



Fostering Global Awareness: the Case of International Students Enrolled in Latvian Higher Education Institutions

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Dr. Anna Stavicka

Dr. Indra Odiņa

University of Latvia



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Multilingual and Multicultural University: Preparation Platform for Prospective International Students

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Overall Project Aim

- **internationalize the prospective students' experience before arriving to Latvia or enrolling in higher education programmes**

The Key Objective

- contribute to successful integration of prospective international applicants by providing the **preparation service** for the studies in Latvian Higher Education Institutions.

Background

- Recent research (CCG, 2014; Yang, 2014 and others) → main challenges to study mobility
→ the lack of information, insufficient language proficiency and lack of comprehensive support services aimed at enhancing **the quality of mobility starting from pre-departure stage.**

Background

- Over the last several decades **Chinese students** have become increasingly visible in the European higher education area. According to official statistical data (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018), **608400 Chinese students** studied abroad in 2017, which makes PRC the more and more important market also for Latvian higher education institutions.

- The implementation of The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by the government of People's Republic in China (PRC) substantiates the need for professionals with the sufficient knowledge of the Latvian language.

Research Sample

The introduction of the Latvian language as a foreign language to Chinese students dates back to 2011 when the first comprehensive course in the Latvian language as an elective course was launched in Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) in the People's Republic of China. Since then another university – Beijing International Studies University (BISU) – introduced the study programme on the Latvian language and culture in 2015.

- According to data provided by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (n.d.: <http://www.moe.gov.cn>), in September 2015 BISU launched the experimental programme “Beijing Municipal Commission on 7-Year Education Programme of Beijing International Studies University. The Latvian Language and Culture Programme”.

- Twenty high school students representing different districts of Beijing were selected to enrol in the programme and relocate to BISU campus. The curriculum of the “7-Year Education Programme” presupposed the study of the Latvian language and the subject titled “National Conditions of Latvia” for 2 years in BISU alongside with general high school subjects in accordance with the National Education Standard for PRC.

- Alongside the intensive Latvian language courses, during the study years in Beijing, the students of the 7-year programme are expected to complete the courses in accordance with the following curriculum: Chinese Language and Culture, Maths and Logical Thinking, Personal Development, Fundamental English, Oral English, Ideology and Politics, Chinese History, Chinese Geography, Physical Education and Health Education, Artistic Performance, Social Activities/ Extracurricular Activities/ Professional Internship (BISU, 2019a).

Curriculum

- Upon the completion of the first stage, one year of the Latvian language study programme (120 ECTS) comprising such subjects as: History of Latvian Culture, History of Technical Sciences, Functional Communication, Latvian as a Research Language, Introduction into Academic Studies and Research Work, Academic Writing, Basic Grammar Course, Studies of the State Language, English Language, Functional Stylistics of the Latvian Language, Intensive Latvian Language Course, Latvian for Part-time Students, Latvian for Foreign Students, Latvian Language Communication Culture, Latvian Lexicology, Analytical Reading in Latvian, Introduction to Linguistics, Communication Theory and Practice in Latvian, etc. had to be completed in Latvia (RTU, n.d.).

- Upon the completion of the study year in Latvia, the students had to go back to China to gain the graduation certificate of vocational education equal to high school diploma (Beijing Education Committee, 2018) and return to Latvia for 3 years to obtain a bachelor degree related to one of the study fields within the Latvian language studies (e.g. Technical Translation Programme) (RTU, 2013)



Narratology

- Although the educational migration from China may still be driven by state programmes as in the afore-mentioned case, the career strategies of individual Chinese students and their families are coming to the fore (Thøgersen, 2016).

Narrative and Identity (Applied Narratology)

- Conceptualization
- The way humans conceive of themselves as opposed to something or someone else as manifested and discussed in the stories we tell.

- Philosophers, social scientists and literature and culture scholars have argued that narrative plays a central role in our sense of self and identity. Their theories, and the 'applications' of these theories in professional and therapeutic fields, inevitably express normative notions of self and narrative.

The power of stories. Storytelling as a tool in organization and management

- how narratives enable organizations to learn from experience

Methodology

- Two types of narratives provided by BISU students in the year 2018 were processed, analysed and interpreted in accordance with the codes: *power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long- or short-term orientation and indulgence vs. restrain*, derived based on the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede et al., 2010).

- In accordance with the aim of the research, in total 26 students provided 52 narratives on their personal opinions on their studies and well-being, as well as on their evaluation of the teaching/ learning process stating all the aspects helping them to learn the new foreign language and all the obstacles hindering the learning process.

