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TEACHERS AND STUDENTS
IN MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Introduction

Statistics regarding international students are provided by EUROSTAT, UNESCO, European Union Statistical Office and some national databases. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has 36 countries as members, and it publishes statistical reports covering 10 areas, including education. Also, some countries present yearly updated information about both inbound and outbound flows.

There is a clear separation among international mobile students (usually referring to tertiary or higher education), foreign students and credit-mobile students (like students of ERASMUS mobility programme).

- *An internationally mobile student is an individual who has physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective of participating in educational activities in a destination country, where the destination country is different from his or her country of origin* (UNESCO, 2015). The length of their stay is more than one year (sometimes up to 6-7 for those studying medicine), as in the case of credit-mobile students.
- *Foreign students – refers to non-citizens who are currently enrolled in higher education degree courses. This definition does not distinguish between students holding non-resident visas and those with permanent resident status. The former usually arrive and stay independently, while the latter usually migrate because their parents moved, making them 1.5-generation immigrants (Migration Data Portal, 2020).*
- *Credit-mobile students – refers to "study-abroad" or exchange students, such as those in the EU's Erasmus programme. These students remain enrolled in their home countries while receiving a small number of credits from foreign institutions* (Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016).

Data provided by UNESCO in 2019 showed that the number of international students had increased significantly in the last 2 decades; in 2000 there were about 2 million and in 2017 over 5 million IS. The most attractive countries were the USA, UK, Australia, France, Germany and the Russian Federation.

Statistical data also provided by UNESCO and OECD mentioned that Asian students represented, in 2011, almost 53% of the foreign students enrolled in tertiary education worldwide, followed by Europeans (23%), Africans (12%) and the rest of the world (about 12%) (OECD, 2013).

Factors that influence students' choices of the host-country

The most important reasons for international students to choose a specific institution where to study seem to come from the advice of the teacher/counsellor, attractiveness of the ethnic/cultural diversity of the campus, family's decision, the offer of financial assistance other than a job, low tuition, interest in the special educational program of the college, the college's good reputation, not being accepted by the first-choice college and the offer of work/assistantship at institution (Lee, 2008).

According to OECD statistical data provided in 2013, international students primarily choose English-speaking countries, more than 1/3 of them being interested in the fields of social sciences, business and law. Countries like the USA, Australia and the UK, together host a constant proportion of 36% of all foreign tertiary students enrolled worldwide (in 2000 the proportion was about 39%).

In the case of credit-mobile students, reasons were found to be different: studies show that ERASMUS students are motivated by life-experiential reasons and physical environment instead of academic goals. Most of the mobilities are towards Mediterranean countries because of their comfortable climate and hospitable host-cities (Rodríguez González, *et al.*, 2011; Cubillo *et al.*, 2006).

In general, *the status of higher education institutions might be most important for Northern European students, as these students are overrepresented in cities hosting a world-class institution for higher education. In addition, students from Southern Europe seem to mainly move within their own region, as well as towards Eastern Europe. This pattern might be related to similarities among localities in terms of costs of living, culture and/or climate* (Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016).

More and more universities across the world must face the challenges of helping international students adjust to the demands of their new environment. Although international students represent an important gain for the host country (Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Wang, 2006), universities must take into account the fact that the adaptation process is very demanding.

The process of acculturation and acculturative stress among students

In 1960, Oberg described migration as producing a *cultural shock,* which felt like a disease or condition, with both physical and psychological symptoms, such as fear of physical contact, anger or excessive hand washing. Over the

years, migration was described by focusing on its positive aspects. For example, Geeraert & Demoulin (2013) found that international students' distress decreased after entering their new host-country.

Some other studies show that, in a small proportion, international students see the new experience of studying abroad as an "opportunity for personal growth" (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009) or "learning and expanding cultural awareness" (Montuori & Fahim, 2004).

The term "cultural shock" was replaced by "acculturative stress" which refers to *the impact of culture change on the individual* (Berry, 1997) and implies a process characterized by phases of stress and adjustment (Berry, 2006m).

According to Spradley and Phillips (1972), the acculturation experience should be a series of life changing events where psychological factors, coping strategies or personality traits influence a lot of the dynamics of acculturative stress.

Apart from these factors, some others were correlated with the level of acculturative stress (Demes & Geeraert, 2015):
- former experience with the host culture,
- antecedents of cultural adjustments,
- intercultural adjustments (Matsumoto *et al.,* 2001),
- empathy (Håkansson & Montgomery 2003),
- social support (Cemalcilar *et al.,* 2005),
- locus of control (Ward & Kennedy 1992),
- agreeableness, extraversion and conscientiousness (three of the five big personality traits identified in Big Five Model of Costa & McCrae (1992),
- the honesty-humility factor from HEXACO's personality model (Ashton & Lee, 2001).

The scientific literature mentions some efficient coping strategies used by international students in order to cope with acculturative stress: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping developed by Lazarus & Folkman (1984), turning to religion, using humor, self-blaming and seeking social support (Carver *et al.*, 1989; Ward & Kennedy, 2001).

Berry (2005b) defines acculturation as *the dual process of cultural and psychological changes that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members* (p. 699). It can be a lengthy process (taking years, generations or even centuries). There are numerous factors that can trigger acculturative stress. These include loss of social support (Wodarski, 1992), contact with the culture of origin and the modes of acculturation (Dona and Berry, 1994) as well as discrimination (Lueck and Wilson, 2010).

According to Smart and Smart (1995), immigrants may experience acculturative stress in stages: (a) relief and hope in the beginning, followed by (b) questioning the decision to leave the country of origin due to the many stressors faced by the individual and, in the end, (c) adjustment to losses and remaking one's life if acculturative stress is surpassed.

On a global scale, there has been an increasing interest in accommodating students from different cultural backgrounds. International studies are beneficial for both the host country (financial, social, cultural) and country of origin (specialized training, international networking).

The pursuit of an academic degree in another country represents an exciting and challenging experience for international students. Their study and overall experience can be influenced by several adjustment issues, such as *culture shock, discrimination, financial problems, social isolation, English language skills, academic difficulties, unmet expectations, employment and psychological distress* (Khawaja and Stallman, 2011; Sherry *et al.,* 2010; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2010; Hotta and Ting-Toomey, 2013; Ramos *et al.,* 2016). These issues can cause *feelings of uneasiness, insecurity and loss* (Yakunina *et al.,* 2013) and can lead to *mental and physical health problems* (Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004; Menon and Harter, 2012; Ryan & Twibell, 2000).

To cope with acculturative stress, international students are often advised to resort to personal and multicultural strengths. Yakunina *et al.* (2013) found some evidence in this sense. Tavakoli *et al.* (2009) also explored some ways to help students cope with acculturative stress.

Language – The language barrier represents one of the major challenges faced by international students (Brown, 2008; Taušová *et al.,* 2019), and language proficiency can impact academic achievement (Xu, 1991; Trenkic and Warmington, 2019). Lee (1997), in an earlier work, identified five major areas international students found problematic: *listening ability, cultural background differences, oral communication skills, vocabulary and writing.* Furthermore, Zhang and Mi (2009) found that, although listening and speaking represent difficult areas, these *are overcome in a 2-year period.* Also, reading does not seem to be problematic, but writing seems to be, even after a 2-year period.

Sociocultural stressors – Not only do international students leave family, friends and cultural norms behind, but they also need to create new social networks when arriving to their new location; they may experience feelings of loneliness (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). International students can build friendships with people from their own country, other countries as well as the host country. (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011).

According to Glass *et al.* (2014), students from non-European countries have more friends among co-national peers and fewer friendships with host national peers. Also, they are less adapted and attached to university than students from European countries. In addition, international students report being unhappy with the opportunities to make friendships. They want to have more local friends (Zhang and Brunton, 2007) and they struggle with loneliness and/or isolation (Sawir *et al.,* 2008).

Discrimination – Research also points out that discrimination is another important stressor when it comes to international students. They experience

more discrimination than domestic students (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2010) and display feelings of anger, frustration and helplessness (Xie *et al.,* 2019). Moreover, the educational experience is strongly (and negatively) influenced by perceived discrimination (Karuppan & Barari, 2011). Furthermore, migrant students experience more discrimination off campus than on campus (Hanassab, 2006). Perceiving discrimination is associated with lower permeability, which in turn leads to avoiding the new society and, at the same time, endorsing one's own cultural background (Ramos *et al.,* 2016).

Practical stressors − International students can also experience a series of issues related to finances, accommodation (Poyrazli & Grahame), 2007 transportation, religion and weather (Gautam *et al.,* 2016; Muraru *et al.,* 2020).

ROMANIA

In a study on first-year IS enrolled in a medical university in Romania, Iorga *et al.* (2017) showed that almost a quarter of them felt discriminated in their first few months as students: 4.7% by neighbours, 4.7% by teachers, 6.3% by people in city transportation, 6.3% by colleagues and 10.2% by the citizens. Also, male students, compared to female students, were more satisfied with their relationships with their colleagues. Among the main reasons to choose to study in Romania, the students mentioned the university's prestige, their trust in the academic offer and personal advantages. More recently, Muraru *et al.* (2020) revealed that international students face problems, such as understanding and learning the Romanian language, adjusting to the university schedule, weather, food, academic or local transportation. Other factors that influenced students' adaptability were related to distance from home, corruption, politics, discrimination, homesickness, lack of local attractions and the presence of insects. (Muraru *et al.,* 2020)

Teaching multicultural students in academia

The permanent increasing number of international students and the diversity of their cultures has become a challenge for teachers and tutors. Most of the university teachers face unfamiliar student characteristics and needs. Consequently, permanent demands force them to re-adjust permanently to the multicultural groups they teach. So "current teaching practice needs to start with the way in which teachers see their students as learners." (Ryan & Carroll 2007).

Higher education institutions with international students need to tailor their educational activities according to the specificity of the processes of adaptation to the training conditions, future professional activities, communication and interaction in the educational environment and in society (Dzhamalova *et al.,* 2016). However, although research has focused on good practice, there is no

consensus on what constitutes good practice within this specific context (Arenas, 2009).

In universities, where the number of international students has increased during the last two decades, the reactions of teachers has varied. Some of them saw this as an opportunity to enrich learning environments and to benefit when it comes to multiculturalism and diversity. Some others were overwhelmed by duties and efforts to adjust to the new learner's needs and were forced, not only to produce new materials for international students, but to also internationalize the curriculum for students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Ryan, 2010).

Ryan & Hellmundt (2007) explained how teachers create the contexts and provide relevant information for international students. In the authors' opinion, because "learning is individually constructed, socially supported and culturally mediated, learners in unfamiliar social and cultural environments may experience a number of difficulties in activating their existing schemas." The result could be cognitive dissonance or psychological confusion. This cognitive dissonance explains why students with good results and academic success also experience academic shock. In fact, there is not an academic distance between students and teachers, but a cultural gap. Ryan & Hellmundt (2007) appreciated that the results can be feelings of exclusion and alienation, a decreased level of self-esteem and difficulties in the learning process. Instead of focusing on cultural and academic differences, both students and teachers should use this opportunity to create an intercultural dialogue and create new situations, new contexts and build new bridges.

Teachers and students alike can experience frustration and report various problems if there is a failure to recognize and address the difficulties faced by international students.

Accordingly, university teachers should consider several suggestions in order to address various issues when working with international students (Lee, 1997; UTDC Guidelines, 2004; Ryan, 2005; Arkoudis, 2006; Arkoudis *et al.,* 2010; Shaheen, 2016):

Cultural diversity

- express an interest in cultural diversity, discover what students expect and be respectful of cultural differences that might influence students' learning behaviour,
- respectfully accept the distance set by students, given the fact that some of them might not be comfortable with familiarity,
- acknowledge the fact that learning habits and styles have cultural roots,
- provide an explanation of the appropriate learning styles for success in your field of teaching,

- clarify the role as a lecturer and your expectation of them,
- discuss with the students their perceptions concerning appropriate learning,
- provide recommendations for library research, such as magazines or books,
- acknowledge the fact that culture shock affects students,
- clarify the different connotations of words as international students might perceive them in a different way,
- spend time with the students,
- clarify what constitutes good writing.

Preparation

- allow students to prepare for lectures/tutorials by providing them with reading/case study material in advance,
- direct the students towards the preparation of some responses for the next lecture/practical session so that they can have the chance to prepare their answers in advance,
- make assignments clear and unambiguous,
- carefully explain the first assignment – allow time for students to question and discuss issues,
- build assignments up to increasing complexity,
- use "ice-breakers" as a way of helping students connect and making friendships,
- give clear examples for writing and referencing.

Participation in small groups

- try to memorize students' names and encourage them to speak,
- engage students in discussion in small working groups. By using cooperative learning techniques, they can preserve their dignity by sharing the responsibility for the answers they provide),
- give students time to provide an answer before moving on to someone else; international students might need a little bit more time to understand the question, formulate their answer and then report it in the new language,
- make use of quizzes and pair work: they are efficient strategies for small group teaching as they encourage interaction among students,
- participation in the discussion is important, and university teachers should explain why; this could be achieved by using incentives or by assessing participation based on clear and specific criteria,

- increase the interaction between domestic and international students by designing tasks in this sense,
- make the rules for participation noticeably clear from the beginning,
- structure the ways students ask questions and participate in group discussions,
- clarify turn taking rules for participating in a discussion as these might be different in other languages,
- the composition of small groups should be changed regularly after three/four weeks,
- encourage students to speak English to each other and to think in English as much as possible,
- help students by encouraging them to form groups they want naturally to be in,
- take advantage of international students' experience instead of a local to help them become more confident and for domestic students to enrich their learning,
- stay clear of language/expressions that international students might find hard to understand
- pronounce words clearly, without haste, facing the students,
- in case you cannot understand their English, ask the students to repeat their answers, but with tact, patience, honesty and civility,
- create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable asking questions.

Participation in large classes

- make use of handouts, blackboards, PowerPoint presentations and colored pens to highlight main points, key terms; clarify ideas and assignments,
- encourage international students to listen to news programs on television or the radio/Internet,
- provide a recap for previous lectures and a preview for the next,
- explain the meaning and usage of technical words,
- speak clearly and slowly, facing the students,
- note-taking should be interactive,
- take into consideration allowing students (or yourself) to tape the first few lectures or the most important ones; however, there should be a cut-off date after which this will not be permitted anymore (for the protection of intellectual property and to force students to move forward with more confidence in their own skills,
- promote the sharing of opinions by asking open-ended questions with no right or wrong answers,

- in order to get one's maximum attention span, allow for breaks every 15 to 20 minutes.

Assessment

- use an assessment briefing to offer all possible information about any assessments and allow the students to ask questions,
- the assessment guidelines should be made available in written form and should contain all information, examples and criteria (including the grading system),
- the purpose and content of an assessment should be detailed,
- assist students to prepare for the next assessment by providing thorough, timely and encouraging feedback and advice for progress,
- a portfolio system could be used for assessment and should include different types of assessments,
- fairness should be the cornerstone of the evaluation, and the assessment should focus on the stated learning outcomes (not English language ability – especially at first),
- cross-cultural communication should be central to any assignments,
- assessment tasks should be written using clear unambiguous language,
- provide very clear guidelines when it comes to assessing participation and group work,
- the criteria for assessing oral presentations should clear and known to all students,
- model the type of responses required by running cases and sample questions like the exam.

Plagiarism

- explain the meaning of plagiarism and give clear examples,
- organize a special workshop on writing research essays, referencing and plagiarism,
- teach students to paraphrase and reference,
- students must be made aware of the fact that notes/textbook regurgitation are not accepted, and misconceptions should be carefully discussed,
- organize class/workshops/tutorials with the purpose of modelling, practicing and repeating the type of desired answer.

Reference/reading list

- use references/readings selectively,
- annotate bibliographies,

- highlight key texts,
- identify important chapters or excerpts,
- use electronic mediums for materials, units or modules,
- the reading lists should be provided early,
- supply a glossary of key terms and concepts,
- review texts/websites for accessibility,
- verify the relevance of the language used and check its appropriateness.

Critical thinking

Critical thinking tasks are approached differently by students from culturally and linguistically diverse traditions, and this can affect their academic performance in a negative way. Teachers can help international students to achieve critical thinking skills.

- create an encouraging environment where students can develop their critical thinking by using active learning techniques (for example, the one-minute paper) and by welcoming critical questioning,
- critical thinking skills for different disciplines might slightly differ. Provide explanations and demonstrations of what those are in your disciplinary area,
- incorporate critical reflection on the learning process itself by using questions, such as triggers, reflective written tasks and self- and peer-assessments,
- offer them a list of academic papers and critical thinking books,
- gain awareness into their cultural background in order to understand their existing mental models,
- offer feed-back on their statements: what is wrong and why,
- encourage discussions in pairs,
- clarify assessment criteria,
- encourage students to make a link between theory and practice in their own country,
- group discussions can help students' critical thinking skills Arenas (2009) showed that teachers tend to lean towards a knowledge transmission, teacher-focused approach to teaching and argues that an awareness of this fact can be the starting point for implementation of staff development programs aimed at a student-focused approach.

Tips:
- inform yourself about students' national sports and idols,
- inform yourself about impolite subjects from student's culture,
- ask information about their backgrounds,
- avoid over-simplification and over-stereotyping,

- do not apply the same filter for all students; they might have the same nationality (their level of education, experiences, geographical and social area, family-related aspects), but they are quite different.

Necessary competences for university teachers working with international students

One-to-one academic interactions

According to Skyrme (2010), one-to-one academic interaction with teachers can serve students by clarifying two aspects: content and process. Furthermore, face-to-face interactions are a good way of gaining personal recognition, and this recognition of the student as a person with potential, in turn, can enable him/her to fulfil their potential. These interactions can take place:

(a) immediately after the end of lectures,

(b) in seminar classes in a moment of semi-privacy generated by the fact that other students' attention is diverted by group discussions and

(c) in teachers' offices by making an appointment. The last option can offer a sense of protection from public gaze and can help students take risks that they otherwise would not in the presence of other students.

McGrath (2014) examined the role of office hour attendance in combination with a learning reflection in helping students learn material. The results of the study show that this combination can be a useful way to increase students' satisfaction with work and to improve students' understanding of data.

Teacher self-efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy refers to the "teachers' beliefs in their own abilities to plan, organize and carry out activities required to attain given educational goals" (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007, p. 612). In addition, it positively influences students' academic adjustment and teachers' psychological well-being, job satisfaction and commitment (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017; Zee and Koomen, 2016). Different studies showed that, in universities, teachers who report positive beliefs and attitudes toward multicultural student groups also report high efficacy (Sela-Shayovitz and Finkelstein, 2019). However, research in this area is scarce and further analysis is needed in order to fully understand the role of teacher self-efficacy in teaching international students.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Cultural responsiveness in teaching refers to creating equal opportunity for students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010). However, although culturally responsive teaching is not a new idea in higher education, university teachers do not focus very much on this area, (Ginsburg and Wlodkowski, 2009).

Jabbar and Hardaker (2013) proposed an adapted theoretical framework for culturally responsive teaching with five-pillars for a Business School. This could represent a first step of an educational approach:

- *Cultural consciousness*. The background and cultural characteristics of the students are very important. There are a few key aspects as part of this pillar: validation, care and the need to develop empathy.
- *Resources*. In order to help students, the quality of the resources is important.
- *Moral Responsibility*. This pillar takes into consideration the role of the teacher: to protect the interests of the student and those of the institution, to create a culturally responsive partnership between the teacher and the learner,
- *Cultural Bridging*. Academic staff need to connect the students' pre-existing knowledge and the new material and to put each individual at the centre of the learning process.
- *HE Curriculum*. This pillar takes into consideration the pivotal role of the university/college in the success of the student, in general. Furthermore, it needs to develop a flexible and dynamic approach.

Cultural branching

Jabbar and Mirza (2019) define cultural branching as "helping ethnically diverse students to build bridges between their pre-existing knowledge and what they are expected to learn" (p. 570).

The authors identified three themes utilized in cultural branching:

(a) culture as a vehicle for learning,

(b) adjusting to culture,

(c) student skills.

This approach underlines the necessity of higher education institutions to challenge and even change the way they develop pedagogical approach, implement guidlines by policies and procedures, and how they support students (Jabbar and Mirza, 2019).

Intercultural competence

In the context of internationalization, the intercultural competence (ICC) of university teachers represents an important acquisition designed to provide effective educational processes. Zelenková & Hanesová (2019) describe efficient training aimed at increasing the ICC in teachers at a Slovak university. The training was aimed at improving three aspects: general communicative competences in English, pedagogical-didactic competence and the intercultural competence of teachers.

Offering support

International students need to know that their contributions are valued, and lecturers have to create opportunities for them to participate and succeed. In order to achieve this, Ryan (2005) provides a few suggestions: offer opportunities for the students to show their abilities, allow negotiations of discussions and assessments, incorporate (if possible) inclusive ways in achieving learning objectives, organize and facilitate multicultural group work and discussion.

