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**CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN EDUCATION:  
CHALLENGES AND ADVANTAGES**

***Introduction***

Cross cultural communication is an important and popular topic for modern world and modern Europe.

The purpose of this article is to report on challenges and advantages of cross cultural communication encountered by student during German-Ukrainian Youth Meeting „Meet up! in SWF“. The meeting took place in November 2015, it gathered 11 German and 12 Ukrainian students in Fachhochschule Südwestfalen (Meschede, Germany) to work on the topic “Entrepreneurship fostering social, cultural, and environmental developments in Europe”, and it was supported by Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” (EVZ) and the German Federal Foreign Office (the project authorization number is 32.5.1C09.0051.0).

Cross-cultural communication is one such global skill that will equip the learner to adapt to any cultural context. Cross-cultural communication has emerged largely through the globalization of markets, affairs of nation-states and technologies. need to pay attention to intercultural communication and discusses some specific approaches and strategies in the teaching of intercultural communication in the classroom [Suneetha and Sundaravalli, 2011]. These include tackling issues like learning to honor and sharing one’s own culture while developing a capacity to be open to other cultures; progressing from an ethnocentric to an ethno-relative state of understanding and acceptance of cultural differences; and increasing the ability to communicate with non-native speakers. Specifically, classroom practices and strategies include intercultural explorations through the use of appropriate texts, films and other multimedia resources, short stories, contrastive case studies of cultures, group encounters and role plays. Thus the ways people communicate and interact, their language patterns, nonverbal modes all are determined by culture (Klopf &

Park, 1982). Cross-cultural communication theory begins with the assumptions of cultural variations. These differences act as barriers to communication. Knowing the differences exist and recognizing the potential effects on communication, the communicator will be more sensitive to the fact and accommodate such differences. This means that for communicators to understand each other, they should have something in common in their back grounds that will enable them to perceive the stimuli similarly. Communication is intricately woven into the culture. Culture fosters or promotes communication process. There is strong correlation between culture and language.

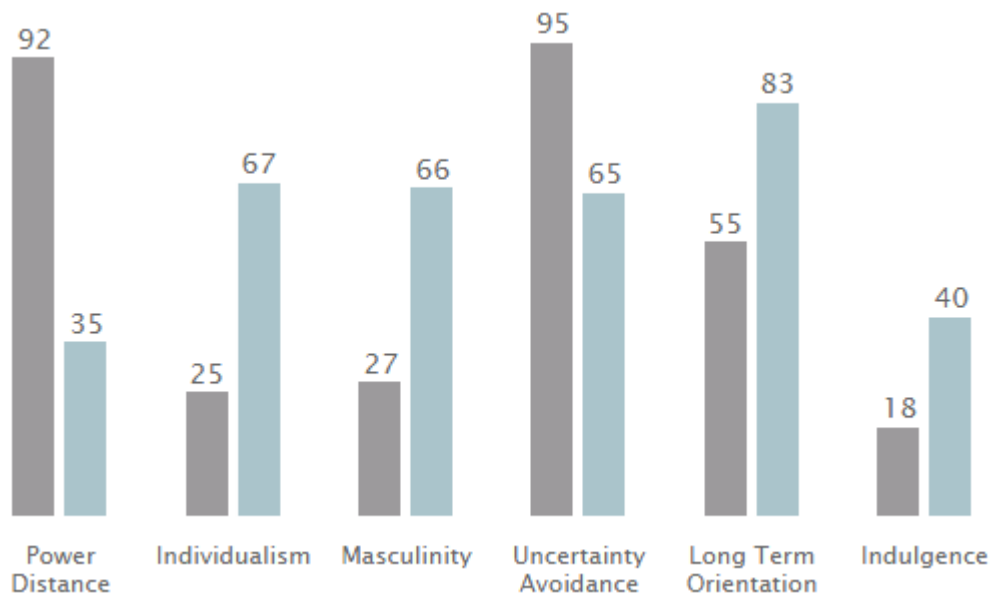
Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is one the most cited and widely accepted frameworks for cross-cultural communication, developed by Geert Hofstede. It describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior, using a structure derived from factor analysis.

Hofstede developed his original model as a result of using factor analysis to examine the results of a world-wide survey of employee values by IBM between 1967 and 1973. It has been refined since. The original theory proposed four dimensions along which cultural values could be analyzed: individualism-collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; power distance (strength of social hierarchy) and masculinity-femininity (task orientation versus person-orientation). Independent research in Hong Kong led Hofstede to add a fifth dimension, long-term orientation, to cover aspects of values not discussed in the original paradigm. In 2010 Hofstede added a sixth dimension, indulgence versus self-restraint.

Hofstede's work established a major research tradition in cross-cultural psychology and has also been drawn upon by researchers and consultants in many fields relating to international business and communication. The theory has been widely used in several fields as a paradigm for research, particularly in cross-cultural psychology, international management, and cross-cultural communication. It continues to be a major resource in cross-cultural fields. It has inspired a number of

other major cross-cultural studies of values, as well as research on other aspects of culture, such as social beliefs.

According to Hofstede's research results at <http://geert-hofstede.com/>, Ukrainian and German cultures are very different (see Picture 1).



Picture 1. Hofstede's cultural dimensions: Ukraine and Germany comparison (<http://geert-hofstede.com/>)

The biggest difference can be found in 'Power Distance' dimension. Ukraine, scoring 92, is a country where power holders are very distant in society. Being the largest country entirely within Europe and being for almost a century part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine developed as a very centralized country. The discrepancy between the less and the more powerful people leads to a great importance of status symbols. Behavior has to reflect and represent the status roles in all areas of business interactions: be it visits, negotiations or cooperation; the approach should be top-down and provide clear mandates for any task. Highly decentralized and supported by a strong middle class, Germany is not surprisingly among the lower power distant countries (score 35). Co-determination rights are comparatively extensive and have to be taken into account by the management. A direct and participative communication

and meeting style is common, control is disliked and leadership is challenged to show expertise and best accepted when it's based on it.