Power Distance (China– 80, Latvia – 44)

- The *Power Distance* scores for China (80) provide the information on the dependence relationships (Hofstede et al., 2010: 57) in the country revealing the obvious dependence of students on educators, which is confirmed in the narratives provided by the respondents (e.g., “*we don’t dare to question teachers in classes*”).

PD: Implications

- Given that Latvia scores 44 for this dimension, the clear tendency towards the more limited dependence of students on educators may lead to the challenges for educators to meet the needs of this particular target audience.

PD: Implications

- Moreover, Latvian educators may consciously or subconsciously be ready to deal with students questioning and challenging their educators, while not being able to respond to “the need for dependence well established in the student’s mind” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 69).

PD: Implications

- Given that the education process in the high-power distance countries is generally teacher-centered and students are used to following strict orders (ibid.), it may not be easy for them to adjust to the Latvian education settings predetermining the necessity to be more active and autonomous.

Individualism vs Collectivism

- China and Latvia can be found on the opposite poles in the *Individualism vs. Collectivism* dimension scoring 20 and 70 respectively (Hofstede et al., 2010), which leads to the necessity for Latvian educators to review their teaching strategies and practices taking into account that students from collectivist countries may view themselves as part of the group, which affects their behaviour and activities in the classroom

IC: Implications

- It is also crucial to highlight that within the individualist culture classrooms, “speaking one’s mind is a virtue” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 107), while for collectivist cultures sharing feelings and emotions is challenging

IC: Implications

- Given that in the individualist societies, such as Latvia, the purpose of receiving education is more focused on “learning to cope with new, unknown, unforeseen situations” and finding one’s place in the society (Hofstede et al., 2010: 118), the goals students coming from collectivist countries put forward for themselves within the education process may be completely opposite.

IC: Implications

- The data obtained from the respondents confirms that the role of diplomas for the members of collectivist societies differs from that of individualist one revealing that for Chinese students it is “a ticket to a ride” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 119) rather than the need for self-respect rooted in the ability to master a subject and gaining the sense of achievement (ibid.)

Masculinity vs. Femininity

- As concerns the dimension *Masculinity vs. Femininity*, Latvia with the score 9 and China scoring 66 also have significant differences which have to be managed within the multilingual and multicultural classroom. Students from more masculine countries such as China may be willing to take exams again and again until they receive the acceptable or the highest grade possible (Hofstede et al., 2010: 161), while Latvian students may not always strive for excellence

Masculinity vs. Femininity

- Even though the collectivist norms put limit on open competition with each other (ibid.), failing is viewed as a very serious incident (e.g., “*my future*”, “GPA [grade point average] *is really important for me*”).

Masculinity vs. Femininity

- It is also crucial to highlight that within the feminine societies such as Latvia, these are the educators' **social and communication skills and the ability to build friendly classroom atmosphere** – which are of primary importance, while in the masculine cultures – this is the **correlation between educators' excellence and students' academic performance** given that the masculine society is highly success-driven.

Uncertainty Avoidance

- The scores for the dimension *Uncertainty Avoidance* reveal that Latvia scoring 63 and China with the scores 30 may have certain differences in the students' learning habits and different expectations as regards the learning process organization.

Uncertainty Avoidance

- Within this dimension, the stronger uncertainty avoidance cultures such as China generally give preference to structured learning situations and less space given to creativity and freedom, which has already been highlighted in the analysis of the data for the *Power Distance* dimension.

Uncertainty Avoidance

- The Chinese students in the Latvian classroom may expect the educators to have all the answers and to be the leaders within the education process, while the Latvian educators may be implementing their professional practices based on their strive to develop the autonomy and creativity of their students

Long-Term vs. Short-Term and Indulgence vs. Restrain

- Within the dimensions *Long-Term vs. Short-Term* and *Indulgence vs. Restrain*, Latvia (scores 69 and 13 respectively) and China (scores 87 and 24 respectively) (Hofstede et al., 2010) appear to be on the same pole, which points to similar tendency towards the focus on persistence, perseverance and long-term success, which has direct correlation with less attention and time given to leisure and effort invested in hard work to achieve long-term goals

Conclusions

- different value patterns and cultural peculiarities lead to challenges rooted in differences in values related to power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long- or short-term orientation and indulgence vs. restrain.

- These differences have significant impact on the classroom interaction between the educator and the students of diverse cultural backgrounds as well as among students themselves.

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