Arkoudis *et al.* (2010) also stress the importance of creating environments for interacting and offer several ways of reaching this goal: devote time to introductions in the first class, use "ice-breakers" in the first session, review the previous lecture/tutorial in small groups or in pairs, assign seating or invite students to sit with an unknown student, structure the activities, intensify interaction between local and international students, organize a short workshop on peer learning and provide group-work resources for students.

Sawir *et al.* (2008) provide various ideas for universities to help international students, stressing the importance of assisting them in learning English and informing them, as early as possible, about the services already available to them. Other important aspects for international students are friendly classrooms, competent administration, and student services.

Conclusions

International students can receive assistance from universities, not only through innovative teaching and academic assistance, but also through their involvement in non-academic issues. (Shams, 2017) Moreover, universities might need to rethink curriculum content, teaching styles and take into consideration each culture's contribution to the learning process and knowledge. (Valiente, 2008) Also, student success is not only measured by quantitative data (such as grades). Qualitative data obtained from surveys, interviews and focus groups should also be taken into consideration in order to have a full understanding of what helps students achieve success. In order to make universities welcoming places for international students, faculty personnel must be aware of student needs and address them properly. The transition from their home country to the new country represents a challenge for international students. Institutions do not need new programs and budgets to deal with this issue; they can offer support services within current support centers by additionally training the personnel and redesigning existing programs (Andrade, 2006). Finally, there is a need to further investigate the efficiency of different programs aimed at helping international students, given the fact that the available literature is mostly descriptive, and refinements might be needed.

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UNIVERSITY TEACHERS WORKING
WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS. A COMPARATIVE STUDY

MAGDALENA IORGA, CINTIA COLIBABA

Introduction

Intercultural competence is the ability to communicative effectively and appropriately with students who are linguistically and culturally different from ourselves. It is an important skill for teachers who want to support the diversity of students in their classes. (Myles, 2019)

The increasing number of international students enrolled in the tertiary level of education and the mobility of teachers have determined an extraordinary need for developing the intercultural competence, for both teachers and students.

According to Myles (2019), intercultural competence is *a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself, respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people, establish positive and constructive relationships with such people, understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural "differences".*

Linguistic and cultural differences between teachers and students can determine many challenges. In general, when it is about the student-teacher relationship in the academic environment we take into consideration many challenges: personality types, working styles and communication skills. Also, the cultural differences can also be seen in the manner in which both actors deal with the hierarchy, stereotypes, academic expectations, timelines and feedback. Some students have different ways in which they perceive criticism or receive feedback regarding their work. Also, deadlines or being on time at the main lectures is also related to culture (Brown, 2007; Dimitrov *et al.*, 2014; Shi-Xu, 2001; Winchester-Seeto *et al.*, 2014).

Dandruff (2006) defines intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" and Garrett-Rucks (2016) as "the ability to step beyond one's own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds". Some studies proved that international students had to deal with challenges when it

came to integrating into the academic institutions – the most common being the language barriers and their own lack of understanding of the host culture. (Guo & Chase, 2011; Guo & Guo, 2017) On the other hand, some other university research proved a lack of intercultural understanding and cross-cultural communication competence (Winchester-Seeto *et al.*, 2014; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

The mobility of students and teachers is also important for academic institutions. They want to attract more intelligent, willing and determined students and to have experienced and well-known teachers. That is why having students and teachers that prove intercultural competencies is important in order to have good academic results and assure a competitive environment.

Research

This scientific research was developed among Romanian university teachers working with international students. The goal of the study is to identify their perception about their own preparedness in working with multicultural and multilingual groups, what the main challenges are and how they deal with them. Some items also questioned the teacher's academic relationship with international students and what types of difficulties they consider students have to face.

An online tool was constructed especially for this research. The questionnaire has different pats: the first one gathered socio-demographic and medical data, the second one gathered information about profession and training, the third part contained items that focused on the opinion of teachers regarding working with international students and the main important challenges. Also, a psychological tool was administrated. The results are presented in the next subsections.

Socio-demographic data

The sample was composed of 63 respondents. From these, 50 (79.4%) were women and 13 (20.6%) were men. The mean age among the sample was 43.03 years (± 9.12, min. = 28, max. = 65).

More than ¾ of the (N = 50, 79.4%) respondents were involved in a romantic relationship, while 13 (20.6%) were single. 61 (96.8%) of the respondents lived in an urban area and 2 lived in a rural area (3.2%). All the respondents were of Romanian nationality.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic data*

Variable	Levels	N	%
Gender	Female	50	79.4
	Male	13	20.6
Relationship status	Single	13	20.6
	In a relationship	50	79.4
Environment	Rural	1	1.6
	Urban	62	98.4
Work country	Romania	63	100
Nationality	Romanian	63	100

Professional data

The respondents indicated they have a mean teaching experience at the university level of 14.52 years (± 8.81, min. = 1, max. = 30), and that their mean experience in teaching to international students was 9.31 years (± 6.70, min. = 1, max. = 27).

Regarding the professional data, most of the participants reported that they teach a medical discipline (N = 41, 65.1%), in contrast with a non-medical discipline (N = 22, 34.9%). Almost a half of the participants reported that they teach in English only (N = 31, 49.2%), the rest teaching in French only (N = 9, 14.3%), in both English and French (N = 12, 19%) and only in their native language (Romanian) (N = 11, 17.5%)

Subsequently, the participants were asked how comfortable they feel with the act of teaching in either English or French. For English teaching, only 1 (1.6%) of the participants reported that they do not feel comfortable teaching. The other participants said they feel somewhat comfortable (N = 9, 14.3%), comfortable (N = 28, 44.4%), *very comfortable* (N = 16, 25.4%) or extremely comfortable (N = 9, 14.3%)

Regarding French teaching, however, the respondents felt less comfortable. 26 of them (41.3%) responded that they did not feel comfortable, 13 (20.6%) said that they were somewhat comfortable, 15 (23.8%) were comfortable, 5 (7.9%) were *very comfortable* and 4 (6.3%) were extremely comfortable.

Finally, the participants were asked whether they attended a training program aimed at teaching international students. 22 of the participants (39.4%) said they did. 41 of the participants (65.1%) said they did not take part in such training.

Table 2. *Professional data*

Variable	Levels	N	%
I teach	Medical discipline	41	65.1
	Non-medical discipline	22	34.9
I teach in	English	31	49.2
	French	9	14.3
	English and French	12	29
	National language	11	17.5
University	University of Oradea	8	12.7
	Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi	44	69.8
	Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca	11	17.5
I attended a training program in teaching international students	No	41	65.1
	Yes	22	39.4
Teaching experience (M±SD)	14.52 (±8.81)	min 1, max 30	
Experience in teaching international students (M±SD)	9.31 (±6.70)	min 1, max 27	

Relationship with international students

The first instrument assessed the teachers' relationship with the international students. This instrument contains 13 items, with a dichotomous response scale, where the answer "Yes" was noted with 1, and the answer "No" was rated with "0". Table 3 presents these instrument's questions and the frequency of the participants' answers.

We observed that 96.8% of the teachers expressed an interest in cultural diversity, 87.3% tried to memorize their student's names, and many established professional relations with some of their students (73%) and encouraged one-on-one meetings with them (79.4%). Moreover, most teachers believed that international students confided in them about academic difficulties (85.7%) and that they offered support to international students (66.7%).

Most teachers did not report negative interactions with international students. 73% did not observe cultural/religious or ethnic conflict between the students and only 25.4% of them felt that international students did not respect them.

Generally, they believe that international students have a good attitude (73%), and most report they had no conflict with their students (87.5%). 17.5% of the teachers reported that they were verbally assaulted by the international students and only 1.6% of them (one teacher) reported that he/she was physically assaulted.

To compute other descriptive statistics for the scale and further analyses, we needed to recode the items describing negative behaviors (items 7-13). Thus,

all the included items were similarly coded with a higher answer value indicating a good relationship with the students, and a low answer value indicating a bad relationship with the students.

For the entire scale, the possible range is 13, with a theoretical minimum of 0 (indicating a bad relationship with the students) and a theoretical maximum of 13 (indicating a *very good relationship* with the students). For this sample, the mean was 10.39, and the standard deviation was 2.37. The minimum was 4 and the maximum was 13.

Table 3. Relationship with international students

Variable	Levels	N	%
1. I express an interest in cultural diversity.	Yes	61	96.80%
	No	2	3.20%
2. I try to memorize my international students' names.	Yes	55	87.30%
	No	8	12.70%
3. I have established close professional relations with some of my international students.	Yes	46	73%
	No	17	27%
4. I encourage one-on-one meetings with my international students to clarify teaching content.	Yes	50	79.4%
	No	13	20.6%
5. International students confide to me about their difficulties in academic and cultural adaptation.	Yes	54	85.7%
	No	9	14.3%
6. I provide support to international students outside the academic program to facilitate their academic and cultural adaptation.	Yes	42	66.7%
	No	21	33.3%
7. I have noticed cultural/religious/ethnic conflicts among international students in class.	Yes	17	27%
	No	46	73%
8. Sometimes I feel that international students do not respect me.	Yes	16	25.4%
	No	47	74.6%
9. Sometimes the attitude of international students towards me seems offensive.	Yes	17	27%
	No	46	73%
10. I feel uncomfortable when international students speak their mother tongue in class.	Yes	23	36.5%
	No	40	63.5%
11. I have had conflicts with some international students.	Yes	9	14.3%
	No	54	87.5%
12. I have been verbally assaulted/threatened by at least one international student.	Yes	11	17.5%
	No	52	82.5%
13. I have been physically assaulted by at least one international student.	Yes	1	1.6%
	No	62	98.4%

Teaching activity

This scale contains 33 items, rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). It measures the effectiveness of different teaching activities with international students.

Table 4 presents these instrument's questions, the frequency of the participants' answers, the mean and standard deviation for each answer.

Table 4. *Teaching activity*

Variable	Level	N	%
1. I believe that practical activities are more effective than theoretical ones when working with international students.	M	4.19	
	SD	0.77	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	3	4.8%
	Undecided	5	7.9%
	Agree	32	50.8%
	Strongly agree	23	36.5%
2. Activities carried out in small groups of international students are more efficient.	M	4.44	
	SD	0.75	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
	Disagree	1	1.6%
	Undecided	1	1.6%
	Agree	26	41.3%
	Strongly agree	34	54%
3. The regular use of audio-video tools is more efficient when working with international students than with national students.	M	3.25	
	SD	1.06	
	Strongly disagree	2	3.2%
	Disagree	14	22.2%
	Undecided	22	34.9%
	Agree	16	25.4%
	Strongly agree	9	14.3%
4. Teaching international students seems more difficult than teaching national students.	M	3.36	
	SD	1.19	
	Strongly disagree	5	7.9%
	Disagree	13	20.6%
	Undecided	8	12.7%
	Agree	28	44.4%
	Strongly agree	9	14.3%
5. The fact that international students are not fluent in the language of instruction makes the educational process difficult.	M	3.74	
	SD	0.91	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	9	14.3%
	Undecided	9	14.3%
	Agree	34	54%
	Strongly agree	11	17.5%

Variable	Level	N	%
6. In my work, I have noticed that international students with a larger social network (friends, relatives in our country) get better learning results.	M	3.74	
	SD	0.84	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
	Disagree	3	4.8%
	Undecided	17	27%
	Agree	32	50.8%
	Strongly agree	10	15.9%
7. In my work, I have noticed that international students with previous migrant experience adapt more easily to the requirements of the host country.	M	3.61	
	SD	0.83	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
	Disagree	5	7.9%
	Undecided	17	27%
	Agree	34	54%
	Strongly agree	6	9.5%
8. In my work, I have noticed that international students tend to interact with students from the same country or with the same cultural background.	M	4.03	
	SD	0.62	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	1	1.6%
	Undecided	8	12.7%
	Agree	42	66.7%
	Strongly agree	12	19%
9. I believe that the educational counseling services offered by the university to international students facilitate their adaptation.	M	3.84	
	SD	0.62	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	3.2%
	Undecided	12	19%
	Agree	43	68.3%
	Strongly agree	6	9.5%
10. I feel uncomfortable when international students speak their mother tongue in class.	M	2.68	
	SD	1.2	
	Strongly disagree	7	11.1%
	Disagree	32	50.8%
	Undecided	3	4.8%
	Agree	16	25.4%
	Strongly agree	5	7.9%
11. The fact that international students have different levels of training makes my teaching difficult.	M	3.26	
	SD	1.01	
	Strongly disagree	2	3.2%
	Disagree	17	27%
	Undecided	9	14.3%
	Agree	32	50.8%
	Strongly agree	3	4.8%

Variable	Level	N	%
12. Sometimes, some behaviors of international students make the didactic activity difficult.	M	3.2	
	SD	1.08	
	Strongly disagree	2	3.2%
	Disagree	20	31.7%
	Undecided	9	14.3%
	Agree	27	42.9%
	Strongly agree	5	7.9%
13. I always manage to create equal opportunities for academic success for all international students regardless of culture, religion, ethnicity etc.	M	4.39	
	SD	0.52	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Undecided	1	1.6%
	Agree	36	57.1%
	Strongly agree	26	41.3%
14. Working with international students is more challenging than working with national students.	M	3.65	
	SD	0.93	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
	Disagree	9	14.3%
	Undecided	9	14.3%
	Agree	36	57.1%
	Strongly agree	8	12.7%
15. Working with international students has changed my view of multiculturalism.	M	4.01	
	SD	0.75	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	4	6.3%
	Undecided	5	7.9%
	Agree	40	63.5%
	Strongly agree	14	22.2%
16. In general, I am satisfied with the way my professional activity with international students goes.	M	4.07	
	SD	0.6	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
	Disagree	0	0
	Undecided	3	4.8%
	Agree	48	76.2%
	Strongly agree	11	17.5%
17. I am satisfied with the communication I have with international students.	M	4.03	
	SD	0.47	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	1	1.6%
	Undecided	3	4.8%
	Agree	52	82.5%
	Strongly agree	7	11.1%

Variable	Level	N	%
18. I am satisfied with the way I manage to understand the customs and habits of international students.	M	3.9	
	SD	0.55	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	2.32%
	Undecided	7	11.1%
	Agree	49	77.8%
	Strongly agree	5	7.9%
19. I am satisfied with the punctuality of the international students.	M	3.06	
	SD	1.06	
	Strongly disagree	3	4.8%
	Disagree	20	31.7%
	Undecided	14	22.2%
	Agree	22	34.9%
	Strongly agree	4	6.3%
20. I am satisfied with the attitude that international students have in my courses / laboratories / tutorials.	M	3.74	
	SD	0.82	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
	Disagree	5	7.9%
	Undecided	10	15.9%
	Agree	40	63.5%
	Strongly agree	7	11.1%
21. I prefer frontal interaction in my work with international students.	M	3.77	
	SD	0.83	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	6	9.5%
	Undecided	12	19%
	Agree	35	55.6%
	Strongly agree	10	15.9%
22. I prefer interactive activities in my work with international students.	M	4.12	
	SD	0.58	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	3.2%
	Undecided	1	1.6%
	Agree	47	74.6%
	Strongly agree	13	20.6%
23. In working with large groups (entire series) of international students, I prefer the teacher-to-students flow of information (e.g., lecture / presentation).	M	3.5	
	SD	0.85	
	Strongly disagree	0	
	Disagree	11	17.5%
	Undecided	13	20.6%
	Agree	35	55.6 5
	Strongly agree	4	6.3%

Variable	Level	N	%
24. In working with small groups of international students, I prefer the teacher-to-students flow of information (e.g., consultation / lab / clinical cases).	M	3.63	
	SD	0.86	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	10	15.9%
	Undecided	9	14.3%
	Agree	38	60.3%
	Strongly agree	6	9.5%
25. In working with international students, I prefer the students-to-teacher flow of information (e.g., lectures / debates / dissertations / clubs).	M	3.71	
	SD	0.79	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	27	11.1%
	Undecided	10	15.9%
	Agree	40	63.5%
	Strongly agree	6	9.5%
26. In working with international students, I prefer the students-to-students flow of information (e.g., chat, discussion forum, colloquium).	M	3.73	
	SD	0.7	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	3	4.8%
	Undecided	17	27%
	Agree	37	58.7%
	Strongly agree	6	9.5%
27. My teaching methods are appropriate for international students.	M	3.8	
	SD	0.56	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	1	1.6%
	Undecided	14	22.2%
	Agree	44	69.8%
	Strongly agree	4	6.3%
28. I feel comfortable teaching international students.	M	4.04	
	SD	0.6	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	3.2%
	Undecided	4	6.3%
	Agree	46	73%
	Strongly agree	11	17.5%
29. I provide clear criteria for international students regarding participation, topics, evaluation etc.	M	4.23	
	SD	0.46	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Undecided	1	1.6%
	Agree	46	73%
	Strongly agree	16	25.4%

Variable	Level	N	%
30. I make available to international students all the materials necessary for the study of the discipline I oversee.	M	4.3	
	SD	0.46	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Undecided	0	0
	Agree	44	69.8%
	Strongly agree	19	30.2%
31. When I prepare my lectures/tutorials/labs I take into consideration the cultural background of international students.	M	3.55	
	SD	0.92	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
	Disagree	8	12.7%
	Undecided	17	27%
	Agree	29	46%
	Strongly agree	8	12.7%
32. In delivering teaching content I provide international students with information that helps them adapt more easily to the host country	M	3.96	
	SD	0.59	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	3.2%
	Undecided	6	9.5%
	Agree	47	74.6%
	Strongly agree	8	12.7%
33. I encourage international students to think critically about the topics I present.	M	4.11	
	SD	0.69	
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	3.2%
	Undecided	6	9.5%
	Agree	38	60.3%
	Strongly agree	17	27%

We also computed descriptive statistics for the entire scale. Thus, the possible range is132 with a theoretical minimum of 33 (indicating low effectiveness of teaching strategies) and a theoretical maximum of 155 (indicating high effectiveness of teaching strategies). For this sample, the mean was 124.80 and the standard deviation was 8.54.

The minimum was 105 and the maximum was 141. These results show that, in general, teachers believe they use appropriate and effective teaching activities with international students.

Difficulties encountered by international students

This scale contains 15 items, rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("very difficult) to 5 ("very easy"). They measure how problematic a teacher thinks that some issues are for international students. Table 5 presents these

instrument's questions, the frequency of the participants' answers, the mean and standard deviation for each answer.

Table 6 presents a ranking of the most difficult problems encountered by international students, as seen by teachers. 42.9% of the respondents thought it is difficult for international students to communicate in the language of the instructions and 65.1% of them said that active participation in the lectures is hard for international students. However, many teachers believe that international students' problems with discrimination (57.1%), hostility of the local people (46%) or bullying (57.1%) are neutral. Local arrangements (52.4%), local transport (60.3%), the climate (49.2%) or the eating habits (44.4%) are important difficulties that make the adaptation harder.

