noted the distance they feel from them:

*And sometimes it seems that those foreigners are even more discriminated against than we, you can notice it from teachers’ mimics and expressions, it is obvious that some of the teachers don’t want them, our foreigners, to come. (RA, MA)*

The process of intercultural learning helps to reflect on differences and understand otherness, which may take the form of the recognition and acceptance of or even resistance to the Other. It means that the Other is not always accepted; on the contrary, it often causes the feeling of discomfort for research subjects. As a result, tensions arise, and learning suffers because meaning is no longer seen. The appearance of the Other shapes cultural identity of Lithuanian students through their mother tongue, as linguistic divide in the class is inevitable.

The relation between the categories “Recognition of the Other” and “Mutual rejection”. During intercultural studies, learning together with foreign students is an inevitable part of intercultural learning. This means sharing the reality of everyday life with Others; in this way, there are constant clashes that leads to the recognition or rejection of Others. In most cases, clashes with the Other in intercultural learning make students see their differences, understand otherness or, on the contrary, reject the Other because of fears. This means that, although students have to learn together, it is not always easy to accept the Other; on the contrary, it can cause discomfort and tension in the learning process, which may be due to a language barrier. Learning in intercultural studies in one’s own country means the ability to learn with people from different cultures and of different language proficiency levels and, in spite of everything, the ability to pursue a common goal that unites both Lithuanians and foreign students to complete their studies and acquire education. This occurs either through the recognition or rejection of the Other.

## 5. Conclusion

Grounded theory of intercultural learning consists of separate elements. Learning in a diverse group (in a case of the study, a university), where not only Lithuanian students but also foreign students’ study – it is a space of intercultural learning, where intercultural learning of Lithuanian students takes place. The aim and content of this intercultural learning are expressed through issues of tolerance, equality, acceptance of cultural differences and respect for each other. In a sense, learning in intercultural studies in one’s own country means the ability to learn with people from different cultures and of different language proficiency levels and, in spite of everything, the ability to pursue a common goal – to complete studies and acquire education. This condition implies that this type of learning becomes quite opposite, as, in some cases, Lithuanian students do not like it, which is manifested through their learning and fellowship with foreign students.

The main prerequisite for intercultural learning, which helps to form the construct of cultural identity through the mother tongue, is a confrontation with the Other. This confrontation takes place during lectures and in the process of the preparation of joint homework. Research subjects feel uncertain, they have doubts and do not know what awaits them. Communication between students takes place only during lectures, and no initiative is taken to communicate outside the university. Research data revealed that most of research subjects feel discriminated against when they have to talk, learn

and discuss everything in a foreign language, which means that a small part of the group gains more leadership. Lithuanian students try to adapt to the changed learning process and even overcome themselves, which often leads to frustration and a reluctance to learn, as the learning process becomes incomprehensible. A feeling of insecurity usually accompanies students during the whole learning process; in another case, students find the quickest way to solve the problem, i.e. they take academic leave. The encounter with the Other in the learning process makes students aware of existing differences and understand otherness. The interview with research participants revealed that fear and constant tension are the main feelings intervening the process of intercultural learning. Research subjects are aware of existing differences between themselves and Others. Such perceptions shake them and lead them to constant self-doubt and fear or, in other cases, to resistance. All these factors hinder consistent learning; therefore, intercultural learning becomes fragmented and poses challenges to students.

During the whole process of intercultural learning, the linguistic aspect becomes the most important thing. It is through the mother tongue that students’ cultural identity, “Who am I?” is formed, and this identity is dual. One part of research subjects feels a learning barrier, they feel as being “lost in translation” because they lose the meaning of learning due to the use of the foreign language, and intercultural learning becomes meaningless for them. The other part of research subjects reflects on the joy of learning in intercultural studies, as they have an opportunity to improve their foreign language skills. Interaction between research participants and foreign students is an important part of cultural identity, as the main learning directions are taken, namely, continuous learning from experience, collaborative learning and informal learning. This usually happens through emotional transformation and the use of the language. Research subjects reflect on individual learning and an opportunity to rediscover themselves. In other words, it is not a form of learning that dictates certain things about how to learn and what learning difficulties are, but group interaction and learning together, which helps to shape the behaviour of each person in the group. A person’s cognitive development is also influenced by the culture in which he/she participates, for example, by a foreign language or a social context.

The outcome of the process of intercultural learning is a horizontal and dual construct of cultural identity. In the narratives of research participants on their own learning and themselves in relation to Others, two outcomes of cultural identity are highlighted – the recognition of the Other and the mutual rejection. This dual construction of cultural identity is based on the principle of contrast: the recognition of the Other is associated with positive



experiences, whereas the mutual rejection, with negative and undesirable ones. In the narratives, these parts of cultural identity constantly interact with each other and are highlighted in the process of intercultural learning. The recognition of the Other, as a part of cultural identity, is considered positive because students feel and understand that it cannot be otherwise. The narratives reveal the students' efforts to adapt and adjust to the learning process. Particular emphasis is placed on the recognition and the fact that research subjects improve by learning together and develop a sense of tolerance for otherness. The recognition of the Other is most pronounced at the climax of the narrative, when a person begins to fully understand a part of the construct of cultural identity through the mother tongue, as new acquired meanings lead to positive intercultural learning. The mutual rejection is reflected in the narratives as manifesting itself through a negative prism, when research participants begin to pay more attention to and analyse Others. In this part, the leadership of the Other in the learning process plays an important role because Others do not feel a language barrier. This concerns the competition between students. In this way it is said that students experience stagnation, and discrimination against the Other begins. However, as students learn, they try to detach themselves, and this part of cultural identity is manifested through mutual relations, which are treated as forced. This means that the acceptance of the Other does not always occur during studies; on the contrary, it can cause discomfort to students. Due to very significant linguistic divide, tensions may arise.

## 6. References

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