

## INTENSIVE COURSE AS THE UNIQUE LEARNING ECOLOGY - MULTIDIMENSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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**Research topic, problem, goal.** Living in global society creates a need to explore learning opportunities encompassing multicultural as well as multiprofessional components. This study aims to disclose how professional development and personal growth is influenced by learning experience during international multiprofessional short term courses. Such unique learning ecologies are not widely studied in Lithuania and scientific attention to the importance of personal growth in the relations to professional development should be increased. Learning courses like this are rather new phenomena but are extremely popular between students of higher education institutions so it's worthwhile to gain a deeper understanding of benefits and shortcomings.

**Important words:** Learning ecology, learning experience, multicultural, multiprofessional

**Research methods.** Content analysis of reflective essays of the participants of the international project Green Care was the main method of the conducted research. Essays were prepared after the intensive international multidisciplinary courses. Participants were 42 students of 4 study fields from 4 countries. All the participants gave consent to use their essays for research purposes. Participants submitted their reflective essays using Google forms questionnaire with restricted access and no personal data was collected. Researchers acknowledge limitations of the study due to linguistic competence (English) of the participants, lack of skills of preparing high quality reflective essays due to different educational profiles, and a core sample of two specific short term courses.

**Results and conclusions.** The content analysis of reflective essays allows us to evaluate the impact of the multidimensional learning experience on personal and professional growth of the participants using four main categories. Learning experience within learning ecology is the activity which due to its' cognitive-emotional impact is recognized by the participants as being especially relevant (González-Ceballos et al (2021)). Category is divided into two main subcategories: Content related learning and Confirming previous knowledge/ beliefs. Emotional experiences are ubiquitous in nature and important and even critical in academic settings, as emotion modulates virtually every aspect of cognition (Tyng CM, Amin HU, Saad MNM and Malik AS (2017)). Thus the second category – **emotional response** (positive, negative and mixed feelings.). Negative and mixed emotional responses were mainly triggered by group interaction and different levels of contextual knowledge. Phillips (2008) asserts that professional development may take many forms, but whatever the delivery method the major

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lmt.lt/mokslo-politika/mokslo-ir-meno-sriciu-ir-krypciu-klasifikacija/2321>

consideration should be how relevant the instruction is. Third category – **Impact on professional development**, was found containing two subcategories: development of area specific knowledge/ skills and increase of multiprofessional cooperation. Participants are seen as getting **learning experience**. Jain, Chaya & Apple, Daniel (2015) conclude that self-growth is a desire to become a better version of oneself. The fourth category - **Impact on personal growth** emerges with two subcategories: traits of personality and multicultural awareness. Participants of the study agree that they have experienced changes in their attitudes, beliefs and even managed to develop some new personality traits. Almost everyone agrees that it has increased their multicultural awareness. Multidimensional learning ecology (Barron, 2004) creates opportunities to gain new knowledge, to experience a lot of positive emotions and might boost professional development as well as growth of personality. However, it has drawbacks as well – some information might be repetitive, personal interaction not so smooth as expected and stressful.

**Originality and practical relevance.** Research creates evidence based background for the development of international multidisciplinary courses, stresses the benefits and highlights the limitations of such a learning experience.