Table 5. *Teachers opinions about the difficulties encountered*
by international students

Variable	Level	N	%
Communication in the language of instruction	Mean	2.66	
	SD	0.89	
	Very difficult	4	6.3%
	Difficult	27	42.9%
	Neutral	18	28.6%
	Easy	14	22.2%
	Very easy	0	0
Active participation in lectures / tutorials / labs	Mean	2.49	
	SD	0.87	
	Very difficult	2	3.2%
	Difficult	41	65.1%
	Neutral	8	12.7%
	Easy	11	17.5%
	Very easy	1	1.6%
Understanding local customs and habits	Mean	2.77	
	SD	0.9	
	Very difficult	2	3.2%
	Difficult	26	41.3%
	Neutral	21	33.3%
	Easy	12	19%
	Very easy	2	3.2%
Community discrimination	Mean	3.15	
	SD	0.74	
	Very difficult	1	1.6%
	Difficult	8	12.7%
	Neutral	36	57.1%
	Easy	16	25.4%
	Very easy	2 3.	3.2%

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Variable	Level	N	%
Hostility of the local people	Mean	3.06	
	SD	0.91	
	Very difficult	4	6.3%
	Difficult	10	15.9%
	Neutral	29	46%
	Easy	18	28.6%
	Very easy	2	3.2%
Colleagues' Bullying	Mean	3.14	
	SD	0.83	
	Very difficult	0	0
	Difficult	12	19%
	Neutral	36	57.1%
	Easy	9	14.3%
	Very easy	6	9.5%
Community integration	Mean	2.71	
	SD	0.9	
	Very difficult	2	3.2%
	Difficult	30	47.6%
	Neutral	16	25.4%
	Easy	14	22.2%
	Very easy	1	1.6%
Loneliness	Mean	3.47	
	SD	0.85	
	Very difficult	0	0
	Difficult	8	12.7%
	Neutral	24	38.1%
	Easy	24	38.1%
	Very easy	7	11.1%
Making friends	Mean	2.55	
	SD	0.79	
	Very difficult	1	1.6%
	Difficult	36	57.1%
	Neutral	17	27%
	Easy	8	12.7%
	Very easy	1	1.6%
Living arrangements	Mean	2.69	
	SD	0.89	
	Very difficult	1	1.6%
	Difficult	33	52.4%
	Neutral	14	22.2%
	Easy	14	22.2%
	Very easy	1	11.6%

Variable	Level	N	%
Employment	Mean	3.42	
	SD	0.92	
	Very difficult	2	3.2%
	Difficult	7	11.1%
	Neutral	22	34.9%
	Easy	26	41.3%
	Very easy	6	9.5%
Local transport	Mean	2.42	
	SD	0.73	
	Very difficult	2	3.2%
	Difficult	38	60.3%
	Neutral	18	28.6%
	Easy	4	6.3%
	Very easy	1	1.6%
Adaptation to the climate of the host country	Mean	2.69	
	SD	0.77	
	Very difficult	0	0
	Difficult	31	49.2%
	Neutral	20	31.7%
	Easy	12	19%
	Very easy	0	0
Keeping eating habits from the country of origin	Mean	2.77	
	SD	0.92	
	Very difficult	2	3.2%
	Difficult	28	44.4%
	Neutral	16	25.4%
	Easy	16	25.4%
	Very easy	1	1.6%
Access to quality medical services	Mean	2.71	
	SD	1.08	
	Very difficult	4	6.3%
	Difficult	30	47.6%
	Neutral	15	23.8%
	Easy	8	12.7%
	Very easy	6	9.5%

We observe that the teachers consider that international students have a rather difficult adaption in their host country. 42.9% of the respondents thought it is difficult for international students to communicate in the language of the instructions and 65.1% of them said that active participation in the lectures is hard for international students. However, many teachers believe that international students' problems with discrimination (57.1%), the hostility of the local people (46%) or bullying (57.1%) are neutral. Local arrangements (52.4%),

local transport (60.3%), the climate (49.2%) or the eating habits (44.4%) were considered as important difficulties that make the adaptation harder.

We also computed descriptive statistics for the entire scale. Thus, the possible range would be 60 with a theoretical minimum of 15 (indicating a difficult coping process) and a theoretical maximum of 75 (indicating an extremely easy coping process). For this sample, the mean was 42.79, and the standard deviation was 7.59. The minimum was 27, and the maximum was 61.

Table 6. *Ranking of the most important difficulties for international students, according to the teachers*

Rank	Issue	Mean
1 (most problematic)	Local transport	2.42
2	Active participation in lectures / tutorials / labs	2.49
3	Making friends	2.55
4	Communication in the language of instruction	2.66
5	Living arrangements	2.69
6	Adaptation to the climate of the host country	2.69
7	Community integration	2.71
8	Access to quality medical services	2.71
9	Understanding local customs and habits	2.77
10	Keeping eating habits from the country of origin	2.77
11	Hostility of local people	3.06
12	Colleagues' Bullying	3.14
13	Community discrimination	3.15
14	Employment	3.42
15 (least problematic)	Loneliness	3.47

Approaches to Teaching Inventory

Developed by Trigwell and Proser (2004), this scale measures two different approaches that can be used by the teacher. One is focused on the teacher and emphasizes the transmission of information (ITTF). The other is focused on the student and emphasizes conceptual change (CCSF). Both approaches are synthesized into different subscales of the instrument. Thus, ITTF contains 8 items (1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13) and the CCSF also contains 8 items (3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16). All the items are measured on a Likert-type scale, from 1 ("only rarely") to 5 ("almost always").

For the ITTF sub-scale, internal consistency (measured with the Cronbach's Alpha) was 0.75 and for the CCSF sub-scale the coefficient was 0.768. Table 7 presents these instrument's questions; the frequency of the participants' answers the mean and standard deviation for each answer.

Further analyses were computed separately for each sub-scale. For both sub-scales, the possible range is 32 with a theoretical minimum of 8 (indicating

an exceptionally low use of the strategy) and a theoretical maximum of 40 (indicating a high use of the strategy). For the ITTF sub-scale, the mean was 27.11 (± 5.34), the minimum was 16, and the maximum was 39. For the CCSF the mean was 28.31 (± 5.18), the minimum was 14, and the maximum was 40.

We also ran a *Paired Sample T-test analysis* to verify whether one strategy is preferred over the other. The results show that although the respondents use CCSF more, the difference is not significant (t = -1.74; p = .085). In terms of individual answers, 30 respondents (47.6%) said they use more CCSF, 8 respondents (12.7%) use both strategies equally, and 25 (39.7%) use ITTF more.

Table 7. Approaches to Teaching Inventory

Variable	Level	N	%
1. I design my teaching in this subject with the assumption that most of the students have very little useful knowledge of the topics to be covered.	M	3.39	
	SD	1.14	
	only rarely	3	4.8%
	sometimes	14	22.2%
	about half of the time	11	17.5%
	frequently	25	39.7%
	almost always	10	15.9%
2. I feel it is important that this subject should be completely described in terms of specific objectives related to what students have to know for formal assessment items.	M	3.84	
	SD	0.84	
	only rarely	0	0
	sometimes	8	12.7%
	about half of the time	4	6.3%
	frequently	41	65.1%
	almost always	10	15.9%
3. In my interaction with the students in this subject I try to develop a conversation with them about the topics we are studying.	M	4.26	
	SD	0.74	
	only rarely	0	0
	sometimes	2	3.2%
	about half of the time	5	7.9%
	frequently	30	47.6%
	almost always	26	41.3%
4. I feel it is important to present a lot of facts to the students so that they know what they have to learn for this subject.	M	4.04	
	SD	0.79	
	only rarely	0	0
	sometimes	5	7.9%
	about half of the time	3	4.8%
	frequently	39	61.9%
	almost always	16	25.4%

Variable	Level	N	%
5. I feel that the assessment in this subject should be an opportunity for the students to reveal their changed conceptual understanding of the subject.	M	3.76	
	SD	0.91	
	only rarely	1	1.6%
	sometimes	7	11.1%
	about half of the time	8	12.7%
	frequently	37	358.7%
	almost always	10	15.9%
6. I set aside some teaching time so that the students can discuss, among themselves, the difficulties that they encounter studying this subject.	M	3.06	
	SD	1.31	
	only rarely	10	15.9%
	sometimes	15	23.8%
	about half of the time	6	9.5%
	frequently	25	39.67%
	almost always	7	11.1%
7. In this subject I concentrate on covering the information that might be available from a good textbook.	M	3.42	
	SD	1.16	
	only rarely	2	3.2%
	sometimes	17	27%
	about half of the time	7	11.1%
	frequently	26	41.3%
	almost always	11	17.5%
8. I encourage students to restructure their existing knowledge in terms of a new way of thinking about the subject that they will develop.	M	3.82	
	SD	0.97	
	only rarely	1	1.6%
	sometimes	9	14.3%
	about half of the time	3	4.8%
	frequently	37	58.7%
	almost always	13	20.6%
9. In the teaching sessions for this subject, I use difficult or undefined examples to provoke debate.	M	2.79	
	SD	1.28	
	only rarely	11	17.5%
	sometimes	20	31.7%
	about half of the time	9	14.3%
	frequently	17	27%
	almost always	6	9.5%
10. I structure this subject to help students to pass the formal assessment items.	M	3.63	
	SD	0.95	
	only rarely	0	0
	sometimes	11	17.5%
	about half of the time	11	17.5%
	frequently	31	49.2%
	almost always	10	15.9%
	M	2.96	

Variable	Level	N	%
11. I think an important reason for running teaching sessions in this subject is to give students a good set of notes.	SD	1.3	
	only rarely	12	19%
	sometimes	12	19%
	about half of the time	11	17.5%
	frequently	22	34.9%
	almost always	6 9.5	9.5%
12. In this subject, I only provide the students with the information they will need to pass the formal assessment.	M	2.14	
	SD	1.3	
	only rarely	30	47.6%
	sometimes	11	17.5%
	about half of the time	7	11.1%
	frequently	13	20.6%
	almost always	2	3.2%
13. I feel that I should know the answers to any questions that the students may put to me during this subject.	M	3.65	
	SD	1.23	
	only rarely	5	7.9%
	sometimes	10	15.9%
	about half of the time	2	3.2%
	frequently	31	49.2%
	almost always	15	23.8%
14. I make available opportunities for students in this subject to discuss their changing understanding of the subject.	M	3.82	
	SD	0.97	
	only rarely	1	1.6%
	sometimes	7	11.1%
	about half of the time	9	14.3%
	frequently	31	49.2%
	almost always	15	23.8%
15. I feel that it is better for the students in this subject to generate their own notes rather than always copy mine.	M	3.41	
	SD	1.04	
	only rarely	1	1.6%
	sometimes	14	22.2%
	about half of the time	15	23.8%
	frequently	24	38.1%
	almost always	9	14.3%
16. I feel a good deal of teaching time in this subject should be used to question students' ideas.	M	3.36	
	SD	1.02	
	only rarely	1	1.6%
	sometimes	14	22.2%
	about half of the time	17	27%
	frequently	23	36.5%
	almost always	8	12.7%.

Statistical analysis

To analyze the data, we employed several statistical methods: *Spearman correlations*, *independent sample t-tests*, *one-way ANOVAs*. The analysis revealed some important results which are detailed according to the tests used.

The correlational analyses revealed several correlations between the ATI (items from the 6th section of our instrument) and relationships with the international students (3rd part of our instrument):

For ATTF

- The more teacher-oriented the respondents were, the less verbally assaulted they were by the students ($r = -.27$, $p = .03$).

The correlational analyses revealed several correlations between the ATI (items from the 6th section of our instrument) and the teaching activity (4th part of our instrument):

For ATTF

- The more teacher-oriented the respondents were, the more they believed that teaching international students was more difficult than teaching national students ($r = .36$ $p = .003$).
- The more teacher oriented the respondents were, the more they preferred the teacher-to-student flow of information in large groups ($r = .25$, $p = .04$) or in small groups ($r = .43$, $p < .001$).

For CCSF

- The more student-oriented the teachers were, the more they noticed that larger social networks help students get better learning results ($r = .33$, $p < .01$).
- The more student-oriented the teachers were, the more the teacher to students flow of information was ($r = .37$, $p < .01$).

The correlational analyses revealed several correlations between the ATI (items from the 6th section of our instrument) and difficulties encountered by international students, as seen by the teachers (5th part of our instrument):

For ATTF

- The more teacher-oriented the respondents were, the less they considered students were not affected by difficulties, such as community integration ($r = -.27$, $p = .02$), employment ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$), climate ($r = -.32$, $p < .01$), eating habits ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$) or access to medical services ($r = -.35$, $p < .01$).

For CSSF

- The more student-oriented the teachers were, the more they believed that the students are not affected by community discrimination ($r = .27$, $p = .03$).

We found one significant correlation between age and the relationship with the international students (3rd part of our instrument):

- The younger teachers, the more they tried to memorize the names of their students (r = -.38, p < .01)

We found one significant correlation between age and teaching activity (4th part of our instrument):

- The younger teachers, the more they tried to provide more clear criteria for the international students regarding participation, topics and evaluation (r = -.351, p = .005).

The correlational analyses revealed several correlations between age and difficulties encountered by international students, as seen by the teachers (5th part of our instrument):

- The younger the teachers, the less difficult they thought loneliness was for the international students (r = -.360, p = .004). Also, the younger the teachers, the less they thought that local transport was a difficult problem for the students (r = -.368, p = .003)

We found several significant correlations between teaching experience and the relationship with the international students (3rd part of our instrument):

- The less experienced the teachers, the more they tried to memorize their students' names (r = -.40, p < .001).
- The more experienced in working with international students, the more they tried to establish close professional relationships with the students (r = .40, p < .001)
- The more experienced they were in working with international students, the more they encouraged one-on-one meetings (r = .24, p = .05).
- The less experienced the teachers were in working with international students, the more they observed cultural or ethnic conflicts among the students (r = -.40, p < .001).
- The less experienced the teachers were in working with international students, the more they had conflicts with the students (r = -.28, p < .02) and the more they were verbally assaulted (r = -.27, p < .03).

We found several significant correlations between teaching experience and teaching activity (4th part of our instrument):

- The less experienced the teachers were in working with international students, the more they believed in the efficiency of audio-video tools in working with the international students (r = -.28, p < .02).
- The less experienced the teachers were, the more they thought group activities were efficient in working with the international students (r = -.33, p = .007).

We found one significant correlation between being comfortable with teaching in French and the relationship with international students (3rd part of our instrument):

- The more comfortable the teachers were with teaching in French, the more they considered they established close professional relationships with some students (r = .26, p = .04).

We found several significant correlations between being comfortable with teaching in French and teaching activity (4th part of our instrument):

- The more comfortable the teachers were with teaching in French, the less they considered that audio-video tools were more efficient in working with international students compared to native ones (r = -.28, p = .02).
- The more comfortable the teachers were with teaching in French, the less they considered that the students that were not fluent in the language of instruction make the educational process more difficult (r = -.28, p = .02).
- The more comfortable the teachers were with teaching in French, the less they considered that students had different levels of training make teaching difficult (r = -.37, p = .003).

We found several significant correlations between being comfortable with teaching in French and difficulties encountered by international students, as seen by the teachers (5th part of our instrument):

- The more comfortable the teachers were with teaching in French, the more they considered that communication in the language of instruction is a difficulty for the students (r = -.26, p = .03).
- The more comfortable the teachers were with teaching in French, the less they used CCSF teaching strategies (focused on students) (r = -.37, p = .002).

A comparative analysis was conducted and revealed the following significant differences:

- women (M = 4.46), more than men (M = 4.15) consider that they succeed to create equal opportunities for international students regardless of their race, religion and ethnicity (t = 2.36, p = .025).
- women (M = 4.36), more than men (M = 4.07) consider that they make all the necessary materials available for the international students (t = 2.74, p = .01).
- women (M = 4.06), more than men (M = 3.61) consider that when delivering content, they help international students to adapt better (t = 2.72, p = .013).
- teachers who teach medical disciplines (M = 3.95) prefer frontal interaction more, compared to those who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 3.45) (t = 2.19, p = 0.03).
- teachers who teach medical disciplines (M $_{large group}$ = 3.73; M $_{small group}$ = 3.80), more than those who teach non-medical disciplines (M $_{large group}$ =

3.09; M $_{\text{small group}}$ = 3.31) prefer teacher-to-student flow of information when working with large (t = 2.81, p = 0.008) or small groups of international students (t = 2.18, p = .03).

- teachers who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 4.00), more than those who teach medical disciplines (M = 3.58) prefer student-to-student flow of information when working with international students (t = − 2.71, p = .01).
- teachers who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 4.04), more than those who teach medical disciplines (M = 3.68) consider that their teaching methods are appropriate for international students (t = − 2.91, p = .005).
- teachers who teach medical disciplines (M = 2.46) consider that communication in the language of instruction is more difficult for the students, compared to those who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 3.04) (t = -2.56, p = 0.13).
- teachers who teach medical disciplines (M = 2.41) consider that living arrangements are more difficult for the students, compared with those who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 3.22) (t = -3.86, p < .001).
- teachers who teach medical disciplines (M = 2.29) consider that local transport is more difficult for the students, compared to those who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 2.68) (t = -2.05, p = .04).
- teachers who teach medical disciplines (M = 2.51) consider that adaptation to the climate is more difficult for the students, compared to those who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 3.04) (t = -2.75, p = .008).
- teachers who teach medical disciplines (M = 2.49) consider that the access to medical services is more difficult for the students, compared to those who teach non-medical disciplines (M = 3.22) (t = -2.91, p = .005).
- teachers who undertook a training program aimed at working with international students (m = .81), compared to those who did not (m = .58), provide more support to international students outside the academic program (t = -2.03, p = 0.04).
- teachers who did not undertake training (m = 3.58), more than those who did (m = 2.63), consider that the use of audio-video tools is more efficient in working with international students, compared to national students (t = 3.71, p < .001).
- teachers who did not undertake training (m = 3.95), more than those who did (m = 3.36), consider international students' lack of language proficiency as making the educational process more difficult (t = 2.53, p < .01).
- teachers who undertook a training program aimed at working with international students (m = 4.31), compared to those who did not (m = 3.95), were more satisfied with their activity (t = -2.38, p = 0.02).

The One Way Anova analysis based on the language of teaching (English vs French vs national vs English and French) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers reported being verbally assaulted by the students (F = 3.11, p = .03). The respondents teaching only in French (M =1.00) reported higher scores compared to those who teach in English and French (M = .54) but not compared to the other two categories.

Also, the One Way Anova analysis based on the language of teaching (English vs French vs national vs English and French) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider that communication in the language of instruction is difficult for students (F = 4.10, p = .01). The respondents teaching only in French (M = 2.00) reported lower scores compared to those who teach in the native language (M = 3.25) but not compared to the other two categories.

The analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which the teachers feel uncomfortable when the students speak their mother tongues in class (F = 5.016, p = .01). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 1.00) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = .59) and the University of Oradea (M = .37).

The One Way Anova analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider that it is more difficult to teach international students than national students (F = 6.79, p = .002). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 2.27) have significantly lower scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.63). Also, the One Way Anova analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider that the students' lack of fluency in English makes the teaching difficult (F = 3.55, p = .035). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 3.18) have significantly lower scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.93).

More results were obtained:

- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider that international students changed their view on multiculturalism (F = 4.09, p = .022). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University

(M = 4.54) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.86).

- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers are satisfied with the communication they have with the international students (F = 3.72, p = .03). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 4.36) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.97).

- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers prefer frontal interaction when working with international students (F = 3.79, p = .02). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 3.18) have significantly lower scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.88).

- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers feel comfortable teaching international students (F = 5.70, p = .005). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 4.54) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.97) and the University of Oradea (M = 3.75).

- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider community integration a more serious problem for international students (F = 5.81, p = .005). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 3.45) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 2.50), thus considering the issue less problematic.

- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider adaptation to the climate a more serious problem for international students (F = 4.06, p = .022). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University (M = 3.27) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 2.59), thus considering the issue less problematic.

- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider keeping the eating habits from the native country a more serious problem for the international students ($F = 3.91$, $p = .025$). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University ($M = 3.45$) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University ($M = 2.63$), thus considering the issue less problematic.
- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers consider access to quality medical services a more serious problem for the international students ($F = 4.47$, $p = .015$). The teachers from Iuliu Hatieganu University ($M = 3.54$) have significantly higher scores compared to those from Gr. T. Popa University ($M = 2.56$), thus considering the issue less problematic.
- analysis based on the institutional affiliation (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca and the University of Oradea) reveal that there are differences in the level at which teachers use student-focused teaching ($F = 9.77$, $p < .001$). The teachers from the University of Oradea ($M = 34.75$) have higher scores compared to those from Iuliu Hatieganu University ($M = 25.90$) and Gr. T. Popa University ($M = 27.75$).

Open-ended questions

Q1 – In my opinion, the three most challenging aspects when teaching international students are:

Some of the respondents offered less than three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 153 units of text are grouped into 5 categories. The results can be seen in Table 8. The most frequent category is "teaching process", followed by "culture", "students' behavior and knowledge", "language" and "organizing activity".

Table 8. Selected categories for Question 1

Category	Frequency	Examples
Teaching process	54	"Reaching all the students, despite a lack of interest manifested by some of them", "Creating good working relationships among the students with different cultural backgrounds", "The materials and methods that I use, the

Category	Frequency	Examples
		number of hours available", "To find the appropriate level of knowledge for everybody, to keep them interested in the subject and to motivate them to study", "Fear of not raising their interest enough in the subject"
Culture	37	"Cultural background", "Diversity", "Culturally- marked study skills", "Different international medical approaches"
Students' behavior and knowledge	29	"Some of the students speak at the same time, delays, some of them do not collaborate in discussions", "Students' interest for professional skills".
Language	28	"Explaining a subject using different methods, to make sure students understand, because of their poor knowledge of English language.", "Teaching in a foreign language", "Overcoming the language and accent barrier"
Organising activity	5	"The few international students I have taught until now ended up in my classes for various administrative reasons, not necessarily related to how my courses are aimed to support students' interests, learning and development.", "Respecting the rules", "Fraud during the exams"

Q2 – In my opinion, the three most challenging aspects international students must face when coming to study in my institution are:

Some of the respondents offered less than three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 150 units of text are grouped into 7 categories. The results can be seen in Table 9. The most frequent category is "culture", followed by "language", "teaching process", "social support", "native culture and institutions", "professional difficulties" and "students' behavior and knowledge".

