

GERMAN STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AT CZECH UNIVERSITIES

Lucie Cviklová

Department of Sociology, Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Králové, Rokitsanského 62/26,
500 03 Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

Abstract

The paper discusses the topic of German students' intercultural awareness at Czech universities. Intercultural sensitivity was measured according to the four cultural dimensions described by organizational psychologists Geert Hofstede and Fons von Trompenaars: power distance (how the unequal distribution of power in society is accepted by people); particularism versus universalism (whether circumstance and each relationship dictate the rule or whether specific circumstances and personal relationships are autonomous); collectivism versus individualism (whether the wellbeing of the group is preferred to personal goals or vice versa) and avoidance of uncertainty (whether uncertainty and the unknown are preferred to rules and regulations). The paper is supported by an analysis of unstructured interviews of German students enrolled in translation studies or Czech studies programs and delivers relevant insights into the motivations of these students to live and study in the Czech Republic, reasons such as Czech family background, low cost of living, opportunity for scholarships, or diverse cultural interests. However, these German students also mentioned the difficulty of Czech university entrance exams, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the learning process, and inefficient administration in relation to accessing learning materials as major obstacles in their studies in the Czech Republic.

Keywords: *Collectivism, German students, Intercultural Awareness, Particularism, Power Distance*

1. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration between higher educational institutions has opened new ways for European students to study in other EU countries for their degrees. Recognition of diplomas through agreements between European universities has also improved and provided the opportunity to acquire greater awareness and knowledge of intercultural communications and to develop intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence is an individual's ability to understand culture and use this understanding to communicate and express his/her values and worldviews in various cultural contexts, both verbally and non-verbally and through techniques such as code switching Bennett (1998, pp. 34–35). Intercultural communicative competence directly relates to intercultural awareness and is measured according to different cultural dimensions/variables (Peterson 2004). These variables include concept of time, low context versus high context cultures, emotional versus neutral cultures, and various others Gannon (2004, p.3).

The research objectives and data collection for the current study focused on German students studying for a degree at Czech universities and operationalizing four cultural dimensions: high versus low power distance, particularism versus universalism, collectivism versus individualism, and high versus low uncertainty avoidance (Světlik 2003). Closed questions (yes/no answers) about attitudes lets us examine and measure these dimensions; for example, power distance – “people are less likely to question the boss or lecturer”, “freedom of thought could get you into trouble”, “management style is authoritarian and paternalist”; universalism and particularism – “objectivity, not personal feelings influencing decisions, is possible and encouraged”, “principles sometimes have to be flexible”, “people tend to hire friends and associates”; collectivism and individualism – “people answer the phone by stating the name of the organization”, “it is okay to stand out”, “saving face is important”; high and low uncertainty avoidance – “people expect more formality in interactions”, “rules can be broken for pragmatic reasons, if it makes sense”, “people should keep emotions under control” (Storti 2011). Greater collaboration between many European Union countries has also resulted in closer work between higher educational institutions. European Council and European Commission programs to

strengthen strategic partnerships between higher educational institutions across the EU serve as an illustration of this process. Specifically, a program to encourage some twenty European Universities consisting of bottom-up university networks was set up to enable by 2024 students to obtain degrees by combining studies in several EU countries. Dual degrees in Europe have been already awarded in several study fields (e.g., Administration Studies, Environmental Studies, Sustainability Studies, Technology Studies, Tourism and Hospitality). Despite academic qualifications not being automatically recognized at the European level and qualification holders having to submit to official procedures to obtain recognition of their academic degrees or diplomas in other EU countries, the process has been simplified and improved with agreements between certain universities. University graduates on the European labor market are also now protected by European employment policies and strategies (Bamford 2014).

Whereas students interested in mathematics, physics, biology or other natural sciences select higher educational institutions in other EU countries on pragmatic grounds, for example specializations offered or university reputation, the motivations of students interested in translation, interpreting or cultural studies very often selected their studies according to long-term cultural interests or family backgrounds in the same or neighboring cultural area (e.g., the Baltics, Central Europe, Scandinavia). Prospective students interested in studying a language specialization or national literature abroad have often been inspired by their curiosities to acquire or deepen their knowledge of a country in the same or neighboring cultural area (Eder, Smith & Pitts 2010).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. *Methods used for Quantitative Data Collection*

