

The exploration of cultural differences in international educational and research collaborations¹

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Introduction

Nowadays, the movement of goods, service, capital and people has reached a never expected rate all over the world. Even though there are borders between nations, people can move much more easily than several years or decades ago. Special kind of people's movement is the movement with the aim of studying abroad. The movement of students through different kind of scholarships and projects is supported and has been improved. Although, the students' movement is not a new phenomenon – even in the European Union, even in Hungary –, it has achieved outstanding extent and this rise will continue in the next few years.

In case of Hungary, the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme supports international students to be able to study here and which *“is based on bilateral educational cooperation agreements signed between the Ministries responsible for education in the sending countries/territories and Hungary or between institutions”* (Study in Hungary, 2018). The grant program was founded by the Hungarian Government with the mission on one hand, to increase the number and rate of international students in Hungary and on the other hand, to support and foster Hungarian universities and higher education institutions to attract students coming from different countries.

The University of Győr is a great example how this scholarship program has affected the rate of international students at the campus. From September 2016, more and more students – bachelor-, master- and doctoral-level – have arrived to Győr to begin or continue their studies; the university offers an increasing number of courses and programs in English (University of Győr 2018).

Since students are arriving from really different countries, it is necessary to study their culture and the factors which are affected by their culture to be able to identify the basic and core problematic areas during their studies. It is relevant to explore the dimensions of culture which influence their behaviour, their communication style and their attitudes and preferences not just during the lessons and courses with other student mates as well as with teachers and tutors, but also outside the classroom during research collaborations, project work and thesis work.

The paper will follow this structure, by introducing first some aspects of culture and which will be followed by selection and description of cultural dimensions that has impact on international educational and research collaboration between international students and teachers. As the empirical research is part of a wide-range and ongoing research project, findings will not be illustrated, however, the paper will review previous studies' perspectives on how to conduct research which will be the basics for the present survey.

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1. Literature review

In the next two sub-paragraphs, culture and its elements, the different cultural dimensions will be described which can be captured during educational tasks in between students and student-teacher relations.

1.1. Culture and its elements

The term ‘culture’ is defined by many interpretations; this paper will focus on definitions which highlight the importance of understanding how culture can influence one’s behaviour and attitude. In anthropological aspects, culture has some common attributes which appear in several definitions:

- it is learned;
- it is associated with group of individuals;
- it contains many factors, e.g. norms, values, beliefs, “*shared meaning and patterned ways of behaving*” (Birukou et al. 2009: 3).

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) summarized the existed definitions of culture by listing them based on different perspectives. Most interpretations differ based on what the researchers involve into the content of culture. According to Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945: 82) culture is that complex whole which includes artefacts, beliefs, art, all the other habits acquired by a man as a member of a society. Bogardus (1930: 336) stated that culture is “*the sum total of the ways of doing and thinking, past and present, of a social group*”.

If interactions are taken into consideration, Bullivant (1981: 27) gives an explanation to culture which is a “*patterned system of knowledge and conception embodied in symbolic and non-symbolic communication modes*”.

Hall (1959, 1990) as an anthropologist dealt with the concept of culture in order to study how time, space and communication are seen and handled in different national cultures. Nowadays, the most cited researcher regarding culture is Hofstede who defines it as “*the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others*” (1980, 2011: 1). The author has developed the dimensions of culture which was a new paradigm and which covers basic problems which should be solved by people of a society and which are solved in a different way by people living in diverse national cultures.

1.2. Summary of former studies regarding the role of culture in education

Several previous pieces of research were conducted to study how culture and cultural dimensions are manifested in educational circumstances. Parrish and Linder-VanBerschoot (2010) applied the cultural dimensions of learning framework which is a system to describe how cultural dimensions influence teaching and learning processes. The authors have summarized the following cultural dimensions:

- Social relationships:
 - equality and authority;
 - individualism and collectivism;
 - nurture and challenge;
- Epistemological beliefs:
 - stability seeking and uncertainty acceptance;
 - logic argumentation and being reasonable;
 - causality and complex systems;
- Temporal perceptions:
 - clock time and event time;
 - linear time and cyclical time (Parrish – Linder-VanBerschoot 2010).

The above summarized cultural dimensions involve the dimensions of Hofstede (Hofstede–Hofstede 2005); however the authors applied those with different labels and short descriptions in order to better fit into the objective of their study, i.e. in learning and teaching framework.