Table 9. Selected categories for Question 2

Category	Frequency	Examples
Culture	37	"Adapting to Romanian habits and people", "To adapt to local cultural particularities", "Religious differences"
Language	35	"Different levels of language proficiency"
Teaching process	25	"Our institution, our academic community, as well as we individually are used to placing ourselves at the center of how we perceive reality. This undermines our ability to see, understand, appreciate and accommodate someone else's perspective of the same situation", "Overloaded timetable, lots of things to learn by heart, heterogeneous groups with vastly different motivation or knowledge."
Social support	16	"Finding new friends among their classmates", "Manage themselves with life far away from their parents, having fewer friends at the beginning"

Category	Frequency	Examples
Native culture and institutions	12	"Bureaucracy", "Respect for the specific rules", "New customs", "Understand the Romanian educational system"
Professional difficulties	10	"To have more access to the practical activity in the hospital", "Study in a country with other opportunities to treat patients (may be lower) and the opportunity to stay face to face with patients."
Students' behavior and knowledge	5	"Level of knowledge", "Honesty", "Love to learn"

Q3 – The best three strategies I use when teaching international students are:

Some of the respondents offered less than three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 92 units of text are grouped into 12 categories. The results can be seen in Table 10. The most frequent category is "encourage the students' opinions", followed by "encourage collaboration", "student-centered strategies", "using cultural inclusion", "pedagogical tact", "group work", "using online tools and multimedia", "case studies", "Language proficiency", "humor", "individual work" and "practical activities".

Table 10. Selected categories for Question 3

Category	Frequency	Examples
Encourage the students' opinions	16	"Asking questions and being sincerely interested in their impressions, habits and ways of thinking", "Allow them to freely express their opinions"
Encourage collaboration	14	"Use debates", "Interaction, creating opportunities to discover more"
Student-centered strategies	14	"Asking questions and being sincerely interested in their impressions, habits and ways of thinking", "I let them speak more than I do. I choose topics that they find interesting. I praise them a lot.", "Use problem-based learning"
Using cultural inclusion	12	"Talk about their country and how they have adapted to Romania ",
Pedagogical tact	10	"Explain technical terms, create a positive classroom experience", "Be patient", "Constantly check to see if they understand the task", "Provide clear and concise information"
Group work	8	"Working in small groups (sometimes they choose their teammates, others I choose for them)", "Teamwork, learning through experience, inquiry-based learning"

Category	Frequency	Examples
Using online tools and multimedia	6	"Use of videos, drawing"
Case studies	6	"Case discussions", "Presentation of interesting cases"
Language proficiency	3	"Try to teach them the basic vocabulary", "The Ludic approach to new language", "Practice for pronunciation, a lot of vocabulary (what they want)"
Humor	1	Humor
Individual work	1	"Work with them individually, if necessary, to close gaps in knowledge or execution if there is such"
Practical activities	1	"Interaction with patients and putting the students in the role of doctors"

Q4 – The three most common complaints about my work with international students are:

Some of the respondents offered less than three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 66 units of text are grouped into 7 categories. The results can be seen in Table 11. The most frequent category is "discipline", followed by "language", "institutional organization", "difficulty of the course", "teaching style", "lack of time" and "cultural differences".

Table 11. Selected categories for Question 4

Category	Frequency	Examples
Discipline	25	"I am too strict", "No positive discrimination on the final tests", "They are sometimes dissatisfied with their grades (most of them only until I explain why)"
Language	13	"Do not provide enough speaking activities for them", "Language level"
Institutional organization	12	"Enrolment", "Big number of students in the class", "The course is too early in the timetable", "Large groups, little time, poor infrastructure"
Difficulty of the course	8	"What I teach is too difficult", "Too much information to learn", "Time constraints. More practice. Understanding some of the concepts"
Teaching style	5	"I am exigent, punctual, I do not tolerate disrespect", "I am a fast talker"
Lack of time	2	"Not enough time for one-to-one interaction", "Groups too large, meetings too long and too rare"
Cultural differences	1	"Different cultures, different backgrounds"

Q5 – In what ways have you encouraged collaborative learning among the international students?

The 63 units of text are grouped into 7 categories. The results can be seen in Table 12. The most frequent category is "group learning", followed by "open communication", "create multicultural opportunities", "develop personal relationships", "extracurricular activities", "teacher-student relationships" and "the use of different material".

Table 12. *Selected categories for Question 5*

Category	Frequency	Examples
Group learning	35	"Encourage teamwork", "Work in small teams", "Provide the possibility (in small groups of 2-3 students) to get involved in medical and surgical activities."
Open communication	12	"I encourage them to speech a lot about their problems.", "Initiate many discussions on topics related to the lectures/seminars.", "During my class they are always encouraged to express their thoughts on the matter. I tell them to share their opinions, even if different so long as they bring a logical argument to back them up and they remain open to other opinions."
Create multicultural opportunities	6	"Encourage mixed ethnic work", "I like to form mixed groups, so they get the chance to interact with other students from different backgrounds. Some tasks focus on them discovering similarities and differences as well as reporting the results back to the class from their discussions."
Develop personal relationships	3	"From the beginning of the lectures I invite them to make friends from different cultures and become friends.", "Facilitating connections among them."
Extracurricular activities	3	"Help students attend university organized projects", "I encourage them to prepare scientific work for congresses, in groups."
Teacher – student relationships	3	"Offer license support, questions and answer sessions.", "Keep a close relation with them."
The use different materials	1	"The students had to watch a movie or to read a paper for each laboratory. Based on this support, they had to express their opinions on some relevant topics and read out their opinions during the class."

Q6 – What have you learned from international students?

Some of the respondents offered more complex answers. Thus, more than one unit of text could be extracted from their answers. The 71 units of text are grouped into 8 categories. The results can be seen in Table 13. The most frequent category is "multicultural development", followed by "personal development",

"teaching practices", "general knowledge", "language improvement", "aspects of personal relationships", "humor" and "mobility.

Table 13. Selected categories for Question 6

Category	Frequency	Examples
Multicultural development	24	"To listen without prejudice, to abstain from passing judgment, to examine my own perspective, to appreciate diversity", "To be more multicultural", "Cultural differences are good for both of the us", "Diversity is a great stimulus for growth, both theirs and mine", "Listen to their stories, look at their life circumstances and background. We are all one, with the same basic needs, also, welcome the differences that make up each group, each class is so special and enjoyable. Love each nation, each country as we love our own."
Personal development	17	"To be flexible", "To always be open", "Courage, that I need to establish boundaries"
Teaching practice	15	"To be patient with the students", "To listen more to the students", "To be more tolerant in the classroom", "Abstain from criticism and always appreciate progress and a proper attitude, (kindness, patience, hard work)."
General knowledge	5	"I have learned about different countries' medical systems", "Sociocultural issues" "Words in their language. Medicinal plants in their country. Recipes and travel tips"
Language improvement	5	"To improve my foreign language proficiency", "I practiced my French by talking to native French speakers"
Aspects of personal relationships	2	"The constant desire to communicate with teachers and other students/colleagues "
Humor	2	"They have a sense of humor ", "Humor doesn't travel easily across cultures"
Mobility	1	"Educational mobility "

The profile of the teacher working with international students

63 of the respondents participated in this study. Most of them teach a medical discipline and have teaching experience of more than 10 years. Also, most of the participants teach in English or both English and French. The respondents are more comfortable with teaching in English and less comfortable with teaching in French. Finally, most of them did not take any courses to prepare for teaching international students.

The teachers mostly have a good relationship with the international students. They express interest in cultural diversity, try to memorize the names

of the students and even establish close professional relations with the students, encouraging one-on-one meetings to discuss the students' difficulties in academic and cultural adaption. Still, some teachers feel that the students do not respect them and have some offensive attitudes. Besides, some teachers feel uncomfortable when international students speak their mother tongue in class. However, most teachers did not encounter such problems. Few teachers reported having conflicts with their international students, and only one reported being physically assaulted by a student. By studying the data from qualitative and quantitative standpoints, the lack of a proper relationship between the teacher and the students seems to be the exception, rather than the norm.

The teachers from this sample prefer practical activities rather than theoretical ones, use various multimedia sources and tools and prefer to work in smaller groups. However, they consider that teaching international students is more difficult than teaching native students. The language and the difficulties in adapting to the host culture seem to be important issues for the international students, as seen by the teachers. While considering various problems with the teaching process, the teachers seem to be content with their ability to use appropriate methods when it comes to working with international students. They try to inform and help the students to adapt better and more quickly. Finally, the teachers who teach only in French seem to believe that their activity is less effective.

The teachers believe that the international students encounter a variety of problems, some more troublesome than others. The most problematic issues would be related to local transport, participation in the classes, making friends and living arrangements. However, teachers do not see bullying or loneliness as particularly important problems. Interestingly, the teachers who teach non-medical disciplines considered it easier for international students to cope with various difficulties. It is a possibility that these teachers have fewer interactions with the students and thus become less aware of their problems.

Most teachers consider that an important challenge in working with international students is the teaching process. They consider that some students are less interested in the courses, that they have a few hours to deliver the information and that making the students interested in their course is sometimes difficult. The language barrier, cultural differences and the student's behaviors might also act as important barriers. However, most of these challenges are also encountered by the students, who might have problems with the language or with their adaptation to the host culture. Bureaucracy is also seen as an important problem for the students.

To cope with these difficulties, the teachers encourage the students' opinions, try to create various opportunities for collaboration and group work and focus on student-centered approaches. The teachers also encourage multi-cultural exchange and extracurricular activities. The teachers appear to prefer

using a student-centered approach in education, rather than a teacher-centered approach. However, both approaches are used by the teachers in different moments. Using a more teacher-oriented approach is related to believing that the students encounter more problems. This correlation might appear because when focusing more on their teaching and less on the students, the teachers might underestimate the progress achieved by the students. Thus, they could consider that some difficulties are more important, despite the fact the student might have the necessary mechanisms to cope with them.

In the end, the teachers consider that working with the international students raise some problems, but that they also have the optimal tools to deal with the problems. It is also worth mentioning that most of the teachers consider that their activity with the international students can help them grow. They develop their teaching style, become better people (more flexible and open), they improve their language skills, find out new information and, above all, they develop cultural and multicultural competencies, learning more about diversity, the benefits of being different and how to work and live in a multicultural environment.

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TEACHERS WORKING WITH MULTICULTURAL AND MULTILINGUAL GROUPS – MIGRANTS FOR WORK AND REFUGEES

M A G D A L E N A   I O R G A

Introduction

Numerous educational experts have stated that education plays an important role in guiding refugees and other migrants who come to work in the European Union in order to provide a better future for them and their families. It can help them adapt to a new country and to a new culture. It offers them the possibility to establish new social relationships in their host country so they can feel a part of the community.

Yet, because of the high number of working migrants and refugees that have come in the EU in the last few years there have been a number of new challenges that many European countries face, especially related to their educational system. They realized that there is quite a small number of adult educators who have enough professional competencies to work with this group of learners. That is why there is a high need for educational programs and trainings for teachers who work with multicultural groups so they can provide attractive and learner-friendly training courses for migrants and refugees.

The total number of clandestine migrants and asylum seekers who arrived in Europe in 2019 was 123,920, according to data collected by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Migrant workers play an important part in the world's economy since they contribute to growth and development in their host-countries, while the native countries greatly benefit from their remittances.

Up to 21.6 million third-country nationals live in the European Union, accounting for 4.2% of the total EU population. New migrants settling in the EU every year represent less than 0.5% of the EU population. When it comes to doctors or IT specialists, their needs may differ from those who do not have a higher education. While for the latter category social support, such as access to housing, healthcare and assistance for children is extremely important, the problems for the category with a higher education level are mostly related to the social aspects, like developing a sense of belonging to the new culture.

The EU welcomes more migrants than any other single destination. Half of all recorded flows by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are to its EU members, so migration between EU member countries is most frequent.

Labor migrants make up about 1 in 3 new migrants to the EU, while family migrants (people who migrate to reunite with their families) make up a larger share. Most labor migrants are concentrated in just a few EU Member States (the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain), and principally in those countries where labor migration policies do not have education or skill thresholds (southern Europe).

The EU has attracted more lower-educated people; fewer higher-educated migrants than other OECD destinations and hosts only 1/3 of the migrants with academic degree, compared to almost 1/2 of the lower educated. Low educated migrants in OECD countries are increasingly concentrated in the EU. Statistical data collected for a decade (2000-2010), showed that the share of all low educated migrants in OECD countries living in the EU rose from 36% to almost 50%.

Regarding the refugees, official statistics of the UN Refugee Agency show that by the end of 2017, there were 25.4 million refugee men, women and children registered across the world. EU migrant children are defined as being "children under the age of 15 residing in the EU but born in another Member State."

Language proficiency is one of the most important keys for a good education in the host country. Some national statistics suggests that, on average, EU migrant children do not do as well in school as native students. The underperformance in education of EU-migrant children and the low level of education, in general, is associated with later challenges in the labor market.

According to UNICEF there are 5.4 million child migrants in Europe and 50 million migrant children worldwide – 28 million have fled violence and insecurity.

Children in migration are continuously exposed to risks, such as violence, physical, emotional and psychological abuse, exploitation and human trafficking. Most of them separated from their families.

Refugees

The European Union sees refugees in the global context as, "either a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside their country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves to the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned before, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it".

The 1951, Refugee Convention became a key legal document that defines a refugee as: "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race,

religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

More solidarity is needed within the EU countries to ensure protection for these refugees, including through efficient and speedy family reunion and relocation as well as through education that will allow them to better adjust to a new culture.

The goal of most migrant education programs is to ensure that all migrant students have access to education and succeed to receive a school diploma that will allow to have opportunity to work and to become a responsible citizen in the new country.

Adult educators working with migrants and refugees

Adult education is defined as *a practice where adults are engaged in a systematic learning process to gain or strengthen different forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Such processes can encompass a variety of learning/teaching forms, which go far beyond traditional schooling.* These techniques include formal, non-formal and informal learning to improve or gain general skills, acquire new or improve existing competencies, encourage personal development, adapt better to a new culture in the case of migrant workers and to increase access to employment.

Educators or teachers who work with migrants in order to find employment and refugees play an extremely important role in the implementation of adult migrant education policies. Training and mentoring programs should include training on intercultural skills, language learning and the specific needs of adult migrants. Adult educators who work with migrants may need to be given formal training to successfully facilitate the professional and personal development of their students.

The teachers who work with refugees have other challenges to face since the refugees usually have a lower level of education; they were forced to leave their country, and it was not a choice they took without being influenced by safety concerns. The educators in this case need to also improve their cultural background and to acquire skills that will allow them to connect with the refugees on aspects related to their culture, like religious customs or traditions. Also, the refugees will need to deal with the trauma and stress they endured in their home country, so they might also need counseling services and an educational approach that will allow them to acquire knowledge at a slower pace while working on healing their trauma.

Challenges

The reason why many working migrants have problems adjusting to their new culture is related to several factors that significantly influence the

integration process. These factors are related to language barriers, discrimination, low level of education, uneven access to employment, decent housing or social services and even over-qualification in the case of highly educated migrants.

The challenges most educators who work with migrants' face are related to:

- the different level of education of the migrants
- the cultural background of the migrants (customs, religious practices, traditions)
- the financial situation of the migrants (housing situation, employment status)
- the network connection of the migrants (if they live in a community or if they live alone in their new country, without relatives, friends or co-nationals)
- the work experience of the migrants and their level of expertise.

The adult educators who work with migrant populations have to pay attention to all of these dimensions before coming up with a teaching strategy, because the needs of their students are different and most importantly their goals as well since they have different reasons when it comes to deciding to start a new life in a new culture.

So far there aren't many training programs for educators who work with refugees or migrants. Thus, more programs are needed that could improve the training and qualifications of the teachers who work with these groups, so they can better facilitate their adjustment in their new countries.

There is also a need for new evaluation tools that can enable adult educators to assess their competences and their existing knowledge when it comes to working with migrants and refugees. More training programs for adult educators need to be developed that could encourage the continued professional growth of teachers and to increase the motivation of migrants and refugees to study.

There are a great number of challenges that can arise when it comes to adult education, especially when the need for education does not exist in the individual. Also, if the person, the instructor or the community in which the education takes place lack motivation, this process of adult education can fail, especially if people change their needs or even shift their priorities.

Difficulties with teachers working with multicultural and multilingual groups

Participation of adult learners is highly influenced by a few variables that can be considered obstacles. But even though there are so many things like the social status of the migrant, their educational background or their network connections that can interfere with access to education of people who come from

vulnerable environments, there is still something that should be considered first when it comes to working in this field, which is the concept of social justice and equality that should assure the provision of learning opportunities and equal access to education for all.

Another difficulty of working with working migrants or refugees can arise from the use of traditional approaches to teaching. Also, problems can arise at a micro level, due to the impact of "loss of face" when teaching in a multiculturally groups. This can affect the student's self-esteem since there can be differences in expectations and attitudes in the classroom.

Several research have also identified challenges and strategies useful for teachers who work in a multicultural classroom. They have to encourage students discuss topics, engage in practical activities, have critical thinking and to feel free to discuss with the teaching staff and colleagues.

Education and lifelong learning represent an integral part of society that should be present in the minds of all citizens, no matter their age or background. That is why it is good to the educational process with an accurate perspective on the previous education of the learners.

The migration for work has created a radical change in pedagogical patterns; it requires re-assessing the role of adult educators, non-formal learning and formal education. The contents must be adapted to this modern society where multiculturalism impacts a lot of the domains of the global society.

Across the European Union developing new skills for adults professionally and socially is a strong and ambitious objective for all the member states, but the questions that arise more frequently are related to the problems that this objective will pose and the means that can be used to achieve this goal.

Factors that can guarantee better results and facilitate the educational process are:
- the experience of the educator in working with multilingual and multicultural groups,
- the migrant has already adjusted to other cultures before (it is not his/her first experience as a migrant),
- certain personality traits of the migrant that can facilitate the process (agreeableness, extraversion, openness),
- a big network connection – the migrant has relatives or friends in the host country.

Barriers in communication

Communication barriers in the classroom make it difficult for students to get the most out of their educational experience. In this case, the fact that the students are working migrants or refugees who have different levels of education make it even harder. Some teachers sometimes fail to create engaging

lessons due to cultural differences, language barriers, religious beliefs, previous education or even discrimination. Personality differences and peer pressure also contribute to the classroom climate in a negative way.

Among the factors that can significantly interfere with communication in the classroom, the following are the ones which have a higher impact:

- *speech and language difficulties* – students with speech difficulties often struggle to communicate in classroom settings, both with the teacher and with their colleagues or with other members of the community they live in.
- *personality differences* – personality traits like extraversion, agreeableness or openness can significantly influence the quality of the student-teacher relationship. The solution would be for the educators to recognize and understand these personality traits and find a healthy balance that would improve the classroom climate.
- *experiencing information overload* – too much stimulation or information can sometimes make it difficult to listen with full attention. Especially for migrants or refugees who might have other daily concerns or responsibilities, too much information given during classes can make them lose interest. One solution might be for the teacher to focus on the relevant information and make sure that the main ideas are well-understood by everyone in the classroom.
- *mundane teaching* – eliminating blackboard and chalk teaching. One way to overcome this barrier is by making the classes more interactive and even by incorporating technology like certain devices or applications that can make the educational process more interesting.
- *discrimination in the classroom* – working migrants or refugees often have a hard time adjusting to their new home. Yet, many of them sometimes face discrimination from their classmates and even staff. This can instil a bad attitude towards school and their colleagues, which reflects in their schoolwork. Often, the teachers might not understand the migrant's struggles and might misinterpret their behavior.
- *the level of education* – it is common for families to move to other countries so they can find a better life for their children. Sometimes, migrants have to choose between getting an education and getting paid, so they can struggle quite a lot with their classes. At the same time, the people who are overqualified but are forced to accept jobs that do not allow them to use their competencies can feel frustrated and can become less motivated to participate in the classroom activities.
- *peer pressure* – this factor can also create communication problems, especially when it maximizes the difference between the educator and the rest of the classroom. Students might refuse to build relationships with their teachers in order to maintain a certain reputation. Experts

advise that the best way to combat communication difficulties resulting from peer pressure is by rewarding positive behavior.

Strategies used to teach working migrants and refugees

The quality of the training offered by teachers who work with multicultural and multilingual groups depends on their capacity to incorporate new tools and teaching methods into their training course. That is why they must constantly develop new competences, especially digital competences since they will need to learn how to use e-learning platforms or other tools and methods that incorporate open educational resources.