The first part of the paper describes the quantitative measurement of selected cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede 2002; Stevens & Görgöz 2010; Zhu 2011; Baker 2015). The current study employed specific attitude pairs to measure the understanding of power by German students who studied at Czech universities. These attitude pairs highlighted the thinking behind German students' attitudes towards the unequal influences and different roles of students and lecturers at Czech universities and the role of power in other areas of their lives; the method revealed whether German students perceived power and status as artificial and the degree to which they would like to de-emphasize or minimize the differences between lecturers and students. The study also employed specific attitude pairs to measure the universalist and particularist values of German students who studied at Czech universities. These attitude pairs reflected the German students' assessments of particularist and universalist behaviour in university lecturers, employers and employees at Czech and German universities; this method revealed whether German students agreed or disagreed with the particularist or universalist attitudes they encountered at public institutions and in their private lives. The study applied specific attitude pairs to measure collectivism and individualism and the German students' preferences at Czech universities in relation to these concepts. These attitude pairs reflected whether the German students preferred collectivism to individualism at university and other aspects of their lives, for example collective and personal needs and social acceptability of collective recognition (Hui 1988). Finally, the study used specific attitude pairs to measure the degree of avoiding uncertainty and the German students' preferences at Czech universities. These attitude pairs reflected whether German students accepted conditions of uncertainty at university and other aspects of their lives, for example in social acceptability of expressing emotions, assessment of risk and danger, importance of formal rules and regulations in social settings, and many other relevant areas (Brandt & Wanasika 2020).

2.2. *Methods used for Qualitative Data Collection*

Illustrated by excerpts and direct quotes, the second part of the paper presents an analysis of numerous semi-structured interviews (Barribal 1994) conducted with German students enrolled in translation, interpreting or cultural studies at Charles University for more than two years. A range of open-ended questions were organized into several types according to the students' motivations for study, their circumstances in the Czech Republic, criticisms of the study program, and issues of acculturation. The

results of the student interviews were arranged into narratives and according to the most significant findings (Patton 1991). The first range of questions explored the circumstances and motivations which inspired German students to select a Czech university, for example their interests in Czech language and literature or the material aspects of study such as living expenses, costs for tuition, opportunities to obtain scholarships, prospective employment on the transnational labour market, etc. The second range of questions focused on the unpleasant aspects of study programmes at higher educational institutions abroad, for example being insufficiently prepared for studies at Czech universities as a consequence of the differences between secondary school curricula in the Czech Republic and Germany, difficulties encountered in Czech university entrance exams, culture shock experienced at Czech universities, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the last few years on forms of study and study requirements. The third range of questions probed the problems of acculturation, drawing on the relevant literature concerning the differences between Czechs and Germans (Berry 1997). German students were asked whether Czechs communicate information in a direct, explicit or precise manner, whether they respect the space people feel is necessary to set between themselves and others, whether Czechs schedule one event following another, or whether a schedule is more important than interpersonal relationships to them, and so on.

3. RESULTS: INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS OF GERMAN STUDENTS AT CZECH UNIVERSITIES MEASURED ACCORDING TO RELEVANT CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

3.1. Intercultural awareness of German students at Czech Universities from the perspective of power distance

The notion of power distance describes the attitude of a society toward inequality, i.e., how cultures deal with people's different levels of status and access to power. Power distance manifests in workplace relations and educational institutions, especially in management roles and the relationship with employees and in the roles and relationships of lecturers and teachers with students. Social actors characterized by high power distance accept that inequalities in power and status are natural; employers, university lecturers and other social actors with power tend to emphasize and protect that power, not delegate or share it, and distinguish themselves as much as possible from those who do not have it. Employees, university and school students and employees are not expected to take initiative and are closely supervised. Social actors in cultures characterized by low power distance regard inequalities in power and status as largely artificial; it is not natural that some people have power over others. In this case, employers, managers, university lecturers, teachers and other social actors implied in power structures tend to de-emphasize power, minimize the differences between themselves and employees, students at university or school or other subordinates, and delegate and share power to the extent possible. Employees, students and other subordinates are rewarded for initiative and do not enjoy close supervision (Daniels & Greguras 2014).

To identify their perspectives on power distance, the German students participating in the current study were asked to choose the statement which best agreed with them from pairs of statements: (1a) University students should be allowed to criticize their university lecturers (because university lecturers do not require deference), (1b) University students should not be allowed to criticize university lecturers (because fear of displeasing the lecturer is more prevalent in cultures with high power distance); (2a) The status symbol of lecturer should be an important part of the profession, (2b) The clothing style of university lecturers should not play any role (because emphasizing distinctions between lecturer and student is the norm); (3a) Critical thinking should be encouraged in students (because no one is threatened by the independence of thinking for oneself), (3b) Critical thinking can get you into trouble (because independence in students is not valued); (4a) The organizational hierarchy at educational institutions should exist mainly for convenience (because power differences between teachers and students are not emphasized), (4b) The organizational hierarchy at educational institutions should be clearly established (because position should be respected and not contravened); (5a) Students should be given precise instructions from lecturers, (5b) Students should not be given precise instructions from university lecturers (because close supervision or the visible exercise of power is common to the culture); (6a) Communication between lecturers and students should be casual