A comparatively smaller difference can be found in 'Uncertainty Avoidance' dimension though the difference is still very visible. Scoring 95 Ukrainians feel very much threatened by ambiguous situations. Presentations are either not prepared, e.g. when negotiations are being started and the focus is on the relationship building, or extremely detailed and well prepared. Also detailed planning and briefing is very common. Ukrainians prefer to have context and background information. As long as Ukrainians interact with people considered to be strangers they appear very formal and distant. At the same time formality is used as a sign of respect. Germany is among the uncertainty avoidant countries (65); the score is on the high end, so there is a slight preference for Uncertainty Avoidance. In line with the philosophical heritage of Kant, Hegel and Fichte there is a strong preference for deductive rather than inductive approaches, be it in thinking, presenting or planning: the systematic overview has to be given in order to proceed. This is also reflected by the law system. Details are equally important to create certainty that a certain topic or project is well-thought-out. In combination with their low Power Distance, where the certainty for own decisions is not covered by the larger responsibility of the boss, Germans prefer to compensate for their higher uncertainty by strongly relying on expertise.

It is very important to practice intercultural cooperation between Ukrainians and Germans to understand representatives of other culture better and be more successful in future cooperation, including business cooperation. The above mentioned German-Ukrainian Youth Meeting „Meet up! in SWF“ is a good example of an intercultural collaborative learning project that helps to see challenges and advantages of cross cultural communication in education.

### *Experiment*

German-Ukrainian Youth Meeting „Meet up! in SWF“ was designed and implemented as for students, studying Economics and Entrepreneurship in Germany and Ukraine. It was held at Fachhochschule Südwestfalen, Department of Engineering and Management Sciences, Meschede, Germany from 21 November

2015 till 28 November 2015. Ukrainian representatives, students of People's Ukrainian Academy (Kharkiv, Ukraine), came to German university with the grant support from the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" (EVZ) and the German Federal Foreign Office. The project authorization number is 32.5.1C09.0051.0. German and Ukrainian students participated in 4-day seminar that was aimed at developing intercultural concepts for entrepreneurial activity fostering social, cultural, and environmental developments in Europe. Main project activities included discussions on the above mentioned topic, developing a business idea in a multicultural group and presenting it to the audience. The project united 12 Ukrainian and 11 German students.

Data was collected via pen-and-paper survey of the participants of the German-Ukrainian Youth Meeting „Meet up! in SWF“. The average age of 11 German respondents was 27.6 years old, with 36% female, 64% male. The average age of 12 Ukrainian respondents was 20.5 years old, with 50% female, 50% male. Survey was based on the interview with open questions on intercultural experience and challenges & advantages of cross cultural communication in education.

### **Results**

The results of the survey are shown in the tables 1 and 2. Statistics shows that language is a key in intercultural communication for both countries: majority sees it as a benefit though almost the same group of respondents testifies that communication in a foreign language is always a challenge.

A very positive trend is that the number of benefits is larger than the number of challenges: this is true for both Ukrainian and German samples.

Ukrainian and German project participants see the challenges very similarly: several aspects of cultural differences made communication more difficult or created some obstacles on the way to a common project decision.

Table 1 – Benefits and Challenges, Ukraine

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Number of votes</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Number of votes</b>
Practice of foreign language	7	Communication in foreign	8

Cultural exchange	5
New experience	3
New foreign contacts/friends	3
Learn different views	3
No authority/ independence	2
Improve communication skills	2
Share experience	2
Improve skills	2
Become more self-confident	1
Improve attitude to studies	1
Positive emotions	1
Improve organizational skills	1
See other places	1
Start from scratch	1

language	
Habits, behavior differences	4
Differences in academic knowledge	3
Misunderstanding	2
Mentality differences	2
Age differences	1
Food differences	1

Table 2 – Benefits and Challenges, Germany

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Number of votes</b>
Practice of foreign language	5
Learn different views	5
New foreign contacts/friends	3
New ideas	3
Learn more about Ukraine/ another culture	3
New experience	2
Increase knowledge	2
Cultural exchange	2
Positive emotions	1
Break the stereotypes	1
Improve communication skills	1
Improve intercultural skills	1

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Number of votes</b>
Communication in foreign language	9
Habits, behavior differences	3
Different points of view when discussing a problem	3
Misunderstanding	2
Cultural differences	1
Age differences	1
Differences in academic knowledge	1

Both German and Ukrainian students see benefits in learning new during intercultural educational project: new and different views, new ideas, new people, and getting new experience in general.

At the same time, the difference in perception includes the following: Ukrainians mentioned 'Cultural exchange' as second important benefit, while for Germans learning new ideas and new point of views was more important. Germans mentioned learning more about Ukraine and breaking stereotypes, while Ukrainians didn't touch this topic at all.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of communication is to transfer ideas and knowledge from one entity to the other. The first step in communication is input; someone must say something that is received by someone else. The communication loop is successful when the receiver demonstrates that he or she understands what was being communicated. From an organizational perspective there are many barriers than can impede the flow of communication. These barriers include culture, technology, language, workforce, and environment [Matthews and Thakkar, 2012]. Such a communication is very important for business, and thus is very important part of education and training for business students as the economics and companies become more and more global requiring intercultural communication skills from the employees and managers.

The project described and the summary of students' opinions on benefits and challenges of cross cultural learning project is one of the possible ways to increase students' awareness about other cultures and improve their intercultural communication skills.

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