

## КРОС-КУЛЬТУРНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ВЗАЄМОДІЇ У ВИЩІЙ ОСВІТІ

*Стаття присвячена експериментальному дослідженню взаємодії у вищих навчальних закладах. Аналізуються зумовлені культурою відмінності цінностей та їх відображення у взаємодії «викладач-студенти».*

**Ключові слова:** крос-культурна взаємодія, освітні цінності, крос-культурний досвід.

*Статья посвящена экспериментальному исследованию взаимодействия в высших учебных заведениях. Анализируются культурой обусловленные ценности и их отражение во взаимодействии «преподаватель-студенты».*

**Ключевые слова:** кросс-культурное взаимодействие, образовательные ценности, кросс-культурный опыт.

*This article investigates the character of teacher-student interaction in higher educations, values that foreigners from different nations arrive with and how they experience the difference. These findings can be related to broader notions of cultural different values in order to discuss their reflection in higher education taking into account cross-cultural interaction.*

**Key words:** cross-cultural interaction, educational values, cross-cultural experience.

The world of universities has for centuries been a force for globalization. If harmonization is going on, it should be happening here. In contrast, the experiences of students having studied abroad, and of faculty having worked at universities in other countries, point to considerable differences being in teaching and learning styles between countries. There is an overwhelming amount of anecdotal information about striking differences in cross-cultural interaction and entertaining misunderstandings, told and retold at academic meetings, but also a growing empirical and analytical literature providing evidence of those differences. Hofstede has illustrated his famous 4 dimensions drawing on personal teaching experiences from a number of universities [2] and the differences have been addressed from the strategic-institutional perspective of educational establishments encountering globalization and privatization [4]. Together, there is strong evidence that attitudes to professorial authority, degrees of student participation in teaching and learning, and approaches to knowledge at universities vary widely across nations.

At the same time, it is often assumed that the globalization of higher education may lead to a convergence of values and norms in line with Levitt's prediction from 1980 [5] that the world, due to increased international communication would move towards a common, global set of preferences. In an analysis of foreign students Gooderham and Nordhaug found strong similarities between the values of students coming from European countries, concluding

that a significant convergence of values is taking place across Europe [1]. There indeed are large cultural differences among universities in different countries. These differences are systematically interconnected, constituting coherent cultural patterns. Differences in attitudes to professor-student relations, professors emphasis on factual knowledge, the frequency of case-discussions and group work are strongly linked to each other, and vary together in a relatively predictable way, suggesting the existence of an underlying value dimension common to these different approaches to teaching and learning.

However, while the institutions display large differences from country to country, students have relatively similar preferences independently of their country of origin and are more egalitarian and participation oriented than the international average of universities. They do not seem to be influenced by neither the values of their home university, nor the exchange university where they have studied for a semester or two.

If the analysis of the universities point to a world consisting of different national university cultures, ranging from very authoritarian and fact oriented to very egalitarian and discussion oriented, the students are best described as a transnational subculture with relatively similar, egalitarian and discussion-oriented values.

*The aim of this article* is to represent the present analysis of educational values and practices at universities is based on 245 foreign exchange students

studying at different Ukrainian universities in 2008 and 2009, and 250 Ukrainian students with experience from foreign universities.

In the student questionnaires we asked the students about a variety of behaviours and attitudes at their home universities and the institutions they visited, and about their own preferences in relation to these issues. The present analysis relies on the answers to those questions that concern authority and participation at the universities.

The contents of the questions were determined on the basis of 10 focus groups and a number of in-depth interviews with foreign and Ukrainian students. The first version of the questionnaire was tested in a small pilot study that resulted in a few questions being dropped and others reformulated to ensure that the terminology was comprehensible and consistent.

There were received answers from students with experience from 31 different countries. The distribution of respondents is skewed with a large number of students having experience from a limited number of countries, while very few students have experience from the rest of the countries. In order to limit the number of countries with very few students, the analysis includes only countries with 7 or more respondents per country.

In the present paper, we restrict the analysis to answers to five questions concerning the organizational culture at the universities. We asked the students to characterize their home and exchange universities along these four variables, and to indicate their own preferences.

The four variables and the questions were as follows:

1. *Reproduction of facts versus critical discussion:* «At your [home/exchange] university, what is mostly emphasized by professors: Reproduction of facts and textbook knowledge, or critical discussion and individual perspectives?» This question is intended to measure the extent to which individual independence and critical participation is valued in the institutional culture

2. *Authoritarian or egalitarian relations:* «At your [home/exchange] university, how is the relationship between professors and students: Professors treat students as equals, or professors are authoritarian?» Here we look at the degree of egalitarianism in the institutional culture.

2a. *Authoritarian or egalitarian relations:* «At your [home/exchange] university, how do you address professors: formally, by title and surname, or informally, using first name?» This is a more simple and concrete measure of question 2, focusing on the formality of student professor relations.