(because distance is minimized), (6b) Communication between lecturers and students implies strict etiquette (because it is necessary to emphasize the power gap); (7a) Teaching methods should be authoritarian (because lecturers are supposed to exercise power), (7b) Teaching methods should be consultative and democratic (because everyone is working towards similar goals and power distance is de-emphasized).

Statement	Number of students who agreed	Number of students who neither agreed nor disagreed
High power distance 1b, 2a, 3b, 4b, 5a, 6b, 7a	43 (28%)	
Low power distance 1a, 2b, 3a, 4a, 5b, 6a, 7b	105 (69%)	
Total	153	5 (3%)

Table 1. High Power Distance versus Low Power Distance

Source: Own Results

3.2. Intercultural awareness of German students at Czech Universities from the perspectives of particularism and universalism

Social actors do not behave in an exclusively universalist or particularist manner; the attitudes of individuals in specific cultures vary, but cultures do tend towards one more than the other. In universalist cultures, certain absolutes apply without exception, regardless of circumstances and situation. Wherever possible, employers, employees, lecturers, students and other social actors apply the same rules in similar situations to everyone, and to be fair is treating everyone alike and not making exceptions for family, friends or members of an exclusive group or in-group. In particularist cultures, the behavior of employers, employees, lecturers, students and other social actors depends on circumstances; family, friends and members of exclusive groups or in-groups are treated in the best possible manner, whereas the rest of the world can look after itself. An in-group protects its members: absolutes cannot exist, because everything depends on whom they are dealing with, and life is not expected to be fair; exceptions are always made for certain social actors (Delanty 2002).

To identify their perspectives on particularism and universalism, the German students participating in the current study were asked to choose the statement which best agreed with them from pairs of statements: (1a) Laws apply to everyone, including lecturers and managers (because for universalists, the law does not depend on who you are), (1b) Agreements between lecturers and university students are established and should not be broken for any reason; (2a) Lecturers and students do not compromise moral standards (because universalists are convinced that certain principles apply, regardless of the situation), (2b) Agreements between lecturers and students can be influenced by personal preference (particularists would say that personal feelings should be taken into account); (3a) Lecturers and students are two parties and should not be reluctant to fulfil the terms of an agreement (universalists avoid exceptions because they believe in absolutes), (3b) Agreements between lecturers and students are made on the basis of personal relationships (because particularist logic declares that a bond is more important than the facts of the case); (4a) The philosophy of the heart is important (because particularist logic is of the heart), (4b) Logical reasoning is important (because universalist logic is of the head); (5a) Subjective rules are normal (because particularists are subjective), (5b) Subjective rules should not exist (universalists like consistency, because principles are absolute); (6a) Written contracts are necessary (because universalists believe in rules anchored in contracts), (6b) Written contracts are not necessary (according to particularists, friends can always be trusted and business is never done with strangers anyway); (7a) Courts of law should mediate conflicts (universalists believe in absolutes, and no circumstances are relevant), (7b) Going to court is an

embarrassment (particularists believe that social action should be guided by a specific situation, not by general maxims).

Statement	Number of students who agreed	Number of students who neither agreed nor disagreed
Universalism 1a, 2a, 3a, 4b, 5b, 6a, 7a	91 (59%)	
Particularism 1b, 2b, 3b, 4a, 5a, 6b, 7b	55 (36%)	
Total	153	7 (5%)

Table 2. Universalism versus Particularism

Source: Own Results

3.3. Intercultural awareness of German students at Czech Universities from the perspectives of collectivism and individualism

No culture is exclusively individualist or collectivist, and concrete social actors exist within each type of culture. Most, however, tend more towards one than the other. In individualist aspects of culture, lecturers and students identify primarily with self and the needs of the individual being satisfied before those of the group. Looking after oneself and being self-sufficient guarantees the wellbeing of the group. Independence and self-reliance are greatly emphasized, and values and social actors tend to be distanced psychologically and emotionally from each other. One may choose to join a group, but group membership is not essentials to a person's identity; success and individualist characteristics are often associated with men and people in urban settings. In collectivist cultures, a person's identity is largely a function of that person's membership and role in a group, for example in the family or a work team. The survival and success of the group ensures the wellbeing of the individual, and by considering the needs and feelings of others, a person may thus protect themselves (Triandis, Chen & Chan 1998, p. 276).