Another solution would be to promote inclusive, multicultural education that can allow every student to have the same learning opportunities as his/her classmates, despite factors like gender, race, nationality, financial status, religious beliefs or educational level. Multicultural education refers to any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, habits, celebration days, cooking, texts, values, beliefs and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. This approach can make the participants more interested in the classroom and the educational process more efficient.

Also, the role of the teacher as a facilitator among migrants who come from different cultures is extremely important since a blended-learning approach should be used. A good number of experts in education have said that this is one of the most effective ways to teach mixed groups of migrants and refugees. Teachers should develop social and civic competences that are necessary, which will contribute to better preparation of the classes. Experts suggest that they should incorporate classes that promote equity, diversity and inclusion approaches and also to involve technology into the learning process. For example, the MASELTOV project, which used as its objective the potential of using smartphones to assist newly arrived immigrants in Europe – moving around, learning the language, connecting with potential sources of support etc – an app that will allow migrants to adjust better and help them tackle everyday tasks more efficiently.

Another project implemented successfully is ADMIRE, an Erasmus + project. The main objective was to design, test and implement a new Migrant Integration Expert Curriculum and to provide digital tools for those working in adult and community education settings. So they could offer migrant support staff for the people who face certain difficulties like lack of knowledge in the political system of their host country or the existence of a wide network gap between immigrant and local communities.

The countries in the northern part of the European Union have developed the concept of "learn at work", which is more effective than the traditional adult

teaching approach. Experts advise that this method may be more effective since it allows the participant to learn and not only listen to the information presented.

Another highly effective strategy that can be used to help working migrants and refugees obtain faster results in learning a new language and adapting to a new culture is by offering educational support through local community voluntarism. This kind of learning-teaching strategy would give adult migrants a chance to develop personal social competences, in order to create a new social network and, most importantly, to feel welcomed by their new community. Experts suggest using non-formal education measures to reduce the social distance between migrants and other members of their communities and will encourage employability among these vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, the most effective strategies to be used to teach working migrants and refugees are:

- the use of e-learning platforms or other tools and methods that incorporate open educational resources,
- a blended-learning approach,
- the use of technology and different applications that could facilitate the learning of a new language or elements of a new culture (*e.g.* the MASELTOV app – Mapp),
- "Learning at work" – educational services embedded in their everyday work activities and mixed with frontal lessons,
- offering support through local community voluntarism – members of the community can help migrants integrate better by volunteering to help them acquire knowledge on different topics like culture, language and customs,
- community-based training for migrants described by accessible education and counselling based on the needs of the community the migrants reside in, including their level of education.

Conclusions

OCED have all expressed a considerable desire for transforming this society into a globalized one that can raise up the economy and ensure performance in education. Important changes require asking questions regarding the process, policy and politics that can influence multicultural and multilingual education.

Experts in adult education suggest that one of the main goals of adult migrant education policies should refer to two main aspects: equal access to the adult education sector and early dropout prevention.

Therefore, the system of adult education for migrant workers and refugees has to be flexible and adaptable to different migrant needs, characteristics and levels of education.

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TEACHERS WORKING WITH MIGRANTS AND/OR REFUGEES. A COMPARATIVE STUDY

MAGDALENA IORGA

Introduction

Confirming Eurostat statistics, in 2016, most asylum seekers in European countries were younger than 35 years. The average is important, because migrants should be integrated from many points of view (socially and professionally). So, it is desirable to guide and motivate them to join professional training or university programs and to support them, so they can acquire additional educational knowledge.

Because some of the migrants spend an important amount of time at language schools (mandatory after getting their residence permit), some of them have difficulties in joining these educational programs. That is why specialists have pointed out the necessity of e-learning opportunities and use of digital solutions. Sometimes, extra didactic materials or the necessity to create new digital tools for students to reach their needs is seen as an important extra effort and investment of time. A study from Wette (2011) confirmed the necessity of ensuring that teachers have sufficient time, resources and independence for them to be able to devise appropriate materials for their classes.

Research conducted by Schreieck *et al.* (2017) revealed that migrants prefer video and audio recordings as e-learning material. The study showed that migrants enrolled in language courses declared that they also consult other sources of learning, such as YouTube registered lessons. They also use the Internet when going to markets or installing apps to learn the language.

According to Pulinx et al. (2017), teachers working in state schools, who strongly adhere to monolingualism, showed lower expectations regarding their students, "but not their own ability to teach, which may result in lower educational outcomes." On the other hand, some studies proved that multilingualism is a potentially positive asset in general.

Some of the authors and educational policy makers highlighted the importance of social media channels and online sites in providing training to migrants and refugees (AbuJarour and Krasnova, 2017). For example, in Germany, there are many universities and educational institutions that offer special courses for this category to get them enrolled in the educational system or for a specialized job.

In their research, Conteh and Brock (2011) sustained the idea that "teachers are required to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes to construct inclusive learning environments by valuing the pupils' home languages, cultures and identities as well as fostering *safe spaces*" and allow students to use their home language and to work in the new language.

Research

Research was conducted on teachers working with migrants or refugees, in eight different countries. An online questionnaire was constructed especially for this study and gathered socio-demographic and job-related data.

Several sections were constructed. Some items focused on the academic relationship with international adult learners and some questions investigated teachers' opinion about the difficulties encountered by migrants. The Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) by Trigwell and Prosser (2004) was also applied.

Socio-demographic data

Most adult educators were females (63.6%), in a relationship (77.3%), from urban areas (84.8%) and were born in the country they worked in (87.9%). Only a minority of the respondents were not born in the country they worked in (12.1%), came from a mixed family (13.6%) and have a mixed family (15.1%). Details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic data*

Variable	Levels	N	%
Gender	Female	42	63.6
	Male	23	34.8
	I prefer not to say	1	1.5
Relationship status	Single	15	22.7
	In a relationship	51	77.3
Environment	Rural	10	15.2
	Urban	56	84.8
Work country	Lithuania	9	13.6
	Belgium	1	1.5
	Romania	12	18.2
	Austria	1	1.5
	Spain	15	22.7
	Italy	9	13.6
	Greece	4	6.1
	Cyprus	13	19.7
	United Kingdom	1	1.5
	Belgium & Italy	1	1.5

Variable	Levels	N	%
Nationality	Lithuanian	7	10.6
	Belgian	1	1.5
	Romanian	11	16.7
	Austrian	1	1.5
	Spanish	15	22.7
	Italian	10	15.2
	Greek	5	1.5
	Cypriot	10	1.5
	British	1	1.5
	Russian	1	1.5
	American	1	1.5
	Chinese	1	1.5
	Not declared	2	3
I was born in the country I work in	No	8	12.1
	Yes	558	87.9
I come from a mixed family	No	57	86.4
	Yes	9	13.6
I have a mixed family	No	56	84.8
	Yes	10	15.2

Professional data

The adult educators in our sample had a mean teaching experience of (16.83±12.33), but a lower mean experience in teaching multicultural adult learners (9.89±8.70).

Many of the respondents took a specialized course in teaching skills (75.8%) but did not attend a training program in teaching migrants and/or refugees (69.7%). Half of the participants (50%) took the training program in an NGO, association or foundation. More than half of the participants taught both categories – migrant and refugees (57.6%), while only a minority dealt only with refugees (1.5%).

Most adult educators had higher education degrees (87.9%). 68.2% of the participants taught in English, 65.2% taught in the language of the host country, and 15.2% taught in the adult learners' language. All the participants (100%) taught adults, but a part of them also taught children (13.6%), teenagers (28.8%) and seniors (27.3%). Details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Professional data

Variable	Levels	N	%
Type of activity			
I teach in	English	45	68.2
	The language of the host country	43	65.2
	Adult learners' language	10	15.2

Variable	Levels	N	%
Adult learners' age	Children	9	13.6
	Teenagers	19	28.8
	Adults	66	100.0
	Seniors	18	27.3
Graduate of	High-school degree	8	12.1
	Higher education	58	87.9
Basic profession			
Specialized course in teaching skills	No	16	24.2
	Yes	50	75.8
Teaching experience (M±SD)	16.83 (±12.33)	Min 0, max 50	
Experience in teaching multicultural adult learners (M±SD)	9.89 (±8.70)	Min 1, max 40	
I teach	Migrants	27	40.9
	Refugees	1	1.5
	Both categories	38	57.6
I attended a training program in teaching migrants and/or refugees	No	46	69.7
	Yes	20	30.3
I took a training program in a	Higher education institution	16	24.2
	NGO, association, foundation	33	50.0

Relationships with international adult learners

All (100%) of the adult educators in our sample declared that they were interested in cultural diversity, and a vast majority of them (97%) learnt a lot from their adult learners (cultural aspects).

Most of them (78.8%) performed their activity in a formal setting / classroom and were interested in memorizing the adult learners' names (90.9%). Close to half (48.5%) of our participants stated that they noticed cultural / religious / ethnic conflicts among the adult learners in their class. Few of the adult educators declared that they had conflicts with some adult learners (19.7%), have been verbally assaulted / threatened (7.6%) and physically assaulted by at least one adult learner (4.5%). Details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Relationship with international adult learners

Variable	Levels	N	%
I am interested in cultural diversity.	No	0	0.0
	Yes	66	100
I learn a lot from my adult learners (cultural aspects).	No	2	3.0
	Yes	64	97.0
The didactic activity takes place in a formal setting / classroom	No	14	21.2
	Yes	52	78.8
I try to memorize the adult learners' names.	No	6	9.1

	Yes	60	90.9
I have established close relationships with some of my adult learners.	No	7	10.6
	Yes	59	89.4
I have been asked by the adult learners for individual meetings for further explanations.	No	11	16.7
	Yes	55	83.3
Adult learners confide to me about their difficulties in academic and cultural adaptation.	No	5	7.6
	Yes	61	92.4
I provide support to adult learners outside the school program regarding their difficulties.	No	18	27.3
	Yes	48	72.7
I have noticed cultural / religious / ethnic conflicts among the adult learners in my classes.	No	34	51.5
	Yes	32	48.5
Sometimes I feel that my adult learners do not respect me.	No	62	93.9
	Yes	4	6.1
Sometimes the attitude of the adult learners towards me seems offensive.	No	59	89.4
	Yes	7	10.6
I feel uncomfortable when the adult learners speak their mother tongue in class.	No	53	80.3
	Yes	13	19.7
I have had conflicts with some of the adult learners.	No	53	80.3
	Yes	13	19.7
I have been verbally assaulted / threatened by at least one adult learner.	No	61	92.4
	Yes	5	7.6
I have been physically assaulted by at least one adult learner.	No	63	95.5
	Yes	3	4.5

Teaching activity with adult learners

More than half (60.6%) of the adult educators strongly agreed that believed that practical activities were more effective than theoretical activities in working with adult learners. Whether their activity was hampered by the adult learners' poor command of the language of instruction, the teachers had various responses: 31.8% disagreed, 31.8% were undecided and 28.8% agreed; a small percentage either strongly agreed (3.0%) or strongly disagreed (4.5%). 92.4% of the adult educators either agreed (51.5%) or strongly agreed (40.9%) with the fact that activities done in small groups of the adult learners are more effective. Few of the participants agreed (7.6%) or strongly agreed (1.5%) with the fact that activities with the adult learners seems difficult to them. Around half of the adult educators agreed that, in their work, they noticed that adult learners with a larger social network (friends, relatives in the adoptive country) got better results (50.0%), those with a higher level of education adapted more easily to the new country (51.5), and those with previous migrant experience adapted more easily to the requirements of the host country (57.6%). However, close to half of the participants disagreed (36.4%) and strongly disagreed (9.1%) that adult learners with a better financial situation got better results. Most of the participants either agreed (56.1%) or strongly agreed (15.2%) that the difference

in adult learners' levels of training made their work more difficult. More than one third of the participants (34.8%) felt that sometimes adult learners' customs or traditions interfered with the activities in class.

Most adult educators (90.9%) declared that their work in class has changed their view of multiculturalism (agree – 53.0%, strongly agree – 37.9%). Most of the participants are satisfied: with the way their work with adult learners went (98.5%), with the way they managed to understand the habits of the adult learners (89.4%), with the punctuality of the adult learners (68.2%), with the attitude that adult learners showed towards their activities (68.1%). 66.7% disagreed with the statement that it was difficult for adult learners to interact with each other. Furthermore, 45.5% agreed and 33.3% strongly agreed that they took into consideration the cultural background of their adult learners when preparing their activities. Details are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Teaching activity with adult learners*

Variable	Levels	N	%
1. As an adult educator working with adult learners, I can have a decent life.	Strongly disagree	2	3.0
	Disagree	2	3.0
	Undecided	6	9.1
	Agree	31	47.0
	Strongly agree	25	37.9
2. My activity is more efficient when I use technological training tools.	Strongly disagree	3	4.5
	Disagree	5	7.6
	Undecided	8	12.1
	Agree	26	39.4
	Strongly agree	24	36.4
3. I believe that practical activities are more effective than theoretical activities in working with adult learners.	Strongly disagree	1	1.5
	Disagree	1	1.5
	Undecided	5	7.6
	Agree	19	28.8
	Strongly agree	40	60.6
4. My activity is hampered by my adult learners' poor command of the language of instruction.	Strongly disagree	3	4.5
	Disagree	21	31.8
	Undecided	21	31.8
	Agree	19	28.8
	Strongly agree	2	3.0
5. Activities done in small groups of adult learners are more effective.	Strongly disagree	1	1.5
	Disagree	1	1.5
	Undecided	3	4.5
	Agree	34	51.5
	Strongly agree	27	40.9

Variable	Levels	N	%
6. Classical individual work activities are more effective in working with adult learners.	Strongly disagree	3	4.5
	Disagree	19	28.8
	Undecided	19	28.8
	Agree	19	28.8
	Strongly agree	6	9.1
7. Lessons with adult learners seems difficult to me.	Strongly disagree	27	40.9
	Disagree	31	47.0
	Undecided	2	3.0
	Agree	5	7.6
	Strongly agree	1	1.5
8. In my work, I have noticed that adult learners with a larger social network (friends, relatives in the adoptive country) get better results.	Strongly disagree	1	1.5
	Disagree	5	7.6
	Undecided	12	18.2
	Agree	33	50.0
	Strongly agree	15	22.7
9. In my work, I have noticed that adult learners with a better financial situation get better results.	Strongly disagree	6	9.1
	Disagree	14	36.4
	Undecided	19	28.8
	Agree	12	18.2
	Strongly agree	5	7.6
10. In my work, I noticed that adult learners with a higher level of education adapt more easily to the new country.	Strongly disagree	2	3.0
	Disagree	4	6.1
	Undecided	12	18.2
	Agree	34	51.5
	Strongly agree	14	21.2
11. In my work, I have noticed that adult learners with previous migrant experience adapt more easily to the requirements of host country.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	2	3.0
	Undecided	14	21.2
	Agree	38	57.6
	Strongly agree	12	18.2
12. In my work, I have noticed that adult learners usually interact with other adult learners from the same country or with the same cultural background.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	1	1.5
	Undecided	6	9.1
	Agree	38	57.6
	Strongly agree	21	31.8
13. In my experience, most adult learners integrate in the host country.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	7	10.6
	Undecided	17	25.8
	Agree	36	54.5
	Strongly agree	6	9.1

Variable	Levels	N	%
14. I believe that the support services provided to adult learners facilitate their integration.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	2	3.0
	Undecided	9	13.6
	Agree	38	57.6
	Strongly agree	17	25.8
15. The fact that my adult learners have different levels of training makes my work more difficult.	Strongly disagree	3	4.5
	Disagree	11	16.7
	Undecided	5	7.6
	Agree	37	56.1
	Strongly agree	10	15.2
16. Sometimes adult learners' customs or traditions interfere with the activities in class.	Strongly disagree	5	7.6
	Disagree	25	37.9
	Undecided	13	19.7
	Agree	21	31.8
	Strongly agree	2	3.0
17. My work in class has changed my view of multiculturalism.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	2	3.0
	Undecided	4	6.1
	Agree	35	53.0
	Strongly agree	25	37.9
18. In general, I am satisfied with the way my work with adult learners goes.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	0	0.0
	Undecided	1	1.5
	Agree	32	48.5
	Strongly agree	33	50.0
19. I am satisfied with the communication I have with my adult learners.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	0	0.0
	Undecided	1	1.5
	Agree	37	56.1
	Strongly agree	28	42.4
20. I am satisfied with the way I manage to understand the habits of the adult learners.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	1	1.5
	Undecided	6	9.1
	Agree	34	51.5
	Strongly agree	25	37.9
21. I am satisfied with the punctuality of the adult learners.	Strongly disagree	1	1.5
	Disagree	7	10.6
	Undecided	13	19.7
	Agree	33	50.0
	Strongly agree	12	18.2

Variable	Levels	N	%
22. I am satisfied with the attitude that the adult learners show towards my activities.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	0	0.0
	Undecided	3	4.5
	Agree	44	66.7
	Strongly agree	19	28.8
23. I prefer frontal interaction in my work with the adult learners.	Strongly disagree	5	7.6
	Disagree	6	9.1
	Undecided	10	15.2
	Agree	36	54.5
	Strongly agree	9	13.6
24. I prefer interactive activities in my work with the adult learners.	Strongly disagree	1	1.5
	Disagree	5	7.6
	Undecided	5	7.6
	Agree	29	43.9
	Strongly agree	26	39.4
25. I prefer the teacher-to-adult-learners flow of information (*e.g.* workshop, presentation) in my work with the adult learners.	Strongly disagree	2	3.0
	Disagree	11	16.7
	Undecided	9	13.6
	Agree	35	53.0
	Strongly agree	9	13.6
26. I prefer the adult learner-to-teacher flow of information (*e.g.* workshop, presentation) in my work with adult learners.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	8	12.1
	Undecided	11	16.7
	Agree	35	53.0
	Strongly agree	12	18.2
27. I prefer the adult learner to adult learner flow of information (e.g., chat, discussion forum, colloquium) in my work with the adult learners.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Disagree	6	9.1
	Undecided	9	13.6
	Agree	34	51.5
	Strongly agree	17	25.8
28. It is difficult for my adult learners to interact with each other.	Strongly disagree	7	10.6
	Disagree	44	66.7
	Undecided	7	10.6
	Agree	6	9.1
	Strongly agree	2	3.0
29. When I prepare my activities, I take into consideration the cultural background of my adult learners.	Strongly disagree	2	3.0
	Disagree	8	12.
	Undecided	4	6.1
	Agree	30	45.5
	Strongly agree	22	33.3

Difficulties encountered by international adult learners

According to approximatively a quarter of the adult educators in our sample, they believe that it is difficult for the adult learners to actively participate in lectures / tutorials / labs (25.8%), to understand local customs & habits (24.2%), to deal with community discrimination (28.8%) and hostility of the local people (21.2%), to deal with colleagues' bullying (25.8%), use local transport (21.2%) and access quality medical services (25.8%). Close to a third of our participants considered it was difficult for the adult learners to communicate in the language of instruction (37.9%), to integrate in the community (31.8%), to make friends (33.3%) and to and deal with living arrangements (36.4%). Half of the adult educators believed it was difficult for the adult learners to deal with loneliness (47.0%) and to find employment (50.0%). Details are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Difficulties encountered by international adult learners

Variable	Levels	N	%
Communication in the language of instruction	Very difficult	3	4.5
	Difficult	25	37.9
	Neutral	21	31.8
	Easy	15	22.7
	Very easy	2	3.0
Active participation in lectures / tutorials / labs	Very difficult	1	1.5
	Difficult	17	25.8
	Neutral	21	31.8
	Easy	23	34.8
	Very easy	4	6.1
Understanding local customs & habits	Very difficult	0	0.0
	Difficult	16	24.2
	Neutral	26	39.4
	Easy	23	34.8
	Very easy	1	1.5
Community discrimination	Very difficult	9	13.6
	Difficult	19	28.8
	Neutral	32	48.5
	Easy	6	9.1
	Very easy	0	0.0
Hostility of the local people	Very difficult	10	15.2
	Difficult	14	21.2
	Neutral	30	45.5
	Easy	12	18.2
	Very easy	0	0.0

Variable	Levels	N	%
Colleagues' bullying	Very difficult	12	18.2
	Difficult	17	25.8
	Neutral	29	43.9
	Easy	5	7.6
	Very easy	3	4.5
Community integration	Very difficult	3	4.5
	Difficult	21	31.8
	Neutral	25	37.9
	Easy	16	24.2
	Very easy	1	1.5
Loneliness	Very difficult	12	18.2
	Difficult	31	47.0
	Neutral	18	27.3
	Easy	4	6.1
	Very easy	1	1.5
Making friends	Very difficult	0	0.0
	Difficult	22	33.3
	Neutral	18	27.3
	Easy	22	33.3
	Very easy	4	6.1
Living arrangements	Very difficult	13	19.7
	Difficult	24	36.4
	Neutral	18	27.3
	Easy	11	16.7
	Very easy	0	0.0
Employment	Very difficult	18	27.3
	Difficult	33	50.0
	Neutral	10	15.2
	Easy	5	7.6
	Very easy	0	0.0
Local transport	Very difficult	4	6.1
	Difficult	14	21.2
	Neutral	20	30.3
	Easy	28	42.4
	Very easy	0	0.0
Adapting to the climate of the host country	Very difficult	0	0.0
	Difficult	6	9.1
	Neutral	23	34.8
	Easy	25	37.9
	Very easy	12	18.2

Variable	Levels	N	%
Keeping eating habits from the country of origin	Very difficult	1	1.5
	Difficult	13	19.7
	Neutral	21	31.8
	Easy	27	40.9
	Very easy	4	6.1
Access to quality medical services	Very difficult	2	3.0
	Difficult	17	25.8
	Neutral	22	33.3
	Easy	15	22.7
	Very easy	10	15.2

Approaches to Teaching Inventory

The Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) is an instrument developed by Trigwell and Prosser (2004) "to measure the key variations between an information transmission/teacher focused view of teaching and a conceptual change/student-focused view of teaching" (p. 415). It consists of 16 items designed to measure to two of the above-mentioned dimensions: (1) an information transmission/teacher focused approach to teaching and (1) a conceptual change/student-focused approach to teaching.

