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### **UKRAINIAN AND CANADIAN ACADEMIC CULTURES: DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES**

*Стаття розглядає організаційну культуру освітнього закладу в контексті інтернаціоналізації освіти. Автор пропонує огляд освітньої культури і аналізує культурні відмінності освіти України та Канади. Українська і канадська освітні культури порівнюються за п'ятьма вимірами Г. Хофстеде (індивідуалізм/колективізм, дистанція влади, ставлення до невпевненості, мужність/жіночість, довгострокова/короткострокова орієнтація). Пропонуються чотири категорії, які впливають на успішний перехід студентів між освітніми культурами: рівень академічної підготовки, час для адаптації, інформація/комунікація та самостійна підготовка.*

**Ключові слова:** *інтернаціоналізація, освіта, освітня культура, адаптація до освітньої культури, відмінності освітньої культури, культурна модель Г. Хофстеде, міжкультурні особливості, культурні компроміси.*

*Статья рассматривает организационную культуру образовательного учреждения в контексте интернационализации образования. Автор предлагает обзор образовательной культуры и анализирует культурные различия образования Украины и Канады. Украинская и канадская образовательные культуры сравниваются по пяти измерениям Г. Хофстеде (индивидуализм/коллективизм, дистанция власти, отношение к неуверенности, мужественность/женственность, долгосрочная/краткосрочная ориентация). Предлагаются четыре категории, которые влияют на успешный переход студентов между образовательными культурами: уровень академической подготовки, время для адаптации, информация/коммуникация и самостоятельная подготовка.*

**Ключевые слова:** *интернационализация, образование, образовательная культура, адаптация к образовательной культуре, различия образовательной культуры, культурная модель Г. Хофстеде, межкультурные особенности, культурные компромиссы.*

*The article provides a framing and synthesis of the concept of academic culture in the context of internationalization of education. The author offers an overview of the concept of academic culture and analyzes cultural differences within academia in respect to internationalization processes in Ukraine and*

*Canada. Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures are compared in relation to Hofstede's five dimensions (e.g., Individualism/Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity/Femininity, and Long-term/Short-term Orientation). A useful framework for conceptualizing the issues of students' transition between Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures is also suggested. Four key categories – academic preparedness level, adjustment time, information/communication, and self-preparation for the transition – are recognized as those that might influence students' transition between Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures.*

**Key words:** *internationalization, education, academic culture, academic culture transition, academic culture differences, Hofstede's cultural model, cross-cultural settings, cultural compromises.*

For several decades, internationalization has been defining the direction of education policies of many countries. Student mobility, an international collaboration of educational establishments in terms of research and networking, and internationalization at home raise the issues of academic culture, academic culture differences, and academic culture adjustment. As the number of Ukrainian students studying at different universities abroad increases, and Canada is one of the most preferred countries for education among Ukrainians, understanding the differences and identifying the similarities between these two academic cultures become essential for student success.

The purpose of the article is to provide a framing and synthesis of the concept of academic culture in the context of internationalization of education in Ukraine and Canada. This purpose is accomplished through the following goals: (a) to offer an overview of the concept of academic culture; (b) to analyze cultural differences within academia in respect to internationalization processes on the examples of Ukraine and Canada; and (c) to suggest a useful framework for conceptualizing the issues of students' transition between Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures.

The experience of international students in a different academic culture is one of the internationalization aspects that has gained the most attention in the literature. Olshen [11], Zhou & Zhang [20], et al. paid special attention to the first year of studies as a period of particular importance for an academic adjustment. There are studies, which have analyzed the experiences of international students as a homogeneous entity versus the experiences of specific nationalities (Ryan [12], Salvarajah [13], Wan [18], and Zheng & Berry [19], et al.). Others have examined international students' academic performance, cultural backgrounds, and previous experiences (Brown [1], Ryan [12], Seow [15], and Zheng & Berry [19], et al.). The positive aspects of the cross-cultural transition of international students have become the subject of extensive research of Lillyman & Bennett [6], Moores & Popadiuk [9], et al. Despite the extensive research on academic culture and international students, the suggested

findings and recommendations seem not to have desirable effects on eliminating difficulties in academic culture adjustment both for international students and for educational institutions.

Academic Culture. Continuous increase in cross-cultural teaching/learning situations requires academic improvement initiatives and shifts organizational culture studies into the leading positions. Examining different cultural dimensions has become a major focus of research since the late 1970s and early 1980s, which leads to deeper understanding of organizational culture. In literature, academic culture is often linked to academic effectiveness and improvement [7; 17].