Harmony and the interdependence of group members are emphasized and valued; group members are relatively close psychologically and emotionally, but distant towards non-group members. Collectivism is often associated with women and people in rural settings. To identify their perspectives on collectivism and individualism, the German students participating in the current study were asked to choose the statement which best agreed with them from pairs of statements: (1a) Lecturers should be recruited according to their skills (because individuals need independence), (1b) Lecturers should be recruited from within the organization (because people are defined by the group they belong to); (2a) Lecturers and students should not lose face (because saving face maintains harmony and is the glue that keeps the group together), (2b) The best strategy is being straightforward with lecturers or students (collectivists avoid conflict because it could destabilize harmony); (3a) Individual recognition at educational institutions is not acceptable (because no-one feels excluded, as opposed to the majority ruling over the minority), (3b) Individual recognition at educational institutions is normal (because individualists reject self-effacement); (4a) Lecturers and students change worldviews frequently (because they have to adapt to abrupt changes given by the global conditions), (4b) Lecturers and students adhere to tradition (in the sense that older, senior people are given deference); (5a) Lecturers and students organize cocktail parties (because their lives are determined by short-term relationships), (5b) Marriage rates are high (because marriages keep the group and families happy); (6a) Lecturers answer the phone stating the name of the educational institution (because collectivists present themselves through their affiliations), (6b) Lecturers answer the phone at the workplace stating their name or surname (because individualists present themselves through their names); (7a) Students are able to make friends among each other relatively quickly (because the individual engages in or leaves relationships on his/her own), (7b) It takes a long time for

university students to make new friends among each other (because it is necessary to become familiar with the members of the group your new friend belongs to).

Statement	Number of students who agreed	Number of students who neither agreed nor disagreed
Individualism 1a, 2b, 3b, 4a, 5a, 6b, 7a	93 (61%)	
Collectivism 1b, 2a, 3a, 4b, 5b, 6a, 7b	54(35%)	
	153	6 (4%)

Table 3. Collectivism versus Individualism

Source: Own Results

3.4. Intercultural Awareness of German students at Czech universities from the perspective of uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty creates anxiety in all cultures and is managed through means such as technology for uncertainties in the natural world, and laws, regulations and procedures for uncertainty in human behavior. Cultures have devised norms and systems according to their own attitudes towards dealing with uncertainty; cultures that are “high certainty avoidance” or “low certainty avoidance” can be described according to different characteristics (Finn, Mihut & Darmody 2022).

Social actors in cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance feel especially anxious about the uncertainty in life and attempt to limit and control it as much as possible. Cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance tend to have more laws, regulations, policies and procedures and place greater emphasis on compliance; they also have a strong tendency towards conformity, and hence, predictability. The unknown is socially constructed as frightening, and people therefore take comfort in structure, systems and expertise and strive to eliminate anything that blunts or even neutralizes the effect of anything unexpected. Social actors in cultures characterized by low uncertainty avoidance do not feel threatened or are not anxious about uncertainty, and therefore have no such strong need to limit or control it. These cultures seek to legislate fewer areas of human interaction and more readily tolerate differences. People feel trapped by too much structure or too many systems and are curious rather than frightened by the unknown and not uncomfortable with leaving things to chance; life is interesting but not especially daunting (Scott 1995).

To identify their perspectives on uncertainty avoidance, the German students participating in the current study were asked to choose the statement which best agreed with them from pairs of statements: (1a) Students and lecturers should display their emotions (because nothing is frightening about emotions), (1b) Students and lecturers should keep emotions under control (because when people lose control of their emotions, anything can happen; (2a) Diversity is intriguing and challenging (because the unknown is enticing), (2b) Diversity is dangerous (because it is unpredictable or unknown); (3a) Students should change school infrequently (because stability is sought, and change is threatening), (3b) Students should change school with greater frequency (because change is not so frightening); (4a) Rules can be broken for pragmatic reasons, if it makes sense (because rules are sometimes limiting and nothing is inherently satisfying about rules), (4b) Rules should not be broken (because rules are the foundations of order); (5a) Students and lecturers expect less formality in interactions (because the unknown is not particularly worrying, and risks are not to be feared), (5b) Students and lecturers expect more formality in interactions (because risks are inherently unsettling since they involve the unknown); (6a) Disagreement between students and lecturers is natural (order does not break down or is not undermined so easily), (6b) Disagreements between students and lecturers should be eliminated (because disagreement threatens the smooth running of matters); (7a)

Organizational hierarchy should never be circumvented (because organizational hierarchy guarantees order and keeps matters under control), (7b) Lecturers more readily accept dissent (because control is not so comforting).