In our sample, the mean for the first approach is 24.36 (±5.91), with a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 39. For the second approach, the mean is 27.96 (±5.38), with a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 40.

According to Trigwell and Prosser (2004), teachers adopt one of the two approaches, depending on the context. The first approach (information transmission/teacher focused view of teaching – IFFT) is chosen when teachers (a) feel that there is no real commitment to student learning in their department and (b) they do not have control over what is taught. The second approach (conceptual change/student-focused – CCSF) is chosen when teachers feel that (a) there is a proper workload, (b) student characteristics are sufficiently homogeneous, (c) students are at the appropriate academic level, (d) the size of the class is not too large, and (e) they have some control over what is taught.

Statistical analysis of data

To analyze the data, we employed several statistical methods: *Spearman correlations, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVAs and chi square tests.* The analysis revealed some important results which are detailed according to the tests used.

The correlational analyses revealed several positive correlations between teaching activities (items from the 4th section of our instrument) and the ATI (6th part of our instrument):

- The stronger adult educators believed that their activity was more efficient when using technological training tools, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.345, p=.005).
- The stronger adult educators believed that practical activities were more effective than theoretical activities in working with adult learners, the more student-focused they were (r=.282, p=.022).
- The stronger adult educators believed that their activity was hampered by adult learners' poor command of the language of instruction, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.393, p=.001).
- The stronger adult educators believed that activities done in small groups of adult learners were more effective, the more student-focused they were (r=.328, p=.007).
- The stronger adult educators believed that classical individual work activities were more effective in working with adult learners, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.314, p=.010).
- The stronger adult educators believed that the activity with adult learners seemed difficult to them, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.319, p=.009).
- The stronger adult educators believed that adult learners with a larger social network get better results, the more student-focused they were (r=.253, p=.041).
- The stronger adult educators believed that adult learners with a higher level of education adapted more easily to the new country, the more teacher-oriented they were (r=.300, p=.015).
- The stronger adult educators believed that adult learners usually interact with other adult learners from the same country or with the same cultural background, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.357, p=.003).
- The stronger adult educators believed that the fact that adult learners had different levels of training, which made their work more difficult, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.333, p=.006).
- The more satisfied adult educators were with the way their work with adult learners went, the more student focused they were (r=.254, p=.040).
- The stronger adult educators preferred frontal interaction in their work with adult learners, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.291, p=.018).
- The stronger adult educators preferred the teacher-to-adult-learners flow of information in their work with adult learners, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.575, p<.001).
- The stronger adult educators preferred the adult learner-to-teacher flow of information in their work with adult learners, the more student-focused they were (r=.316, p=.010).

- The stronger adult educators preferred the adult learner to adult learner flow of information in their work with adult learners, the more student-focused they were (r=.357, p=.003).
- The stronger adult educators believed that it was difficult for their adult learners to interact with each other, the more teacher-focused they were (r=.329, p=.007)

The correlational analyses also revealed two negative correlations among teaching activities (items from the 4th section of our instrument) and the ATI (6th part of our instrument)

- The stronger adult educators believed that adult learners with a better financial situation got better results, the less student-focused they were (r=-.270).
- The more satisfied adult educators were with the way their work with adult learners went, the less teacher focused they were (r=.254, p=.040).

Furthermore, the correlational analyses revealed two correlations (one positive and one negative) between difficulties encountered by international adult learners (items from the 5th section of our instrument) and the ATI (6th part of our instrument).

- Positive correlation: The stronger adult educators believed it was difficult for international adult learners to actively participate in lectures / tutorials / labs, the more student-focused they were (r=.375, p=.002).
- Negative correlation: The stronger adult educators believed it was difficult for international adult learners to integrate in the community, the less teacher-focused they were (r=-.271, p=.028).

Both positive and negative correlations were found between age and items from the 4th and 5th sections of our instrument. The positive correlations were as follows:

- The older participants were the stronger group; they noticed that adult learners with a better financial situation got better results (r=.249, p=.044).
- The older participants were the stronger group; they believed that adult learners have different levels of training, which made their work more difficult (r=.345, p=.005).
- The older participants were the stronger group; they believed that adult learners' customs or traditions interfered with the activities in class (r=.267, p=.030).
- The older participants were the more difficult group; they thought it was difficult for adult learners to use local transport (r=.419, p<.001).
- The older participants were the more difficult group; they thought it was for adult learners to access quality medical services (r=.247, p=.045).

The negative correlations were the following:

- The younger the adult educators were the stronger group; they believed that their work in class changed their view on multiculturalism (r=-.318, p=.009).
- The younger the adult educators were, the more satisfied they were with the punctuality of the adult learners (r=-.316, p=.010).
- The younger the adult educators were, the stronger they preferred frontal interaction in their work with the adult learners (r=-.351, p=.004).
- The younger participants were, the more difficult they believed it was for the adult learners to communicate in the language of instruction (r=-.268, p=.029).
- The younger participants were, the more difficult they believed it was for the adult learners to actively participate in lectures/tutorials/labs (r=-.282, p=.022).
- The younger participants were, the more difficult they believed it was for the adult learners to make friends (r=-.254, p=.040).

The adult educators who were single had higher scores on the CCSF approach of the ATI (M=30.93) compared to those who were in a relationship (M=27.09): t (64) = 2.522, p=.014. In other words, the single participants were more student-focused than those who had a life partner.

The adult educators who did not perform their activity within a formal setting/classroom had higher scores on the CCSF approach of the ATI (M=30.50) compared to those who taught in a formal setting/classroom (M=27.28): t(64) = 2.207, p=.047. More specifically, the adult educators who taught in less formal settings were more student-focused than those who taught in formal settings.

The adult educators who did not try to memorize the students' names had higher scores on the CCSF approach of the ATI (M=32.66) than those who tried to memorize the students' names (M=27.50): t (64) = 2.314, p=.024. More explicitly, the adult educators who did not try to learn their students' names were more student-focused than those who reported trying to remember the names of their students. This result can be explained by the fact that the number of adult educators who did not try to memorize the students' names is much lower than those who made the effort.

The adult educators who felt their students did not respect them had higher scores on the ITTF approach of the ATI (M=32.00) compared to those who did not experience that feeling (M=23.87): t (64) = -2.803, p=.007. Concretely, the adult educators who felt that their students did not respect them were more teacher-focused than those who did not feel that way.

The participants who strongly agreed that their activity was more efficient when they used technological training tools had higher scores on the ITTF (M=26.70) compared to those who strongly disagreed (M=14.66): F (4,61)=4.706, p=.002. More clearly, the adult educators who strongly agreed

that their activity was more efficient when they used technological training tools are more teacher-focused compared to those who strongly disagree.

The participants who strongly agreed that their activity was hampered by the adult learners' poor command of the language of instruction had higher scores on the ITTF (M=38.00) compared to those who strongly disagreed (M=20.00): $F_{(4,61)}=5.949$, p<.001. Specifically, the first category was more teacher-focused than the latter.

The adult educators who strongly agreed that the adult learners with a better financial situation got better results had higher scores on the ITTF (M=30.80) compared to those who strongly disagreed (M=19.66): $F_{(4,61)} = 3.017$, p=.025. More explicitly, the adult educators from the first category were more teacher-focused than those from the second category.

The adult educators who strongly agreed that the differences in their adult learners' training level, which made their work more difficult, had higher scores on the ITTF (M=27.60) compared to those who strongly disagreed (M=14.66): $F_{(4, 61)} = 4.097$, p=.005. The participants from the first category were more teacher-focused than those from the second category.

The participants who strongly agreed that the adult learners' customs or traditions interfere with the activities in the classroom had higher scores on the ITTF (M=35.00) compared to those who strongly disagreed (M=19.20): $F_{(4, 61)} = 3.526$, p=.012. The adult educators from the first category were more teacher-focused than those from the second category.

The adult educators who strongly agreed that they preferred frontal interactions in their work with the adult learners had higher scores on the ITTF (M=26.55) compared to those who strongly disagreed (M=16.00): $F_{(4,61)} = 4.034$, p=.006. The participants who had a strong preference for frontal interaction were more teacher-focused than those who strongly disagreed.

The adult educators who strongly agreed that they preferred the teacher-to-student flow of information had higher scores on the ITTF (M=30.00) compared to those who agreed (M=25.40), those who were undecided (M=21.11), those who disagreed (M=21.72) and those who strongly disagreed (M=10.00): $F_{(4,61)} = 10.153$, p<.001. The participants who had a strong preference for the teacher-to-student flow of information were more teacher oriented.

The adult educators who strongly agreed that it was difficult for the adult learners to interact with each other had higher scores on the ITTF (M=35.50) compared to those who strongly disagreed (M=18.28) and those who agreed (M=27.33): $F_{(4,61)} = 4.993$, p=.002. The participants who strongly believed that it was difficult for adult learners to interact with each other were more teacher-focused than those who strongly disagreed and those who agreed.

The adult educators who strongly agreed that they took into consideration the cultural background of their adult learners had higher scores on the ITTF (M=26.18) compared to those who agreed (M=23.90), those who were undecided

(M=27.25), those who disagreed (M=23.25) and those who strongly disagreed (M=10.00): F (4,61) = 4.700, p = .002. The participants who strongly agreed that they took into consideration the cultural background of their adult learners were more teacher oriented.

The female adult educators (51.6%) were more likely than the male adult educators (48.4%) when it came to noticing cultural/religious/ethnic conflicts among the adult learners in class (chi square = 4.382, df = 1, p = .036).

The adult educators teaching in urban areas (88.3%) were more likely to try to memorize their students' names than those teaching in rural areas (11.7%): chi square = 6.235, df = 1, p = .013. However, this result must be interpreted with caution, given that the number of the participants who teach in rural areas is smaller than the one who teach in urban areas.

The adult educators who took a training program in an NGO, association or foundation (56%) were more likely to have also taken a specialized course in teaching skills than those who took a training program in a higher education institution (28%) or who did not take a training program (16%): chi square = 7.787, df = 2, p = .020.

The profile of the adult educator

More than half of the adult educators were females, in a relationship, from urban areas and were born in the country they worked in. The female adult educators were more likely than the male adult educators to notice cultural/religious/ethnic conflicts among their adult learners in class.

The mean teaching experience of the participants was around 17 years. At the same time, they also had experience in teaching multicultural adult learners (with a mean of 10 years). Most of the adult educators also took specialized courses in teaching skills. However, relatively few of them attend a training program in teaching migrants and/or refugees. Most of the adult educators had higher education degrees and taught in English and/or the language of the host country. All the participants taught adults, while only a part of them also taught children, teenagers and/or seniors.

All the adult educators were interested in cultural diversity, and a vast majority of them learnt a great deal from their adult learners. Most of their activity took place in a formal setting / classroom and were interested in memorizing the adult learners' names. The adult educators also noticed cultural / religious / ethnic conflicts among the adult learners in their class. Usually, they did not have conflicts with the adult learners.

The adult educators believed that practical activities were more effective than theoretical activities in working with their adult learners. For the most part, they did not find their activity with adult learners to be difficult. Half of them noticed that the adult learners with a larger social network, a higher level of

education and a better financial situation are advantaged. Most of them believed that the difference in the adult learners' levels of training made their work more difficult. For many of the adult educators, their work in class changed their view of multiculturalism. Most of them were satisfied with various aspects of their work such as: the way their work with adult learners went, the way they managed to understand the habits of the adult learners, the punctuality of the adult learners and the attitude of the adult learners towards their activities. The adult educators also took into consideration the cultural background of their adult learners when preparing their activities.

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A TRANSCULTURAL APPROACH RELATED TO ACTIVITIES WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AS MEDIATORS. SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS IN A MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

IRINA CROITORU

Introduction

Over the years, it has been observed that the activity with international students means not only teaching various disciplines by the University staff, including elements related to language, but also teaching and presenting aspects related to the said language's culture and understanding.

At the "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iaşi, within the faculties of Medicine and Dental Medicine are hundreds of international students. Some of them are enrolled in the section dedicated to the studies in French, and others are enrolled in the English-teaching section.

As it was expected, some major differences can be observed between the two foreign speaking sections. For example, in the case of the English section, most students originate from Israel, while the rest originate from various European countries, and only but a small percentage from Asia. On the other hand, within the French section, many students come from the African continent, the top countries of origin including Morocco and Tunisia but also from the European continent, with the occasional students originating from France and Belgium.

A reason for choosing Romania, and especially Iaşi for the higher education, is because the Romanian people often speak very good foreign languages, given the international exposure over the centuries. For several centuries, the French influence on Romanian culture has had a great impact, both at the language level (being the *lingua franca*) as well as the cultural level.

Furthermore, it was often the case imposed by the higher society for important representatives in Romanian history to study abroad, mostly in France (and in Italian or German-speaking countries). These personalities had a major impact once they returned home from their foreign exposure, since they returned with an open-minded mentality and relatively up-to-date know-how in various fields (medicine and chemistry, various brands of industry, civil and political science fields etc.). Such was the case more than a century ago with the most renowned Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, the writer Emil Cioran, the playwright Eugen Ionescu and many others.

On the other hand, we noticed that in some of the cases of the students from Israel, they seem to have chosen Romania because their parents studied here and influenced the decision of the young people or they have close relatives studying here, including siblings (*i.e.* brothers, sisters or cousins). In the long run, they will feel better when they have their friends and part of the family with them.

The international students at the "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iaşi come from no less than 75 countries, according to the latest statistics. It is an essential role to integrate these students as much as possible, so that their academic exposure is not affected in major ways.

Therefore, the main goal in the short, medium and long term is to have the newcomers adjust slowly and efficiently in the culture of the host country. Over the years, specialists have tried their best to find optimal ways of integrating migrants. The migrants first encounter their new culture through verbal and written communication. In the case of the international students, these seem to be exposed initially to the verbal communication everywhere they go (whether formal or informal environments) and much less to the written communication, at least in the initial stage.

A clear definition can be encountered at Riley, in his *Discourse and Learning*, where he defines communication as "a process whereby we create, negotiate and interpret personal meanings" (Riley, 1985).

Risager (2007) sustained that the main idea of the transcultural approach is that in the modern world cultures are mixed due to migration, tourism and globalisation. For example, it is known all over the world that Romanians speak good foreign languages, while in Italy or Germany, they speak fewer foreign languages.

Sir Edward Burnett Tylor was the anthropologist who wrote *Primitive culture* (1871) and gave the following first clear cut definition of culture: "that the complex whole includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Brown sustained that culture and language are "intricately intertwined". (Brown, 2000) All professors teaching languages teach at the same time the culture of the language taught, because they constantly refer to examples from that specific country (whether or not comparing for similarities and differences with the country from where the student comes from), and then they must explain why the person reacted in such a way (through verbal expressions or gestures).

Another issue is the idea of interpreting the various elements from both the native perspective (*i.e.* the professor's experience and background) as well as the person receiving the information (who might come from a similar or contradicting culture and background).

The fascinating aspect is that habits, gestures and expressions differ across countries, especially those who are highly different and exposed to various elements. It does help with understanding in the long run if the students are encouraged to bring examples (in forms of case studies) from their countries and interpret the facts in their way, while at the same time involving the rest of the class in a debate, in an attempt to achieve group cohesion. This is the way in which the transcultural approach is applied. Each migrant/student faces the same action but maybe he/she in other ways interprets differently depending on the country (and family exposure) they come from.

An interesting point is underlined by Claire Kramsch "If [...] language is seen as a social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed as enabling language proficiency... Culture in language teaching is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing" (Kramsch, 1993)

Elements of culture

The most important elements of culture are:

a) Social organization – In many cultures there is someone in charge, who leads the group and the rest of the persons. In some countries what the mother/father (*i.e.* head of the family) say must be done and obeyed. In other countries, the age factor (*i.e.* the oldest individual) in the family is the decisive element.

b) Customs – Included here are values and traditions (*e.g.* Christmas, Easter, Hanuka, Mother's day etc.), social standards etc. Some examples from Romania include: Romanian children go on *Christmas* day to sing carols to the neighbours. In return, they receive sweets, fruits and occasionally money (symbolic coins); on the last day of the year, the children again visit their neighbours and wish them a better and prosperous New Year by means of a poem; *Easter*: the Romanians paint Easter eggs with various vibrant colours, with specific models representing the cross, leaves and flowers; *Mărțișor:* typical of the Slavic exposed cultures, on the 1st of March the women in the family and close social networks receive from men a small ornament tied with red and white string (accompanied occasionally by spring-related flowers). The women wear it the whole month of March pinned on their clothes. The combination of red and white represents the duality of life (signified by the colour of blood) and death/resurrection/purity (represented by the white element). The ornament is hand-made in most villages. At the end of the month, the ornament is tied to a tree branch; Romanians have a similar tradition to Saint Valentine, nationally known under the name of

Dragobete, with a love story presented from a local point of view) and is celebrated on February 24th.

c) Religion – Students who come from different parts of the world and have different religions (Orthodox Christians, Catholic Christians, Adventist Christians, Muslims etc), attend church on Sunday, while others go to church on Saturday but Sunday they work. For example, in Romania we avoid making the students sit for exams on Sundays, because some of the students attend church. During the academic year the students have different celebrations, but they need to adapt to the university program. Ramadan is very important for Muslim students and this sometimes affects their classes because they pay no attention, or they have no energy in class, because they had not eaten for a long period of time, and this has been observed too often in the case of the classes scheduled in the late afternoon.

d) Language – In terms of language, we can group the students belonging to the major branches, namely: Romance languages (Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Romanian), Germanic languages (German, English, Swedish, Norwegian), Arabic languages (with students coming from different Arab-speaking countries, each having its own linguistic variation, *i.e.* Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Morocco), the Hebrew language (Israel), the Greek language (Greece) and Asian languages (Vietnam, China). Having students from all over the world, we share our culture trying to find common elements in our culture and asking them to find similarities and differences with their own. Some students, especially those coming from Israel and Vietnam, have a very difficult time with basic elements, such as handwriting and the direction of the reading. In the case of the Hebrew students, unless they come from bilingual families, the professors will most likely have to face the issue of explaining countless times that the reading and writing direction is the opposite to the students' mother tongue. In addition, it remains critical to explain, emphasise and remind the students several times during the course the importance of writing with capital letters.

A culture can be learned (the habits of the population may be learned), shared (the customs can be explained and shared to other citizens) or adopted (the customs of another culture can be learned and used furthermore). A culture is learned by the migrant/student and is shared by the teacher/Romanian student (in our case).

Ways of teaching cultures

The "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iași is trying to ease the integration of its students in Romanian student life through various Romanian language courses as well as other foreign language courses (English, German, French and, recently, even Chinese), through international

projects in which the students are directly involved and in different activities that take place at the university.

Also, the students' counsellor offers help not only to the Romanian students but also to the international students. They receive support when they cannot handle time management issues, especially when it relates to the study period, or some staff are too difficult and do not understand situations, when they have issues with colleagues or professors; even when they have a cultural problem they do not understand (and thus do not know how to react and handle a situation).

Currently, we find ourselves sinking ever more in this Coronavirus pandemic, the students seem to have developed major issues in communicating among themselves, problems related to not being able to go back home (as usual) in order to visit parents (relatives) and friends left behind. Being physically and socially isolated in a foreign country has become a major issue, and the fact that classes have been limited to the virtual environment has not eased the stress accumulated over the months. This has turned into more than a year of ever-growing isolation (during and after the traveling prohibition imposed at the local and national levels).

On the other hand, international students are learning the Romanian language and culture through exposure to music, theatre, economy and even social events like concerts (live).