At this point of research, I incline to support Detert, Schroeder, and Mauriel [2], and Schein [14] in their conviction, that at the same time, the debates about ontology of culture concept, epistemology, levels and manifestations of the concept, and appropriate methodology do not only enrich our understanding but also seem to interfere the creation of a coherent view of culture, cumulative body of knowledge and practice, beneficial to theorists and practitioners.

Culture concept of an organization is the most compelling one. It is frequently referred to as «below the surface» phenomena [14, p. 11] or the roots of the tree of school organization, an «underlying element» [3, p. 1]. Over the years, various approaches have been suggested to define and study academic culture, which, according to Schein, is a «healthy sing» to testify the importance of culture as a concept, and at the same time, they create fuzziness in the definition of organizational culture [14, p. 13]. In the paper, I would like to concentrate not so much on defining academic culture, though the issue at hand is relatively important, as on characterizing it using relevant ideas.

Emphasizing the idea of something shared or held in common in relation to organizational culture, Schein summarized eleven major categories of observables that are associated with culture and used to describe it in literature: observed behavioral regularities when people interact; group norms; espoused values; formal philosophy; rules of the game; climate; embedded skills; habits of thinking, mental models, and linguistic paradigms; shared meanings; ‘root metaphors’ or integrating symbols; formal rituals and celebrations [14, pp. 14–15]. The descriptions of each of these categories contain an implication of either group or group members and actions, which characterizes an organizational culture as a kind of «within» or «out from» interactions, relations, and cooperation between people.

Other critical elements to describe organizational culture are structural stability, depth, breadth, and patterning or integration [14, p. 14]. In order to survive, culture strives to some level of structural stability, a sense of group identity, which provides meaning and makes it hard to change, though not completely impossible. «Below the surface» characteristic of culture concept reflects its depth as often-unconscious part of a group, less visible than other

parts, but as something more deeply embedded. Culture influences all aspects of organization functioning, internal and external, thus indicating its breadth and pervasiveness. Patterning or integration of cultural elements into a larger paradigm, ability connect all elements together, a sort of coherency emphasizes the stability of culture [14, pp. 15–16].

Often, focusing on the formation of organizational culture, researchers viewed its growth and development as the accumulation of actions, traditions, symbols, ceremonies, rituals, as inherent from organization's vision, beliefs, values, and mission [3, p. 6]. Similarly, culture can be defined in consideration to its constituents as the collection of such rules of behavior, norms, and values, common to the members of culture [8]. The idea of culture formation or development is also illustrated through cultural levels [7; 14]. Schein's model is shaped as a three-level structure with the basic underlying assumption (e.g., relationship to the environment, nature of reality, of human nature, activity, and human relationships, etc.) at the deepest, intangible level. These assumptions are usually taken for granted as they are a part of group identity and come from espoused beliefs and values (e.g., respect for others, collaboration, etc.). They are viewed as «worth striving» or «standards of desirability» [7, p. 8]. The final third level in Schein's classification belongs to artifacts and practices (e.g., language, physical space, technology, dress-code style, narratives and myths about the organization, symbols, rituals, etc.), visible to outsiders, easy to observe and relatively easy to influence [7; 14; 17].

To enrich the culture concept, Maslowski suggested the aspects of content, homogeneity, and strength, attributing the first one to the meaning of basic assumptions, norms, values, and artefacts, the second – to the extent these assumptions, norms, and values are shared, and strength – to the extent to which the members' behavior is influenced by assumptions, norms, values, and artifacts [7, pp. 8–9].

Therefore, concentrating on its characterizing aspects, I incline to perceive an academic culture as basic or underlying in the organization, created through relations and thus shared and complex, rather stable and coherent, but still with a tendency to be dynamic to some extent and able to grow and change/adapt. It is visible to outsiders, but difficult to comprehend for those who are not within.

Academic Culture Differences. Considering academic culture with respect to internationalization processes is impossible without relating to academic culture differences. The discrepancies between academic standards and expectations of host academic institutions and visiting students, the ways to address these discrepancies, and the responsibilities of each side of the process become issues of both students' potential academic success and as a result the success of an academic institution.

Schein indicated that the numerous attempts of researchers and consultants to define cultural «strength», indicate a better correlation of certain cultures with performance, and make claims about improving performance by

promoting definite kind of culture created a dangerous tendency [14, p. 13]. The tendency is connected with evaluation of particular cultures, the suggestion that there are «right», «good» or «bad», and «functionally effective» or not cultures. Schein insisted that it was not as much about the culture alone, as about its relationship to the environment in which it existed [14, p. 13]. Analyzing academic culture differences and further transition between academic cultures, I would like to emphasize that there are no implications about which academic culture is better, only which works better in the given environment.