3. *Amount of student group-work:* «At your [home/exchange] university, how much is group work used in teaching?» This is a question measuring how much responsibility for own learning and team-work skills are valued in the institutional culture.

4. *Amount of class discussions:* «At your [home/exchange] university, how much are class

discussion cases used in teaching?» Assuming that case teaching implies class discussion, i.e. that students have to be active in the teaching process, this measures the extent to which critical participation is valued in the institutional culture.

In questions 1-4 a numerical scale from 1 to 5 was used in answering. Answers to question 2a were binary – formal or informal.

According to the students' answers the nations that have the most discussion-oriented teaching and learning styles are Finland, Denmark, Netherlands, Great Britain, USA, Canada, Australia and a mixed group comprising Singapore, Mexico and Lithuania. The nations with egalitarian cultures are the same, except that the mixed group is replaced by Norway and Iceland. In the low end of both egalitarianism and discussion orientation we find Japan and Ukraine, Russia, with Poland, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Thailand, Austria and Belgium close by. The correlation between the two variables is quite high.

The question about authority and critical discussion refers to the professors' demonstrated attitudes (personal attitudes or forms of behaviour required by the institution) towards students, as seen through the eyes of students with experience of foreign universities. The survey also asked a series of question referring to the importance of concrete forms of teaching at the institutions: whether the institutions relied on lectures or dialogue teaching, what kind of teaching materials were mostly used, how much case-teaching and group work were used. All these forms rely on different levels of student involvement in the learning process: high levels of dialogue in class, case-discussion and group work imply that students are supposed to be proactive and participate actively. Conversely, lectures, few or no case-discussions and little group-work suggest a one-way communication from professors to students who listen, rather than participate.

Among these teaching forms, group work is the one that is mostly dependent on the students' involvement and ability to assume responsibility for their activities, at the same time as it is a teaching form that directly addresses the demand for the social competencies needed in order to collaborate with others. It leaves the initiative in the hands of the students who are supposed to find a way on their own without detailed instructions from the advisor. It was expected that universities that tend to have an authoritarian teaching style should use less group work than more egalitarian institutions.

Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Australia, Netherlands, Canada and USA which are among the more egalitarian nations, have a high frequency of group work while the East European countries, Germany and Italy represent the opposite combination. The notion that students are independent and active, which underlies the correlation between authority and group work, is also related to the form of teaching.

Universities emphasizing reproduction and factual knowledge also tend to use group work relatively little, whereas countries with more a more discussion oriented teaching style also tend to give students the freedom and responsibility of group work.

The analyses shows, there is also a correlation between the use of group work and the use of class discussion cases. Group work and case discussion both represent form of a dialogue-oriented teaching style.

The answers on the question 2a, «whether students address professors formally or informally», gave the idea about the professor's attitudes to students. High levels of participatory teaching – dialogue, cases, group work – correspond to high levels of the egalitarian attitudes of professors to their students and the degree in which they emphasize critical discussion, and vice versa: when students are only little involved in the teaching, professors tend to be authoritarian.

The contrasts between the institutional values in different places are large and vivid. From our focus groups, we have reports from East European students about professors' authoritarian attitudes towards students. A Hungarian student thus told us that «You have to show respect to the professors and not let them lose face. If a professor has made an error, the students will not tell him directly, but approach him saying something like: 'I don't understand, please explain». It is apparent that the authoritarian attitudes reported by the students coexist with a non-participatory approach to students and an absence of critical discussion of viewpoints: in some cases, «questions can be asked, but after class proper» and in other cases «questions must be written down in order for the professor to select», and professors are always addressed formally.

At the other end of the spectrum, a Danish student describes the relationship between professors and students as much more informal and family-like. Also American-style is egalitarian and discussion oriented, irrespectively of their location («Professors are easy to socialize with and students address them by their first name»). Almost all classes are based on case discussions.

The analysis has so far focused on university-internal factors, but the fact that the different countries cluster together suggest that the systematic differences between the countries may be due to broader socio-cultural conditions at the national level. This seems in fact to be the case. The level of authority and participation correlate substantially with a number of socio-cultural indicators.

The World Values Survey [3] suggests that the university values are linked to other socio-cultural phenomena.

In other words, when teaching styles at universities in different countries differ, they do so because they are connected to other socio-cultural phenomena that also differ across countries, and these background variables are also linked and correlate strongly. In general, as suggested by Inglehart [3], socio-cultural values go together in relatively predictable ways across nations, and change as relatively coherent

«syndromes». The correlations suggest that the educational cultures at the universities tap into these syndromes.