On a day to day basis, teaching culture may be done through watching short movies and discussing cultural backgrounds, while bringing other examples from the students' countries. In addition, some language techniques and expressions can be dealt with. Depending on the topic discussed in class for the medical students we use movies: *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* and *Collective*.

- *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* (2007) is a drama that tells the story of two roommates that try to procure an illegal abortion in the Communist Era. Abortion was forbidden by a law from 1966, because the communist ruler of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, wanted to increase the birth rate in the country. Illegal abortions produced many deaths to women in that period. (Uricaru, 2008). At the end of the class students discuss this problem in their country and culture and how the situation has evolved in their countries over time. In some countries abortion is forbidden, and if an individual undergoes such a procedure, she most likely will end up paying for the entire procedure (in countries such as Germany) or sentenced to jail (as in the case of Malta).
- *Collective* (2019) is a movie about a huge improvised popular nightclub that ended up in flames in October 2015 in Bucharest and how the persons were treated in hospitals and how the medical system works in Romania in the case of burns. After watching this movie, the students discuss the medical system in their countries, so that they can exchange information about their

culture and knowledge in terms of the medical system and general hierarchy.

Listening to music is another way of learning a language and culture. The students can decide on their own what kind of music they like to listen to and then try to understand the words of the songs and integrate them in their culture. Sometimes they are asked to listen to various types of music (pop, folk, rock) and describe what they feel when they hear the music and do not understand everything or very few (international/English) words.

When it comes to theatre, going to see a play helps the students understand some of the gestures and discover something relevant from the local culture. Analysing the reaction of the characters and trying to better understand the lines and the language nuances can be seen as an excellent topic for debate in class.

Going to the supermarket is also a part of culture because foreign students observe some products that are also in their countries, and they have the feeling of belonging to the place. Therefore, it should always be encouraged to shop in the grocery store in person rather than online, in order to interact with the locals, while at the same time having a better grasp of basic vocabulary.

Depending on the following factors we must use different methods in teaching and explaining.

Age. The persons must be treated differently if they are adults or children. For example children do not understand notions of grammar or some specific rules of grammar. If one tries to explain the past continuous, most likely it will end up in failure.

But, they will need more practical examples to get to a level of understanding compared to adults. In our case all the students are close to their 20s (thus, they can be considered – at least from the legal point of view – adults), and they studied at least some basic forms of grammar in their own native language, so they are expected to understand more. On the other hand, the way in which the international student handles this approach (practical versus theoretical) is personal.

There are cases in which the international student (given his/her background) ends up fully immersed in the local culture due to similarities back home or given a high inclination towards that specific language.

Often, given intense socialization, international students end up dating local individuals in an attempt at perfecting their linguistic skills, given their plan to settle in the new country in the long run.

The **level of language** is an important factor in understanding the culture of a nation. If the person is a beginner, the teacher must adapt the vocabulary to an A1 or A2 level, while if one is dealing with an intermediary (B1/B2) level, it may be easier to explain, while at the same time providing further details and clarifications.

For the beginners the easiest way of learning is to start with international words, so they gain trust in themselves. They will get up the courage to talk and communicate because they now have a little vocabulary to fall back on.

The difficulty in teaching the local language relates to the fact that in some countries there is no pronoun in the neutral form, like the English *it*, or there are no varying forms when it comes to conjugating the verb. Depending on the culture the students come from and their age, these individuals possess different levels of assimilation for grammar and culture notions. In some countries, there seems to be no different/specific pronoun used in the polite form when addressing an individual.

Social status and gender roles. This relates to the fact of whether the student is a girl or a boy and if they are married or single. Girls seem to be more patient when it comes to listening to the explanation and are often braver (or curious enough) to ask for additional details, while boys seem to prefer less information and shorter details. Girls usually avoid sitting in the first rows, clustering over time in the middle seats. If students are married/engaged, they see life as a family responsibility and view life from other perspectives, while those who are still living with their parents, appear to be more childish. This, however, may not always be the case (*i.e.* exceptions can be observed in the case of students who, although are sent abroad to study, may be the first in their family who can afford this privilege and thus invest most of the energy in bettering themselves in order to return to their birth country and apply the knowledge accumulated over the years in order to contribute socially and financially to their local environment). All these factors play an essential role in the integration of the migrate/student.

Being a professor with multicultural students, different examples must be constantly explained and provided. At the same time, feedback must be received to refresh one's knowledge for future generations. This way, there appears to be a win-win situation for all parties involved, since almost everyone understands things that might be lacking in their countries or were not heard of before. Involving students in mixed teamwork (*i.e.* avoiding placing students from the same country within the same group) will bring success in their accommodation and will hopefully facilitate their integration and understanding of their new host country in the long run.

The concept of culture, language and cultural mediators

Communication is a vital element of culture. The two of them cannot exist without each other, a cultural event being a process of communication, and a mode of communication represents exposure of culture.

Nowadays interculturality occupies an important place in education, and communication has an essential role in this equation. Political, social and

economic changes, in short globalisation, have a strong impact on culture. Communication cannot be separated from culture because they are interconnected, depending on each other. Several elements are needed to create intercultural training. (Stan, 2014, pp. 22-31)

The purpose of intercultural education is to guide young people to assimilate a culture from an anthropological perspective, to understand the point of view of others through relativistic positioning, to legitimise cultural identity, prevent sacralization, ensure respect for differences but within systems of mutual attitudes. (Plugaru & Pavalache, 2007 p. 14)

Intercultural learning is essentially accepting the habits and cultures of others. Intercultural learning must take place every day, because you have something to learn daily if you are open-minded.

With the opening of the borders of the European space, new opportunities for cultural and professional development have emerged. Many individuals have migrated to better developed countries to have a chance to develop financially or intellectually, even both. In addition, it has become apparent that career promotion opportunities or educational offers are much more developed in other countries. In this context of internationalization, the population migrated, and new communities were formed, or existing ones developed over time. The creation of these communities has also brought difficulties of communication and integration, which has led to the emergence of a new profession, that of a linguistic and cultural mediator.

An example are migrants who take their children, but have problems integrating, primarily in the school they attend. Thus, these young people need an intercultural education. As Professor Constantin Cucoş argues, "intercultural education is aimed at a pedagogical approach to cultural differences, a strategy that considers spiritual or other specificities (gender difference, social or economic differences, etc.), avoiding the risks arising from the unequal exchanges among cultures or, even worse, the tendencies of atomization of cultures". as much as possible, In such a multicultural context, the teacher becomes a mediator. (Cucoş, 2002, p. 135)

The general definition of Bochner is mentioned by James Archibald and Giuliana Garzone in *Conceptualising Linguistic and Cultural Mediation*, an article published in the journal *Lingue Culture Mediazioni – Language Cultures' Mediation.* It defines the mediating person as "an individual who serves as a link between two or more cultures and social systems". Subsequently, it distinguishes two functions of the mediator: the first, in which the mediator is considered a translator and aims: "to represent one culture to another faithfully and thereby contribute to mutual understanding and accurate cross-cultural knowledge" and the second in which the mediator is considered a synthesizer and aims "to reconcile disparate culture practices, this type of mediation having special

relevance to exchange from which some action is to follow." (Archibald, 2014, pp. 7-16)

The mediator is different from the interpreter or translator. If the translator is the one who only translating (in writing) documents deriving from a variety of backgrounds, the definition supported by prof. Caiwen Wang in *Interpreters = Cultural Mediators* is the one used by the International Association of Conference Interpreters, namely that the interpreter is the one who works with the spoken terms (including double-meaning cultural expressions), while the translators are the ones who work with the written terms.

Trying to explain to the general public the term of "linguistic/cultural mediation", Franz Pöchhaker cites Wadensjö (2008). He explains the notion as "translation as mediation between languages and cultures, or between cultures and 'their' languages, is probably the default sense in which translation is equated with mediation, even when no modifier is used or when the idea of mediation is itself used as a qualifier, as in 'mediated communication' or 'interpreter-mediated encounter'" thus also providing significantly important synonyms.

The Role of the cultural mediator

To understand the role of the cultural mediator and to truly perceive language as a cultural mediator, we must understand the concept of cultural mediation. The process of cultural mediation aims to establish connections between community members at the social, linguistic and cultural level.

For mediation to take place, it is necessary to create a meeting condition for dialogue. Mediation takes place when the two key elements of the dialogue and the mediator (as a culture element) enter the scene. As the American anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir sustains, "Language cannot exist if it is isolated from the culture". (Sapir, 2016, p. 193)

Intercultural communication is very clearly defined by Professor Cucoș C. in the book *Education. Cultural and intercultural dimensions,* as "an exchange or transaction of value accompanied by the understanding of adjacent meanings, between persons or groups belonging to different cultures. Exchanges can be made at the idea, verbal, nonverbal, behavioural, physical, objective and organisational level." (Cucoș, 2000, p. 136)

Communication is used not only to make us understand (decode the message), but also to be received (seen, heard, read) and accepted (the message should not be rejected); but also to provoke a reaction (a change in perception, thinking, interpretation, attitude or behaviour). (Plugaru & Pavalache, 2007, pp. 77-78)

The translator's role is not just to represent the meaning of the term only by signs, but also to find the equivalent in the respective culture. His/Her role is a cultural and linguistic mediator, the interlinguistic and intercultural transfer

of a message from one language to another, interpretation, as well as translation, require excellent knowledge of working languages, an exceptional mastery of the extralinguistic source and target context, including solid general and specialized knowledge. These are two professions of multilingual communication, based on solid cultural and intercultural skills, but with privilege and development, one is written communication and the other, oral communication.

The mediator/translator/teacher requires not only language skills in both languages, but also writing skills in the mother tongue. In addition, scientific, legal, technical, cultural and/or intercultural skills are needed to convey the correct message, depending on the context.

One area that has been less analysed so far, but which has recently begun to become more in-depth, is mediation. It cannot just be cultural or linguistic but complementary to each other.

As stated in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, drafted by the Modern Languages Division from Strasbourg, language activities involve reception, production, interaction or mediation. Mediation can be interpretation or translation.

Translation and interpretation are mediation activities, which make it possible to communicate between two or more people who are unable to communicate with each other, for whatever reason. Language mediation activities play an important role in our society.

Italy is one of the countries with a large Romanian community, as well as Spain. There are also companies that offer cultural-linguistic mediation services for migrants. These services offered by such companies are in the following institutions: courts and prefectures, detention institutions, hospital institutions, police, public administration offices, chambers of commerce, companies, private institutions, as well as in cooperatives and non-governmental organizations.

However, despite the neutral tone adopted in this present paper, we should not ignore that the common belief underlines the old Italian adage *traduttore, traditore* (the equivalent in English being *the translator is a traitor*) from the tumultuous Medieval Ages times.

Often, the two opposing parties, in a given situation, will always have the tendency to assume that the individual undertaking of the burdensome task of interpreting is either embellishing the truth of what the other party said/claimed/stated or is willing (due to personal interests) to keep the side of the party whose language is mother tongue or very close to one's heart.

In customary judicial hearings, as is the case in the Romanian legal system, the party who is not fluent in the Romanian language is obligated by the legal procedures to undertake the costs of providing a translator certified by the Ministry of Justice. Exceptions are made when criminal proceedings are under way, and the defendant is a foreign national who, by law, is entitled to an

interpreter, in which case the Romanian Ministry of Justice is obligated to sustain the costs.

Regarding the mediating/arbitrary procedures, most of the time, it is assumed that the parties, using mutual consent, come to an agreement that is both neutral and mutual to both, with the clause (most often than not already mentioned in the legal agreements) that the costs will be sustained by the losing party (after initially being split in equal ways).

As we have seen thus far, the notion of linguistic mediation has a lot of impact on the practical side of the world, yet its impact also depends largely on the circumstances in which it is applied.

As we shall see in the division of sectors, the cultural element in this process is highly emphasised in the social element of the society, playing an even more crucial way of coordinating the main players as compared to the legal environment, where the costs, benefits and disadvantages are limited only to the few parties unable to find a mutually satisfactory solution following the economic, commercial and business links.

In terms of the social impact, the key one is felt at the whole societal level since in most cases it involves state-owned entities undertaking huge efforts to integrate the newcomers, especially teenagers and adults. The financial impact is both an opportunity to invest in future workers as well as an economic drain on the current local, regional and national budget (despite the ongoing support of the supranational organisations, such as the European Union).

The fields of activity of the linguistic-cultural mediator are the following ones:

Health sector – This includes hospitals and medical recovery centers or old people's care centers. The mediator's role is to help individuals enrol in the National Health Service, to facilitate the communication of patients with doctors or relatives with medical staff to facilitate communication between the hospital and employers of patients in other countries, to provide information materials, including hospital guidance for patients and relatives. Some hospitals in Italy offer cultural-linguistic mediation services, such as the Careggi University Hospital in Florence, Italy. Here, due to the large number of foreign patients, since 2001 a linguistic-cultural mediation service has been set up for patients who do not speak Italian and come from outside Italy. The role of this service is to facilitate communication between healthcare professionals and patients, as well as to streamline the patient care process. The hospital offers this service free of charge and is performed by qualified staff.

Legal service – Police headquarters, prisons and courts are the institutions where a mediator is needed. In the legal field, the role of the mediator consists in: accompanying migrants to different legal services, carrying out sworn translations, providing informative materials in the mother tongue and advising

the service staff on the specificities of the clients cultures of origin. This also includes providing guidance in the bureaucratic processes of obtaining documents, such as a residence permit or allowing family members access to the country.

Social service sector – Local community, Local Health Center (ASL) social services for children, adults and families. The role of the mediator is to try to welcome the non-nationals who are looking for information regarding social services and try to establish a link between them and the local, while at the same time trying to perceive and explain to both sides in plain language the variety of questions and answers of both parties. The purpose of the mediator is to ensure that the information has been received and processed, as well as the issues solved in the most natural manner possible.

Job placement office – The role of the mediator is by far the most complex in this environment since it goes beyond explaining the various legal procedures related to finding a job and ensuring that the numerous legal documents are processed and issued in a timely fashion. The multitude of tasks include, but are not limited to, explaining how a resume is organised, how different forms are completed with the relevant information, what the basic means are to ensure the legal stay in the said country/state, what the financial obligations are (*i.e.* taxes, duties etc.) related to the work, the procedure for having various documents recognised in the country of stay (such as study documents, driving licenses, etc.).

Educational sector – Childcare centers, nurseries, primary schools, middle schools and high schools. The role of the mediator is even more sensitive in this case because of the age gap that might exist between the parties involved, in addition to the potential differences that might exist both in terms of culture, as well as tradition. In this case, the mediator has to deal with representatives of the educational system in the country and with the newcomers who continue to co-exist with relatives (parents and more or less close members of the family) which may oppose (up to some point) the elements perceived as opposing (or not) the former educational system (*i.e.* the educational system in which the individual – pupil/student was previously exposed to).·

The University of Bucharest organized studies at the Master's degree entitled *Intercultural – literary and linguistic communication strategies*, which aims to familiarize students with the phenomena of multi-, trans- and interculturality. These will be deepened from a philological perspective, respectively in the field of literature and linguistics.

The "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iași has tried to help foreign students to integrate, not only linguistically, but also culturally. With the renovation of the new Modern Language headquarters in 2017, it also changed its name due to its specificity to the Center for Modern Languages and Cultural Integration (CeLI). In addition to the compulsory

Romanian language classes for foreign students from the French and English courses, there are also optional Romanian language courses, but also various cultural activities that facilitate the integration of students, such as *Sărbători ale țării mele* (Celebrations of my country) or *Clubul Intercultural de lectură* (Intercultural Reading Club). Through such manifestations, students become aware of their cultural orientation. Knowing other cultures and being forced to live together, students are sometimes compelled to make concessions in order to live in the community. There are also numerous international projects in which the members of the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Integration have been involved.

Successful European projects

Project EuroIntegrELP – Equal Chances to European Integration Through the Use of the European Language Portfolio – awarded the European Label by the European Commission in 2007 – The EuroIntegrELP project – Equal opportunities for European integration using the European Language Portfolio has helped to promote the betterment of language learning with the help of the European Language Portfolio as an assessment tool. The coordinating institution is the PROSPER-ASE Language Center Association from Bucharest, Romania. The project led to the creation of systems to promote language learning for the purpose of social integration but also personal development, contributing to international mobility and increasing the chances of finding a job. The project languages are: Basque, English, Estonian, French, German, Greek, Italian, Lithuanian, Dutch, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish and Hungarian. This project took place in the period 2004-2007. The project code is: 117021-CP-1-2004-1-RO-LINGUA-L1. (https://nellip.pixel-online.org/files/publications_ELL/01_European%20Language%20Label,%20Emp owering%20People.pd)

Project LIS – Learning and Integration through Singing – The LIS project – Learning and Integration through Song started in 2008 and aims to promote a method of teaching/learning languages using audio-video materials through music, using videotapes, songs and karaoke. The project code is 2008-1-IT2-GRU06-0053201. The languages for which the project was created are in Italian, Romanian, Russian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Minimum knowledge of that language is required to use this method, A1. Depending on the songs chosen, language acquisitions between A2 and B2 are targeted, according to the Common European Framework of Reference. The work units contain grammar and vocabulary exercises, terminological glossaries, linguistic, historical and cultural explanations, as well as customs from the respective country. Worksheets from this project can be used both for self-taught learning and under the supervision and guidance of a teacher. At UMF Iași, these materials have been used for the

benefit of freshmen students from the General Medicine department, study branch in Romanian and French. (http://www.languagesbysongs.eu/)

Project Integra – awarded the European Label by the European Commission in 2012 – The Integra project – Tools for the integration of new citizens arriving in EU member states by acquiring basic language knowledge specific to the financial field took place in 2010-2012 and was dedicated to EU and non-EU immigrant communities, educational and financial institutions from the following partner countries: Lithuania (coordinating country), Romania, Germany, the Netherlands, Greece, Turkey, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Poland and Belarus. The project code is: 510258-LLP-1-2010-1-LT-GRUNDVIG-GMP. (http://euroreso.eu/projects/integra/). The aim of this project was to provide immigrants with opportunities to develop language skills specific to the financial field, but also give access to resources for a better understanding of the culture of the host country. The project ended with the creation of a financial terminology kit, which includes a terminology glossary, information and resources about the main financial institutions in these European countries. UMF students received useful linguistic and informational help in accommodating and optimizing money management in the European and national context.

Project Take Care – This project took place between November 2012 and October 2014 and was co-financed by the European Commission, with the number 526736-LLP-2012-NL-GRUNDTVIG-GMP. The partner countries were the Netherlands (coordinating country), Romania, Germany, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal and Lithuania. The aim of this project was to help migrants acquire language skills to deal with medical situations in their new language and to facilitate their integration into the new country. The main product of this project was *The Medical Linguistic Guide for Migrants*, consisting of a medical expression book and basic language kit for emergency situations required by healthcare providers as well as a glossary in 17 languages (Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Croatian, English, French, German, Greek, Lithuanian, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Romanian, Russian, Turkish and Ukrainian). Particularly important in this project are the examples of medical and religious particularities in the medical context. The guide can be accessed free of charge from the project website https://www.takecareproject.eu/ro-home.

Project Glottodrama – European Label award from the European Commission (2014) – The project took place between 2012-2014, and the partners were from Italy (coordinating country), Romania, France, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Spain. The project is part of the Lifelong Learning Program, with the code 2012-1-IT1-LEO05-02861. The aim of the project was to better exploit the didactic potential of theatre in language learning. Within the project, a creative methodology for teaching by scientific means was created and tested. Finally, the results were compared with other teaching methods through

qualitative and quantitative evaluation. The results of the project materialized through teaching materials (books and an online library with teaching resources) and by training teachers to organize their own courses based on the Glottodrama model.

Within UMF Iași, 35 foreign students and their Romanian language teachers benefited from the 90-hour Glottodrama training course. (http://www.glottodrama.eu/)

CRU-UMF Iași – Founded in March 2014, the Francophone University Success Center was created with the help of the Francophone University Agency and is in the building of the Center for Modern Languages and Cultural Integration of UMF Iași. Within the University Success Center of UMF Iași, francophone student meetings were organized periodically, called *Dialogue intercultural,* in order to facilitate the integration of French-speaking students in the UMF community and in Iași.

Conclusions

Within these projects were teachers from the Modern Languages discipline of UMF Iași, such as teachers of Romanian and foreign languages, who made a contribution to linguistic and cultural integration. Teaching a foreign language is impossible without knowing the culture of that country. We can conclude that the translator or the language teacher is the one who mediates among different languages and cultures, so the most important element is communication and therefore the delivery of the message. Thus, the language comes through the person who communicates it as a cultural mediator.