So far, Hofstede's model of cultural differences has been widely used in different spheres in connection to cross-cultural settings, regardless numerous critiques [16] especially addressing the inappropriate use of the model in internationally diverse educational setting, failure to recognize differences between learning settings (e.g., preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary education), relatively static culture concept regarding values. Nevertheless, it seems no other model manages to provide a complete and well-rounded picture of cultural differences among societies, which are reflected in the educational process as well. According to Hofstede, the differences in academic interactions can be listed according to particular dimensions: Individualism/Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity/Femininity, and later added Long-term/Short-term Orientation [5].

Similarly, Detert et al. synthesized general dimensions of organizational culture along which a culture of one particular organization can differ from cultures of other organizations (e.g., educational institutions). These dimensions are the basis of truth and rationality in the organization; the nature of time and time horizon; motivation; stability versus change/innovation/personal growth; orientation to work, task, and coworkers; isolation versus collaboration/cooperation; control, coordination, and responsibility; orientation and focus – internal and/or external [2]. The eight suggested dimensions of culture can be easily paralleled to the dimensions of Hofstede's cultural model, though some of the dimensions offered by Detert et al. could belong to more than one Hofstede's category (e.g., Individualism/Collectivism could comprise orientation to work, task, and coworkers as well as isolation versus collaboration/cooperation, while motivation could be attributed to both Power Distance and Masculinity/Femininity).

One way to characterize an academic culture of a country is to determine what dimensions are prevalent or more evident in a particular academic culture. In this article, one of the goals is to compare academic cultures in Ukraine and Canada and to infer if they have more differences or commonalities. Hofstede's dimensions of Individualism/Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity/Femininity, and Long-term/Short-term Orientation are chosen as key categories for the comparison.

The dimension of Individualism/Collectivism represents the degree to which the group has power over the individual, or to what extent individual

society members are integrated into groups, loyal and dependent. Thus, in Ukraine, students expect «to learn how to do» [5, p. 312] and education is aimed at gaining prestige in a social environment, while Canadian students expect «to learn how to learn» [5, p. 312] with the purpose of improving economic worth and self-respect. This places Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures on opposite sides in the dimension, the first belonging to the collectivist societies, while the latter has more characteristics of the individualist societies. This dimensional opposition is also reflected in the use of 'we-' and 'I-sentences' in scientific communication.

Power Distance dimension has a particular effect on student-teacher relationships, as it refers the extent of equality to which power is distributed amongst society members or the degree of tolerance of inequality in society. In academia, such differences can be seen student-centered (small power distance societies) or teacher-centered (large power distance societies) education, which means the effectiveness of learning related to the amount of two-way communication or excellence of a teacher, correspondingly [5; 16]. In this respect, Ukrainian academic culture can be viewed as a used-to-be teacher-centered though rapidly moving towards student-centered, which is undoubtedly seen in the latest educational policies and practices. This shift adds to the commonalities between two academic cultures, as Canadian academic culture is characterized by student-centricity.

Uncertainty Avoidance represents the level of acceptance of uncertainty or tolerance to change in society and the degree of structuring in education [5; 16]. Both Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures tend to a weak uncertainty avoidance. All participants of the educational process, in this respect, can be described as rather contemplative, relaxed, tolerant, and accepting personal risks. Unstructured and unpredictable situations hardly make them extremely nervous and agitated. Students are encouraged to be creative, find innovative approaches to problem-solving. At the same time, in Ukrainian academic culture, there is some evidence of strong uncertainty avoidance society, which is reflected in the perception of a teacher as an expert in the field who has all the answers.

The dimension Masculinity/Femininity shows an association of social roles with gender and the relation of competitive values over the quality of life. Education is characterized by either competitiveness or solidarity [5; 16]. This dimension is the one belonging to which is difficult to determine with certainty. Hofstede placed Canadian culture almost on the edge between Masculine and Feminine cultures [5, p. 310]. In my opinion, for the last thirty years, this position seems to have moved on the axis towards Feminine dimension, where the quality of life and interpersonal relationships are stressed more than the distinction between social roles for sexes and dominant value of material success. In Ukraine, the traces of Masculine orientation in academic culture are still strong. In post-secondary education, students very often chose their majors

with the preference to more prestigious or those, which bring material advantages and career opportunities. Some careers are still viewed as 'for men' or 'for women'. Competitiveness in education is rather strong and the perception of failure might serve as a measure for self-esteem and self-image.