Statement	Number of students who agreed	Number of students who neither agreed nor disagreed
High uncertainty avoidance 1b, 2b, 3a, 4b, 5b, 6b, 7a	97 (63%)	
Low uncertainty avoidance 1a, 2a, 3b, 4a, 5a, 6a, 7b	49(32%)	
	153	7 (5%)

Table 4. Uncertainty avoidance

Source: Own Results

4. RESULTS: INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS OF GERMAN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN TRANSLATION STUDIES OR CZECH STUDIES PROGRAMS AT CHARLES UNIVERSITY

4.1. Material and cultural aspects of the motivations behind German students studying at Czech Universities for their degrees

The respondents gave various reasons for their motivation to study Czech language, for example the desire to develop oral proficiency in a second language (Hernandez 2010) or from the partial knowledge of Czech language resulting from informal contact with relatives of Czech origin. *"My interests in Czech language and culture relate to my family's origins. I grew up in bilingual family in Germany and also had some relatives in Prague and the Olomouc and Zlín regions. After coming to Prague, I was surprised by the number of exchange students from Germany at the Institute of Czech Studies at Charles University. Before I came and stayed in the Czech Republic, I informed myself about the Czech Republic's culture and its material and immaterial aspects. For example, I was aware of eating habits and the names of some national dishes. I knew some historical facts about regional differences between individual areas of the Czech lands – Bohemia, Moravia and Czech Silesia."*

Some students also outlined more practical reasons for their decision to live and study at university in the Czech Republic (Trower & Lehmann 2017). *"I was making up my mind and decided to study translation and interpreting. I think you can only study this specialization in Vienna or Prague. I didn't want to go to Vienna because of the high living expenses there and because the city is a long way from Germany. Studying translation or interpreting in Prague also has more benefits, because I can immerse myself in a Czech-speaking environment through informal contact with Czech students, not just in class but also in free time. To put it briefly, thanks to my life in Prague, I can deepen my language knowledge and skills. I wouldn't be able to improve my knowledge of Czech language in Leipzig or in Vienna. These benefits don't come from the structure and content of the study program at Charles University."*

The students also referred to the importance of their previous knowledge of Czech culture and specific cultural interests, for example historical Czech-German relations. *"I learnt about the complicated evolution of Czech-German relations, how Germans began to colonize Czech lands, how their relationship became tenser during the Czech National Revival and that some Czechs falsified manuscripts to overstate the course of Czech history. I also read that Czech patriots made efforts to remove words of German origin from the Czech language and replace them with artificially created Czech words to highlight the significance of the language in a bilingual population spread across the Austrian part of the Habsburg empire. I also learnt that the National Theatre competed for prestige with the German Estates Theatre in its repertoire."*

Other respondents referred to their cultural interests in more recent Czech-German relations, for example the role of Germans in the former interwar Czechoslovakia and the two world wars. *"I knew about the negative response from Czechs to the emergence of an independent Czechoslovakia after World I, about Adolf Hitler's support for Germans in Czechoslovakia just before the outbreak of World War II and the displacement and expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia after the war. I also believe that my partial and fragmented knowledge of Czech culture has played an important role in developing my systematic studies and professional activities. For example, recently I was involved in preparing leaflets for a commemorative event on the occasion of Operation Anthropoid."*

One of the practical motivations for Germans to study in the Czech Republic concerned the insufficient number of German native speakers translating professionally between German and Czech and the potential advantage of this work in future employment opportunities. *"I've noticed that the native language of most translators and interpreters is Czech. My mother tongue is German, and therefore I have good chances to be a successful interpreter and translator specializing in languages, both from Czech to German and German to Czech. In Germany, knowing two or more languages is required for employment in governmental services, but I haven't looked into the details. For example, I can work for German public offices."*

4.2. German students' experiences and the main reasons for their difficulties in studies

Several German respondents were critical of university administration, for example the lack of clarity in university policies, rules and regulations or inadequate infrastructural facilities, e.g. university guidelines concerning hybrid learning (Lin 2008–2009). *"For me, the main obstacle in my studies in the Czech Republic was ineffective organization at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University. Studying in the Czech Republic has been significant innovation in my life, but my fellow students and I, we're foreign students from different countries and cultures, and we didn't get any environmental support that could improve the learning process or develop our cultural and technical skills. The study program didn't disappoint me though, and I personally benefitted from it. I think my fellow students sometimes complained too much about some issues. I'm thankful that I could study in the Czech Republic without doing a university entrance exam and that I got a scholarship."*