Joy and Kolb (2009) on the other hand, have dealt with learning styles in different countries by taking into consideration the cultural clusters and cultural dimensions of the GLOBE² research. Learning styles differ based on the following dimensions:

- collectivism (both, in-group and institutional);
- uncertainty avoidance;
- future orientation;
- and gender egalitarianism.

Nowadays, with the wide-range spread of e-learning and distance learning methods and innovative educational technology, more and more researchers examine the role of culture on this phenomenon. Sobodić et al. (2017) studied the previously introduced cultural dimensions of learning framework (CDLF) adjusted with two factors (perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use) and found that individual differences influence virtual learning rather than cultural differences. However, gender differences were captured – *“females have greater tendency towards equality, and males towards authority in social relationships between lecturers and students”* (Sobodić et al. 2017: 7).

2. Planned research methodology

The aim of the research project is to conduct face-to-face interviews with international students in order to explore the role of culture during their studies at the University of Győr. As the research stays at the exploratory stage, best practices and case descriptions will be collected from own experiences and mini interviews with international students at the master-level and will be introduced in a further study.

In order to examine culture and its impact on international educational and research collaborations, the authors have decided to observe the following basic problems, i.e. cultural orientations:

- time;
- space;
- communication and interactions.

Therefore, Table 1 summarizes the cultural dimensions of Hofstede and Hall which will be explored in educational interactions.

Basic problems	Cultural dimensions	Short explanation of the dimensions
Time	Monochronic vs. Polychronic (Hall–Hall 2000)	- Clock time (deadlines, structured and planned agendas, tasks) vs. event time (no strict boundary between in-class and out-class activities, deadlines are for guidance) - Time is linear vs. cyclical.
Interactions with others	Individualism vs. Collectivism (Hofstede et al. 2010)	- Individual (cognitive skills) or social growth (content knowledge) is preferred, - Speak up or not, - Evaluation of interpersonal relationships, - Basis of hard work: individual aims or greater good.
Interactions with and for others	Masculinity vs. Femininity (Hofstede)	- Collaboration vs. competition, - Appreciated values: cooperation and

² Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (Chhokar et al. 2013).

	et al. 2010)	security or recognition and advancement, - Supportive vs. challenging acts' preference.
Interactions – Distribution of power	High vs. Low Power Distance (Hofstede et al. 2010)	- Handling of inequality, - Status demonstration and respect, - Interaction and communication style, mode and method between teachers/tutors and students.
Communication	High vs. Low Context (Hall–Hall 2000)	- Content of what is said, - Usage of vocal signs, - Usage of non-verbal communication, - Preferred modes of communication.
Risk, unfamiliar situations	Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede et al. 2010)	- Acceptance or avoidance of uncertain situations, - Structured processes or flexibility, - Preferred learning materials and methods.

Table 1. Observed cultural dimensions in educational interactions Source: Own edited based on Parrish–Linder-VanBerschoot 2010 (2019)

The authors of this paper are also involved into this research not just as researchers but also as interviewees since they are – except the first author who is teacher and thesis supervisor of the students – international students coming from Cambodia, South Africa and China.³ The authorship and the joint research provide a good example of inter-cultural team work between students and their teacher.

Intercultural competence's improvement can help the involved parties (teachers and students) to overcome miscommunication or misunderstanding based on different cultural background (Wang 2017; Szőke – Keszi 2018; Szőke 2013).

Summary

Culture identifies people. Everywhere around the globe. Every time. Culture defines who we are, how we behave and communicate with others, how we perceive time and space. Even when people from different cultures have to cooperate with others with educational objectives. But how do these differences affect the team work and the communication process with other students or with the teachers.

The paper gave a short review of culture and cultural dimensions that can influence educational communication and relations. Although it is rather an exploratory phase of a research project, it covers basic data to continue the empirical research with. It is not the aim of the primary research to be representative; the other limitation of the research is that it does not involve international students from every level – only master-level students are interviewed.

Although the study contains some great aspects of cultural differences and their impact on education-related tasks, it covers only a small part of interviews which should be continued to conduct and analysed in further studies. Moreover, intercultural competence should be studied as one good solution to decrease the critical interactions raised from working with people (both teachers and students) from different cultures.

³ The nationality of the students is listed in order as their names appear on the paper.

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