Finally, Long-term/Short-term Orientation dimension describes the orientation towards future reward or relatedness of virtues to the past and present. Meanwhile, academic attitude towards success and failure is different as well as interest in theoretical or applied sciences [5; 16]. The ambiguity of this dimension makes it difficult to position each of the analyzed academic cultures in a definite place. Both academic cultures seem to have the characteristics of Long-term and Short-term orientations. However, Ukrainians place a higher value on applied concrete sciences, while in Canada, theoretical and abstract sciences are in favor among the students.

**Academic Culture Adjustment.** The number of differences between Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures makes educational process more challenging both for students who decide to make a transition between these two academic cultures and for academic staff. Mismatches between expectations and requirements cause misunderstandings and create a fundamental gap between the parties [8; 10], «a gap which needs to be addressed in the creation of a successful teaching and learning environment» [4, p. 25]. The mismatches can be associated with learning different languages, styles of academic writing, etc. As well, interactions in cross-cultural learning situations are problematic for both parties due to the number of differences in the social positions of teachers and students in society, in the relevance of the curriculum, in profiles of cognitive abilities, and in processes of teacher/student and student/teacher interaction [5, p. 303].

Though Brown [1], McEwan [8], and Olshen [11] characterized international students' academic adjustment as challenging and in constant need of support services, creating an impression of a vulnerable student population, international students are proven to benefit from their previous experiences, be more resilient and flexible, able to successfully adjust to new academic environment (Moore & Popadiuk, [9]; Seow [15]). Especially, positive experience during international student transition is articulated through personal development, change in goals, in perspective, and academic growth [9, p. 295].

Upon the literature review on academic culture adjustment process, I would like to suggest four key facilitating categories, which relate directly to academic performance and in such a way might influence students' transition between Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures. These are categories of academic preparedness level, adjustment time, information/communication, and self-preparation for the transition. Academic performance as an indicator of successful academic transition depends on the level of preparedness. The results of a study conducted by Seow have revealed that academic preparation is more important to academic performance and academic adjustment than just cultural

adjustment [15]. Time is one of the fundamental categories, marking the successful adjustment [9; 15]. Seow established the correlation between time span and successful adjustment, noting that the shorter period of time requires greater effort from students to adjust, and improving academic performance takes time [15]. Information and communication categories are influential for academic culture transition. In the study on previous experiences and their influence on students' status, students' answers on transitional issues implied that the information from a university about programs, courses, and expectations, sort of guidance and communication prior engagement into the academic activities would have benefited students' experience [15]. Another study, conducted by McEwan, added to the topic arguing the necessity of bridging the gap between socio and academic culture expectations of staff and students by means of collaboration and sharing academic culture information. The first step in the process is encouraging mindfulness of such academic differences and engaging in certain «cultural compromises», required in an international classroom [8]. Self-preparation can be of various forms. One of them is recognizing academic differences. Learning more about the differences between educational systems in a host and home countries was reported to be helpful while international students' transition [9, p. 297]. As Schein reasoned, better understanding one's culture, oneself, and the dynamics of culture led to less puzzlement, irritation, and anxiety when encountered the unfamiliar [14, p. 13].

Conclusion. The proliferation of internationalization processes brings out the issues of culturally mediated interactions that in turn emphasizes the need for culture conceptualization in academia. There are some academic culture characteristics to consider dealing with cultural processes in education: shared and relational nature of academic culture, complexity, coherence, stability/dynamics correlation, visibility to outsiders, and difficulty to comprehend. Analysis of academic culture needs to reflect not as much upon the culture itself, as upon its relationship to the environment in which it exists. Multiple cultural encounters in academic settings are impossible without considering academic culture differences, discrepancies between academic standards and expectations of host institutions and visiting students. Such mismatches between expectations and requirements create a «gap» between the parties of the process, which needs to be bridged.

Despite the number of differences in Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures in relation to Hofstede's five dimensions (e.g., Individualism/Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity/Femininity, and Long-term/Short-term Orientation), there are additional commonalities which make bridging the «gap» between the students and educators easier. They are the value of excellence in the scholarly activities, academic integrity, and high commitment to student success.

The literature review on academic culture adjustment process makes it



possible to suggest four key categories that might influence students' transition between Ukrainian and Canadian academic cultures: (a) the categories of academic preparedness level, (b) adjustment time, (c) information/communication, and (d) self- preparation for the transition. The need for changes in pedagogy and curriculum alongside with facilitation of mutual dialogue and respect amongst academic cultures and knowledge traditions became recognized in the educational field.

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