Students emphasized the importance of improving access to study materials with information technologies and also mentioned specific issues such as the need for pedagogical training in new technology practices or maintaining uniform standards for data services providers (Kalogiannakis 2010). *"The first year of my studies of Czech language in the Czech Republic was soul-destroying because of the lack of organizational and technical assistance to students. I think the main reason for these difficulties was our lack of knowledge of the Czech language and an absence of technical support in English. It should be mentioned that access to and operating the Student Information System (SIS) web application was complicated, for example usernames and personal identification numbers, or the Charles University Central Authentication Service login (CAS), which was important for access to Charles University Information System applications, faculty information systems, computing facilities, the electronic resources portal, the Moodle learning platform, and so on."*

Students mentioned that admission procedures were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, for example parts of or entire entrance exams were eliminated. *"I started studying for a master's degree in the Czech Republic, so I can't compare it to a master's degree study program in Germany, but I have a bachelor's degree from a German University and therefore some experience with university studies in Germany. The university entrance exam for master's studies at Charles University involves a written and an oral exam. My average was better than 1.5, so I didn't have to sit the written exam and was asked only to take the oral one. I think I was supposed to take the exam in both Czech and English, but the oral exam didn't happen anyway because of the coronavirus pandemic and quarantine."*

Some students also talked about the adverse consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pokhrel & Chhetri 2021), such as poor learning through remote learning methods, increased risk of dropping out of university and partial disruption to their lives. *"Sometimes I didn't consider myself a capable and worthy person, I wanted to interrupt my studies or return to Germany. I think these feelings were related to the coronavirus and other obstacles in my studies. But I don't like giving up, and so I*

managed to overcome a lot of the difficulties and shortcomings of my past study habits, which became unmanageable with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I think that I fulfilled most of the study obligations... I don't want to continue my studies in Vienna or at any other university in Austria because to me the country is geographically and culturally distant from my knowledge and interests."

Concerns were raised about future career goals or prospects and employability after graduation. *"When I chose a study programme, I didn't take into consideration my future career goals. I don't like long-term planning, but I think that Charles University is a university with a high reputation. It is definitively more famous and reputable than other Czech universities, like the University of Josef Evangelista Purkyně in Ústí nad Labem or the universities in Brno. After I graduate, I could go and work in any other European country for a while. But in the long term, because I'm specialized in translating and interpreting Czech and German, I can work only in Germany or the Czech Republic."*

4.3. Response to direct contact with Czech culture, culture shock and adaptation to Czech values and customs

Some German students mentioned the importance of mastering High German [Hochdeutsch] and difficulties in coping with formal and informal Czech. *"In Prague, I experienced culture shock when I realized that there are at least two distinct forms of language – written standard Czech and an unofficial, non-codified and very much used spoken standard of Czech, including slang and dialects, for example the local slang of Brno and the dialects of Ostrava or Pilsen."*

The difference between Czechs and Germans communicating information through body language such as facial expressions, gestures and personal space was also mentioned. *"I was surprised by the difference in personal distance maintained by Czechs. Czech students kept less personal distance between each other than Germans. It didn't happen in class, but in conversations with friends, in group discussions and when saying goodbye. I was astonished by emotional expressions of physical contact such as touching, embracing and kissing. I was also surprised by my fellow students who hugged each other, because I had no experience with similar habits in Munich. I also think that Czechs are more expressive and gesture more often than Germans."*

Respondents from the former West Germany [Westdeutschland] compared their experiences in former East Germany [Ostdeutschland] to their later study period in the Czech Republic. *"I think things worked much better in Munich than in Frankfurt an der Oder or Prague. I think the main difference between Munich and the other two places can be described as organizational order in Munich and organizational disorder in Prague and in Frankfurt an der Oder. I think that these cultural differences can be explained as the hangover from the communist past in Prague and Frankfurt an der Oder. These places can also be described as chaotic, with unexpected happenings at university and in everyday life. Sometimes students from the former East Germany and Czech students were nostalgic about improvisation in everyday life, characteristic to former socialist regimes. From my perspective, these things should be referred to as sloppiness or mess."*

Some respondents also discussed authoritarianism and the authoritarian behaviour they experienced in the university environment and the lack of professional performance in public services. *"I have noticed that academics who hold an important position believe that they don't have to fulfil their obligations or make any other effort. It reminds me of the good soldier Švejk.. I have also experienced poor customer service. Employees in services are often hostile or nasty to clients. For example, I have bad experience with hostile or negative treatment from employees at post offices and shop workers."*

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Main Concerns and Issues in Quantitative Research

The results of research by Hofstede and his team on the German economy and population indicated that most Germans do not accept power asymmetry between superiors and subordinates at organizations and educational institutions as natural and automatic: power distance index is 35 Světlík (2003, p. 209). Focusing on German students at Czech universities, the research highlighted a further

shift in the social construction of power, where German students at Czech universities were more inclined to horizontal forms of organization than vertical ones: only 28% of German students agreed that relationships should be formal and should involve a hierarchical component.