Inglehart explains the different cultural values across the worlds' countries with the different levels of modernization of the societies. The most advanced societies – the richest welfare societies – in the world are among the most egalitarian both in terms of women's' participation in society, emancipation of minorities and tolerance towards out-groups. As shown by Hofstede [2], there are high and significant correlations between the findings from the World Values Survey and his own results, suggesting that his four dimensions also are linked to processes of modernization and part of larger value-complexes which universities also tap into. High levels of student participation, informal and egalitarian relations between students and professors, extended use of critical discussions in class, case-teaching and group work on average tend go together with egalitarian and emancipatory tendencies in society at large, and are characteristic of the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries and the Netherlands.

In short, cross-national differences in educational cultures at universities exist because universities are embedded in national cultures. This is in a way quite remarkable, given the long history of university globalization. For many centuries, universities have been a force for globalization, and the interim of national science systems looks like a parenthesis, and an unaccomplished one, in this history.

So far the analysis has focussed on the behaviours and values in the institutions as reported by the students. We now turn to the students and see to what extent they reproduce this picture. The first question we ask is if the students prefer egalitarian and participation oriented teaching styles or if they prefer the opposite, or something in between? This leads to the second question: where do the student's preferences come from? Do they reflect the values of their home universities or the exchange universities, or are their values independent of the experience with universities at home and abroad?

Another striking feature revealed is that the students, in contrast to the universities, are remarkably similar. While the universities show large dispersions around the means as measured in the standard deviations, the students – foreign and Ukrainian alike – have values that are much less dispersed. For most of the variables, the standard deviations of the universities are between 2 and 4 times larger than the standard deviations of the student scores, implying that the students as a group are much more similar than the universities. The one exception is the preference for discussion or reproduction.

The findings thus support Gooderham and Nordhaug's (2001) conclusion that student values show a high degree of convergence and cross-national similarity. One should, however, be careful not to draw too wide inferences from that. Our data indicate that it does not suggest a *general* tendency towards

convergence of values. The existence of large differences between educational styles at the world's universities indicates that these institutions embody values that are still very different showing no similar signs of a homogenization of values. In other words, comparing students to universities, the former constitutes a transnational, globalized subgroup sharing similar values across their country of origin, while the universities represent a national diversity of different educational cultures.

Universities display wide differences in cross-cultural interaction. These differences grow from roots deep in the social and cultural characteristics of the nations in which they are located and operate. The large majority of university professors originate and live in the local society, and it is therefore not surprising that values at the universities correspond to values in society at large. As suggested by Hofstede, and empirically supported by the analysis in the present paper, university education is culture-bound and closely linked to basic socio-cultural conditions at the national level. The fact that universities continue having different attitudes to teaching in spite of long standing traditions for international cooperation – in particular in research – may well have its explanation in the integration of the universities in the national cultural context. If this is true, we would assume that the educational cultures of the universities will change in so far as society changes, unless deliberate action is taken by university management to develop the institutions in a culturally autonomous way. If, e.g., egalitarian and participation oriented teaching forms are introduced in otherwise authoritarian societies, such universities will tend to become cultural enclaves in their respective countries, and become part of a transnational subculture.

In contrast to the variety of national approaches to teaching at the universities, the students who choose to go abroad as exchange students share a homogeneous set of egalitarian and participation oriented values. They all tend to share the values different from those of their home universities to the extent that these university values differ from the participatory and egalitarian ones. The more

authoritarian and the less participative the universities are, the larger the differences between student values and the prevailing values at the universities.

The intuitive explanation of the difference between national university values and student preferences would be that the students' values are becoming 'global' due to increased international contacts, but our evidence points in a different direction: the fact that Ukrainian students, even after extensive stays in very different foreign institutions, retain a largely homogenous set of values, suggests that the exposure to other educational styles either does not lead to adoption of the foreign values or: only leads to such adoption, if those values are more egalitarian and participative than the ones brought from home. A more plausible hypothesis could be either *self-selection*: students who decide to go abroad have egalitarian and participation oriented values which they have developed independently of – or in opposition to – their home universities. Exchange students are a transnational subgroup with similar values which set them apart from the international diversity of universities. Or, alternatively: *One-way change*: globalization may produce value harmonization, but only in one direction – towards more egalitarian and participative values.

The two hypotheses are not in conflict. The first may be a specification of the second.

We have found preferences, attitudes and values that are different between groups and places. In a fundamental sense, there is no way of evaluating those different preferences and attitudes. There is no objective measure of good or bad values, and no culture can be held to be superior to other cultures in a general sense. What we can say is that there seems to be a timeline, perhaps an evolutionary logic, to the differences: the more authoritarian and hierarchical values came first, deriving from a less liberal, less democratic society and surviving into modernism and industrialism. The more egalitarian and participatory values evolved out of – or in opposition to – those, reflecting more recent turns of social and cultural history. But this evolution has been both gradual and uneven and has had its peculiarities in all the different cultures.

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