The analysis of the questionnaires indicated that German students studying at Czech universities for a degree are not especially concerned about being protected by their families and friends. Only 36% of these students agreed that preferences in public and private spheres should align to personal preferences; they also endorsed the application of fair or just principles at their universities and in other aspects of their lives. Almost two thirds of the German students respected universalist principles such as laws and other regulations and preferred fair treatment for everyone rather than any form of favoritism.

Hofstede's measurements showed that the German people are an individualist nation, where social actors prefer individual interests over collective ones: individualism index is 67 Světlík (2003, p. 209). This characteristic is confirmed by the data on German students at Czech universities: only 35% of students thought that collective interests were more important than individual ones.

Hofstede's results also highlighted that the German people are a nation with an extremely high avoidance index, where social actors are expected to agree with official norms and regulations and challenges to rules are considered a potential threat: uncertainty avoidance index is 65 Světlík (2003, p. 209). The analysis of the questionnaires indicated an intergenerational shift in the social construction of avoiding uncertainty and therefore also social acceptability of innovation and new ideas, i.e. the tendency to replace a lack of tolerance towards non-systemic phenomena with an alternative perspective on risks opportunities: uncertainty avoidance index is 32.

Compared to Hofstede's findings, Czech and German students prefer more democratic arrangements to authoritarian rule; they claim to be faithful to universalist principles, are more individualist and more willing to accept risk and unknown events.

5.2. Main Concerns and Issues in Qualitative Research

German students perceived differences in body language, for example less social distance between Czech students and lecturers during consultation, less personal distance in interaction between Czech students and other students, more frequent emotional expression, and differing interpersonal attitudes from Czech students on informal occasions. The German students' experiences of acculturation and modifying their behaviors in daily life were expressed in criticisms of confusing, ineffective and overly bureaucratic procedures in Czech administration and internal university administration compared to the fewer regulations and rules existing in similar environments in Germany. The students noticed that Czech students made greater efforts to circumvent or avoid compliance with numerous rules or restrictions: the "black sheep" phenomenon is exceptional in Germany yet typical in the Czech Republic.

The cultural perspectives of German students enrolled in translation studies and Czech studies can be put into context with relevant secondary literature (Gareis 2000; Hahnová 2015; Nový and Schroll-Machl 2015). The analysis of the interviews conducted for the current study revealed the significance of unpleasant aspects in long-term co-existence between Czechs and Germans, dissimilarities in non-verbal communication, and criticisms of university environments and services. An "encumbrance" from former socialist development and certain rigidity in social organization and the lack of discussion culture in Czech seminars, conferences, working groups and workshops was highlighted critically by the German respondents from the former West Germany. They regarded social organization in the Czech Republic as backward and commented on the so-called spirit of Austria-Hungary or non-democratic features of the former socialist regime, for example the lack of pluralism and the rule of law.

Synergy and advancing transnational information on national higher educational institutions in the common European institutional framework could be achieved by reversing our insight into the *modi vivendi* of German and Czech students at Czech higher educational institutions. While the analysis indicated the attitudes of German students to their host country/Czech Republic, the results of

prospective research could also consider the typical attitudes of Czech students towards their host country/Germany. Specifically, understanding the attitudes of Czechs towards their fellow German students is desirable in obtaining a complex picture of the social construction of cultural differences in young generations of Czechs and Germans, encumbered by the long-term representations of biases in the social memories of these two nations (Hahnová 2015).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was prepared under the Specific University Research Funding Project (Specifický výzkum) *Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Identity of German students at Czech Universities*, supported by the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Hradec Králové, 2021.

REFERENCES

1. Baker, W 2015, 'Research into Practice: Cultural and Intercultural Awareness', *Language Teaching*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 130–141.
2. Bamford, C 2014, 'Joint degrees and engaging with a Europe of Knowledge: lessons from a UK perspective of a challenging collaborative endeavour', *Research in Hospitality Management*, vol.4, no. 1&2, pp.77–83.
3. Barribal, L 1994, 'Collecting Data Using a Semi-structured Interview: A Discussion Paper', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, vol.19, no 2, pp. 328–335.
4. Bennett, M 1998, *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication*, Yarmouth, Intercultural Press.
5. Berry, J 1997, 'Acculturation and Adaptation, Applied Psychology', *An International Review*, vol.46, no.1, pp. 5–68.
6. Brandt, T & Wanasika I. 2020, 'Communication Styles of Business Students: A Comparison of Four National Cultures', *International Journal of Industrial and Systems Engineering*, vol.14, no.12, pp. 1229–1233.
7. Daniels, M & Greguras, G 2014, 'Exploring the Nature of Power Distance: Implications for Micro–and Macro–Level Theories, Processes, and Outcomes', *Journal of Management*, vol.40, no.5, pp.1202–1229.
8. Delanty, G 2002, 'Models of European Identity: Reconciling Universalism and Particularism', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, vol.3, no.3, pp. 345–359.
9. Eder, J, Smith W & Pitts, R 2010, 'Exploring Factors Influencing Student Study Abroad Destination Choice', *Jo Frankfurt an der Oder. urnal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, vol. 10, no.3, pp. 232–250.
10. Finn, M, Mihut, G & Darmody, M 2022, 'Academic Satisfaction of International Students at Irish Higher Education Institutions: The Role of Region of Origin and Cultural Distance in the Context of Marketization', *Journal of Studies In International Education*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 572–589.
11. Gannon, M 2004, *Understanding Global Cultures*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
12. Gareis, E 2000, 'Intercultural Friendship: five case studies of German students in the USA', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 21, no.1, pp. 67–91.
13. Hahnová, E 2015, *The Long Shadows of Prejudice: on German and English Stereotypes about the Czechs in 20th Century History [Dlouhé Stíny Předsudků: Německé a Anglické Stereotypy o Čechách v Dějinách 20. Století]*, Praha, Academia.
14. Hernandez, T 2010, 'The relationship among motivation, interaction and the development of second language oral proficiency in a study–abroad context', *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 94, no. 4, pp. 600–617.

15. Hofstede, G 2001, *Culture's Consequences*, Thousand Oakes, Sage Publications.
16. Hofstede, G 2002, *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*, Yarmouth, Intercultural Press.
17. Hui, H 1988, 'Measurement of individualism–collectivism', *Journal of Research in Personality*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 17–36.
18. Kalogiannakis, M 2010, 'Training with ICT for ICT from the trainer's perspective, 2010. A local ICT teacher training experience', *Education and Information Technologies*, vol. 15, no.1, pp. 3–17.
19. Qiuyun, L 2008–2009, 'Student views on hybrid learning: A one–year exploratory study', *Journal of Computing in Teacher Education*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 57–66.
20. Nový I & Schroll-Machl, S 2015, *Intercultural Communication: Czechs and Germans [Interkulturní komunikace: Češi a Němci]*, Praha, Management Press.
21. Patton, M 1991, 'Qualitative Research on College Students. Philosophical and methodological comparisons with the quantitative approach', *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 32, no. 5, pp. 389–396.
22. Peterson, B 2004, *Cultural Intelligence. A Guide to Working with People from Other Cultures, United States*, Yarmouth, Intercultural Press.
23. Pokhrel, S & Chhetri, R 2021, 'A literature review on impact of COVID–19 pandemic on teaching and learning', *Higher Education For the Future*, vol. 8, no.1, pp. 133–141.
24. Scott, S 1995, 'Uncertainty Avoidance and the Preference for Innovation Championing Roles', *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 47–68.
25. Storti, C & Benhold–Samaan, L 2011, *Culture Matters. The Peace Corps (U.S.) Cross–Cultural Workbook*, Washington, Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange.
26. Stevens, P & Görgöz, R 2010, 'Exploring the Importance of Institutional Contexts for the Development of Ethnic Stereotypes: A Comparison of Schools in Belgium and England', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 33, no. 8, pp. 1350–1371.
27. Světlík, J 2003, *Marketing for European Market [Marketing pro evropský trh]*, Praha, Grada.
28. Triandis, H, Chen, XP & Chan, DK 1998, 'Scenarios for the Measurement of Collectivism and Individualism', *Journal of Cross–Cultural Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 275–289.
29. Trower, H. & Lehman, W 2017, 'Negotiating motivations of personal growth and instrumental benefits in the decision to study abroad', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol.43, no.2, pp. 275–289.
30. Zhu, H 2011, 'From Intercultural Awareness to Intercultural Empathy', *English Language Teaching*, vol.4, no. 1, pp. 116–119.