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MIGRATION FOR WORK – THE BRAIN DRAIN PHENOMENON

E L E N A   H A N G A N U

Introduction

The brain drain, in particular medical, migration has represented a prominent concern in many countries since the 1960s. "Brain drain" (a name given to this phenomenon by representatives of the Royal Society of London) or "loss of human capital" refers to the process of emigration of trained and talented people to developed nations due to low wages, lack of development opportunities or of other reasons that may be invoked in the country of origin (Gibson 2011). This phenomenon implies the departure of highly skilled professionals with a low level of income from one country to another richer country. Historically this used to be a migration happening from Eastern to Western and Southern to Northern areas of the globe. Usually, a brain drain is driven by the will to have a higher income, better working conditions or access to better research facilities. (Grubel 1994, Boncea 2015)

The emigration of highly skilled health workers, especially physicians, is a normal consequence of the globalization process and the freedom of working in the EU. Brain migration is considered an extremely important problem facing many developing countries, including Romania. In general, EU and Schengen membership leads to a positive increase in the immigration flows of medical doctors. (Botezat, Ramos 2020). The recognition of professional qualifications, implemented under the Directive 2005/36/EC, including medical training, has accelerated the brain drain, especially physicians inside the EU.

An ethical question?

Discussion among specialists about the brain drain in the medical field was often assumed as an unambiguously negative phenomenon. (Kangasniemi *et al.* 2004) It used to be considered a negative model of migration, because it represents transfer of healthcare human resources from those who do not have to those who do. In fact, as Popescu *et al.* (2005) sustained, "governments of poorer states invest in university education, which is free in many cases, while rich states take advantage of it. This phenomenon reduces the quality of health services and has devastating effects on the economy of the eminent country. Besides the direct losses, the brain drain reduces the capacity of poor countries to bridge the gap which separates them from developed ones." This aspect,

alongside the negative effects of the migration of doctors on both the skills base and on the provision of medical care in the country of origin, raises important ethical questions about this migration. (Raghuram, 2009) However, it is one of the major problems of developing countries, where higher education and sound vocational training are often seen as the surest way to escape from a country's deep problems economically, socially or politically.

Nowadays this perspective has changed. The emigration of medical specialists is no longer seen as a negative closed process but as a circular one. Only a small percentage of the emigrant doctors choose to change their permanent residence. Most of them have the aim to return to their home country to apply the skills learned abroad to their home medical system. This situation is defined as circular migration and is considered beneficial for both the origin as well as the destination country. The counterpart of the "brain drain" is the gain of intelligence of the areas to which human capital has migrated. (Wright, 2008)

The ability of the home country to benefit from this process of circular migration has yet to be established, and it depends on the country's abilities to attract the highly trained and qualified doctors to the public and/or private healthcare system.

Romania – a major source of brain export

After the fall of communism in the 1990s, Romania has become a major exporter of health workers, especially in Europe. From 2007, when Romania became part of the European Union, the emigration rate has increased significantly. The healthcare sector is one of the EU's main economic branches, providing around 17 million jobs. Given the aging trend of the population and the increasing demand for medical services, the importance of this sector will be increasingly emphasized.

In the early post-communism period, between 1994-2012, an average number of 288 medical doctors established their permanent residence in one of the EU's most desired destination countries each year: UK, Germany, France, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Spain or Sweden. The most wanted destination countries were Germany, the United Kingdom and France. Between 2008 and 2013, about 8700 medical doctors left Romania and chose one of these countries as a destination. (Boncea, 2015) The presence of a well-represented diaspora in the destination country favored migration inflows among physicians coming from Romania and other Central and Eastern European countries. (Botezat & Ramos, 2020) These doctors are exponents of the brain drain phenomenon. (Grubel, 1994; Boncea, 2015)

Brain drain phenomenon implies the departure of highly skilled persons from one country, with a low-level of income to another, richer country in

search of a higher income, for better working conditions or for better research facilities (Boncea, 2015).

Romania has been a major source country (exporter) of health workers, especially in Europe since the fall of communism in the 1990s, and this phenomenon is still actual today. Romania s integration into the European Union in 2007, as anticipated by the WHO, had led to an increase of the emigration rate of health workers, especially physicians. The implementation of the Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, including medical training, has accelerated the brain drain inside the EU.

According to the World Health Organization, Romania has critical shortages of medical workers, as it has less than 2.5 medical professionals per 1000 people, a figure that it is considered to be critical in order to provide equitable access of healthcare to all people within the country.

The medical health system in Romania faces a number of major challenges: firstly, the average age of the medical staff is rising, as very few young people take the place of retirees. Secondly, the turnover of staff in certain branches is significant, due to the demanding work and low level of pay. Last but not least, the need for new skills is growing, with the development of innovative technologies and the increasing incidence of chronic diseases, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease among the elderly. For Romania, the biggest danger is the growing acute shortage of qualified staff in hospitals in the country.

Many young people choose to go abroad for a higher salary and for better working conditions in the healthcare field, and the exodus of doctors is becoming alarming. Young doctors are leaving for higher salaries, and experienced doctors are looking for respect and better working conditions. The number of those who want to go abroad has increased by 10 percent every six months since the beginning of 2018 (Popescu *et al.,* 2018). According to the data of the College of Physicians from Romania, over 1300 Romanian doctors applied in 2019 for the professional certificates they need to go and work abroad, this number being 10 percent more than in the same period the previous year.

An international study, published by the European platform Forum Alpbach, reveals a discouraging evolution for Romania (last place from the top 3 European countries that free highly trained specialists, trained in the country). If in other countries, the emigration of specialists has been compensated by immigration, Romania is affected by an important loss of people with higher education. According to the statistics centralized by this platform, 26,296 highly trained specialists left Romania, between 2003-2014, to work in other western states. At the top of the brain-drain are teachers, followed by doctors, nurses with university training, physiotherapists and dentists.

For Romania, if we refer to the medical field, the biggest danger is the acute shortage of qualified staff in hospitals in the country. Many young people

choose to emigrate in search of a higher salary and better working conditions in the healthcare field. The exodus of doctors has thus become alarming.

The profile of the Romanian physician who emigrates is that of a young medical doctor, 34 years old, usually a junior trainee, already in his/her speciality training program, other than the general practitioner, employed in a badly equipped and poor working conditions hospital, with limited professional development opportunities. These are highly motivated young doctors. Therefore, migration is considered an essential component for their successful career development, and training period abroad is seen as an achievement itself, a guarantee of professional progression. Internships abroad, the exchange of experience at an international level, are important tools for professional development in medicine. But what is the real motivation to leave Romania?

Some doctors mentioned that they took the decision to work in another country during their university studies, when they met teachers who practiced abroad. After that period, they were exposed from the first years of university to a mirage of internships abroad. They saw from the beginning that the achievement in the medical profession could not be obtained without internships in the West. It is a somewhat an idealistic and purely professional motivation, but for many doctors who choose to go abroad, this predominantly professional motivation exists and is quite strong. Being a medical doctor has remained a profession that attracts capable and very ambitious young people. Some of them will want to work abroad just to promote their careers.

Young doctors are enthusiastic and eager for activity. They aspire to improve and perform, are extroverted, want to be noticed, praised and achieved. They do not like to be embedded in an amorphous mass. On the contrary, the enthusiasm and energy disappear. They are salary capped at their jobs, are satisfied with little, left with only a part of what they considered to be the medical profession and channel themselves on material interest. Or, they give up and look elsewhere in another country for a higher, effervescent environment, which will promote emulation, satisfy their eager personality for activity and appreciation. Is this motivation purely economic? Most of the times, yes, there is economic motivation to be considered. Romanian students and doctors no longer have any administrative or professional recognition barriers. At the level of papers, Romanians are equivalent to students or doctors from the European Community. At the level of theoretical knowledge, they are sometimes better (but the application of knowledge in practice is different). As a result, now the very ambitious doctors can leave very easily, especially the ordinary "normal" doctors from the middle group. And the motivation for some is probably a little different. Most of them still want professional achievement, ball of them want a better quality of life. Still the newspapers trumpet that most doctors leave because of the salary. The debate on this subject is still important, but the young doctors declared that most of them leave because of the working conditions.

Organizational feudalism in Romanian hospitals is flourishing. It would be very interesting if the Romanian College of Physicians would continue address this topic, in order to have a real statistical analysis of the phenomenon and for the society to better understand doctors who leave Romania.

In the last 10 years Romania's health system has evolved to a professional culture that encourages rather than discourages young doctors to emigrate. It is considered acceptable and necessary, rather than problematic. (Connell, 2014) The migration process is encouraged immediately after graduation as the number of medical students in Romania is increasing, and the density of medical graduates is positively associated with higher outflows of medical doctors. Destination countries with a higher proportion of elderly individuals and larger busier medical centres are particularly attractive to medical doctors from Romania.

Only in the last three to four years has the Romanian society realized the importance of attracting the highly skilled immigrant doctors back as well as the necessity of slowing down the brain drain phenomenon. The first measure taken by the government was to increase the healthcare professional's salary. This measure was generally well received but, in the global connectivity era, for the new generation of doctors that are already successful in their career abroad, their decision to return cannot be only influenced by money. How many will return? Many. The first will be those who left, motivated only by the improvement of living conditions. Those who left for purely professional reasons will return later, much better prepared. For them, return is possible, but the institutions that want them back must get involved. Such returns would be successful if the person were "head hunted" for a job with a greater power of influence than the job they are doing in the West. Still, it is very rare to find a Romanian doctor who worked in the West that was head hunted for a job in Romania. This mechanism for the return of quality people has barely appeared for Romanians in the business sector. Sadly, it is more likely to find among physician communities from Romania people who were happy when good doctors left for the West. A major role for the decision making is also played by the working conditions and quality of life available in key destination countries.

In order to address this matter, there are many key factors that need to be changed:
- to have a developed medical system that allows young doctors to advance in their career,
- to increase job availability in order to reduce the unemployment rate after the training period,
- to improve home country living facilities,
- to provide financial incentives for return,
- to enhancee employment conditions in public hospitals,

- to improve staffing policies that act as barriers to return. (Martineau & Willetts, 2006)

Why leave?

Migration of doctors inside the EU is closely related to the postgraduate training system. The aim of the destination countries has been to employ doctors in training posts, thus providing their national health systems with employable staff and simultaneously allowing doctors from developing countries to obtain their postgraduate training that can be subsequently used in their own country. (Connell, 2014)

Less frequently, fully trained specialist doctors apply for work in EU countries. This happens usually for a short period of time and is known as temporary migration process.

In the destination countries medical doctor immigration flows are significantly correlated with the number of hospital beds. This indicates that inpatient department infrastructure is correlated with the demand for medical doctors from abroad. Similarly, good medical infrastructure and medical technology is positively corelated with inflows of foreign-trained doctors. A medical system with better healthcare resources attracts physicians from abroad. The characteristics of the health- care system and the population's needs for healthcare goods in the destination country are highly correlated with the utility of migration to the respective country. (Botezat & Ramos, 2020)

Factors that have been identified as reasons to migrate for doctors inside the EU result from a combination of push and pull factors and are generally classified in three main categories:

1. Factors related to the destination country:
   - facilities for easy relocation inside the EU,
   - employment opportunities,
   - system and society's safety and security,
   - financial support offered for relocation of the doctor and his/her family,
   - possibility of free training,
   - possibility to benefit from postgraduate training,
   - desire to gain a postgraduate qualification,
   - determination to learn a state-of-the-art specialty/profession,
   - gain experience in a new working environment,
   - possibility to establish new professional relationships,
   - opportunities to gain clinical experience through new employment,
   - research opportunities,
   - ability to remit money to family,
   - possibility of obtaining citizenship.

2. Factors related to the home country:
- a healthcare system with high unemployment/ underemployment rates,
- poor salaries and poor working condition,
- high number of young doctors,
- lack of postgraduate training opportunities,
- lack of promotion,
- limited available posts in a specific specialty,
- changes of remuneration or salary cuts due to financial recession,
- everyday life corruption,
- poor quality of life,
3. Individual circumstantial factors:
- desire for a life-changing opportunity,
- seeking a new life and/or adventure,
- financial gain for self-and/or family,
- access to a better quality of life for self and family,
- access to a better education and healthcare system for children,
- benefit from a new cultural experience,
- desire to find a partner and marry in a different country,
- gaining access to new social and professional networks,
- influence from a family or professional mentor,
- desire to improve knowledge in an international language,
- possibility for future onward migration to another country, using the first experience as a step to a desired future. (Davda *et al.,* 2018)

Testimonial

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the brain drain? Is it good or bad that there is this freedom of movement? Many doctors think it is good. It is good for the simple reason that now a specialist education, with internships abroad, which was accessible only to a small group of doctors (ambitious, workaholic, etc.) has become accessible to "normal" doctors, who are of very good professional quality and who have a special potential – but who were not willing to make risky "sacrifices" or "investments" in their training. In the past decades, especially for young people, the "model" was appreciated (to be a good doctor, to prove empathy and cultural knowledge. Are there still models in medicine today? In Romania, university teacher models such as prof Hatieganu, prof Lupu, prof Burghele, prof Danielopolu, prof Fodor or prof Papillian are still present in all generations' minds. These are complex personalities, not only in the medical profession, but also people of culture, who completed their higher education and are deeply, socially involved. Papillian, a professor of anatomy, was the director of the National Theater. Dominic Stanca, a renowned gynecologist, was also a writer. Octavian Fodor was a cultivated

art collector and essayist. Iuliu Hatieganu – founder of sport movement and the builder of the park that bears his name. As a young doctor, if you have such a model, personality formation is a struggle with yourself. Each medical student knows the professional, human and cultural characteristics of the model and try to improve themselves in such a way to become like these personalities (by self-analysis, self-knowledge, self-improvement, fighting against inertia, convenience or neglect). Competition with those around you is not excluded in order to succeed. Are there still models, personalities to follow? The answer is definitely "yes". Not so many, not so complex, maybe not so powerful, but there are. At least professionally there are: very good surgeons, high-performance cardiologists, elite gastroenterologists, pediatricians or any other medical specialist. For young doctors, they can be taken as landmarks and can represent heights to reach. But not always in all specialties are there attractive professional or moral models to be followed. The medical world is also diverse, and in the hierarchical scale the value criterion has not always mattered everywhere, that's why young doctors are always searching. But the system, based on "models", is preferable, because it is built on admiration, affection and loyalty, not on hatred, ferocity, contempt and arrogance, as in the paradigm of the enemy. Young doctors, generally educated above an average level, will prefer the variant of admiration and love, which is closer to the ideal of the medical profession, characterized by generosity, humanism, empathy and love. The existence of the "competitor" is favored by different criteria other than those of value which promote primitive feelings, generated by favoritism. And it removes young people, makes them look for another environment, makes them want to migrate to a different place, closer to the idealistic characteristics of the medical profession. (Selections from interviews with Melania Matcovici and Alma Laptoiu – Romanian medical doctors working in UK and Luxembourg)

Being a foreigner

The emigration process itself is not always easy, even inside EU countries. Doctors have encountered many difficulties after leaving their country. Initially, they pass through an *adaptation phase* that includes dealing with the registration process, recognition of the previous system and qualification. This phase is usually associated with financial worries, social isolation and can be followed in some cases by demotivation and devaluation. Once employed and working some of them experience an education and skills mismatch, disappointment in fulfilling managers or employers' expectations. These factors can result in dissatisfaction, devaluation and deskilling, further leading to integration difficulties. (Davda *et al.,* 2018) Some of these issues are related to poor language skills and lack of non-verbal communication skills or sometimes, not being familiar with the technology used. Doctors' performance at the job was linked to their move to the new country their experiences of social and cultural

isolation, disorientation, financial problems, language difficulties and their inability to understand multidisciplinary team working. (Davda *et al.,* 2018)

If all these barriers are overcome the next period is defined as the *integration phase.* This also comes with challenges and difficulties. The main risk during this period is not to progress. Some doctors get into a comfort zone in a non-training post and experience career stagnation which allows them to have a satisfactory financial life but have less job satisfaction. For others this integration period can mean a total life changing experience. They become dependent on the process of learning, develop a social and professional identity, understand the local workplace culture and have cross-cultural awareness. (Legido-Quigley *et al.,* 2015) They discover a better work-life balance, the security of a well-paid job and the advantages of working in highly developed medical centres. They progress in their career, and the professional achievements bring them significant job satisfaction.

Anyhow, for both categories of doctors, discrimination in training and job opportunities is often experienced. (Legido-Quigley *et al.,* 2015) Not all doctors feel discriminated against by colleagues or patients, although there may have been statements that were not exactly encouraging from people who experienced these sorts of problems during the integration phase.

Living as and becoming a 'foreigner' is not easy and not something recommended to everyone. But, in a normal approach, with exigency and fairness in promoting values, there is no place for hatred, envy and resentment. You have been evaluated according to your abilities. Didn't you succeed? Continue, improve yourself, perform so that you can get where you want to go. It's like an athletic running race. You give everything you can, but if you come in second or third, your opponents are not to blame. It is very easy to conclude that there are advantages and disadvantages all over the world. Young doctors leave mainly for professional reasons and only sometimes for economic ones. Whatever the motivation, they have the chance to achieve success for the first time. In the long run, they have the chance to improve the medical system directly or indirectly in Romania, and this chance must be capitalized.

To achieve performances and to be able to enjoy it you require a certain personality, you need to be open to diversity, to embrace new cultures and to respect 'the home' you live in. At the end of the day, you are a guest, and if you know how to treat your host you will be able to have all that he/she has to offer at its best. Everyone has their own experience, and you will hear different stories based on how one perceives their own situation. The best way is to never believe in stories and for different individuals to come up with their own impression. This strategy is considered the best, has never failed and creates the possibility to know places and people that are truly amazing. In the end, it is sometimes a matter of how lucky you are, because things can be relatively easy or hard depending on chance. It is a matter of having good new or old friends who can

be helpful in happy or sad times. The great advantage is to meet people who appreciate the enthusiasm of a young promising doctor who is hard working and has the conscientiousness on his/her side. The health system abroad is tough, especially for someone who was not trained there. You must adapt and learn from people who do not know you and you have to keep in mind that in any country there are good and bad people; no country is perfect.

The good news is that there is the opportunity to learn and evolve. The responsibilities of young doctors are much higher, as is the workload. Although, in most cases, senior doctors help you, you must adapt, learn and evolve. But it is possible whether someone really wants it. And when you experience a little appreciation, like having a patient who brings you flowers, a sign that is not very common abroad, it is a confirmation that the nationality of a doctor does not matter, only his/her dedication to the medical profession.

True satisfaction comes from understanding that there are no foreigners but only people who care for others, no matter what part of the world they come from.

There is a saying in many countries around the world: *There is no place like home. In fact, home is any place where your abilities and skills are valued and where your heart is welcome*! (*Melania Matcovici, pediatric surgeon, exponent of the brain-drain phenomenon*).

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ETHICS AND TEACHING MULTICULTURAL GROUPS

I L I E   O N U

Introduction:

The teacher has always played a very important role in society, because through his/her personality, behavior and attitude, they generate an influence that no other personality can have. Thus, through one's character, affection, competence and moral commitment, the teacher becomes a model for their students and even for society. In order to be viewed by students with confidence, the teacher must show responsibility and achieve high standards of professionalism. In this sense, the teacher must have impeccable ethical conduct, accepting both the trust of the students and the responsibilities they must assume in practicing this profession. Didactic deontology represents the observance of the norms of conduct, principles, commitments, moral obligations to maintain the standards of integrity, professionalism and management of the school institution.

In order to facilitate intercultural higher education, UNESCO in 2006 provided guidelines with recommendations based on the final report from the "International Conference on the Objectives of Intercultural Education" (UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education, 2006):

- the reduction of all forms of exclusion,
- the furthering of integration and school achievement,
- the promotion of respect for cultural diversity,
- the promotion of understanding of the cultures of others,
- the promotion of international understanding.

The UNESCO guidelines implementation in the educational context must include:

- curriculum,
- teaching methods and materials,
- teaching language,
- academic life and governance,
- the role and training of teachers,
- the interaction between university and society.

International students represent a unique and diverse population, which usually face a number of adaptation problems, including stress generated by environmental changes, language difficulties, cultural misunderstandings and social assimilation issues. Some students are also exposed to the phenomenon of racial discrimination.

International students contribute significantly to the growing diversity of universities from US and Europe and are a culturally heterogeneous group. In a study conducted in higher education institutions from the US, between the academic year 2008-2009, 671,616 international students from over 180 countries of origin were enrolled, being heterogeneous from an ethnic, linguistic and cultural point of view. They came from Mexico, Canada, Japan, India, Brazil, Russia and France. International students in the US are extremely diverse in terms of cultural experiences and value orientations (Yakunina, 2011).

The education system is constantly changing, due to globalization, and the objectives of education depend on the needs, interests and requirements of students. Obviously, the concept of "teacher and teaching" is constantly changing. In addition to good academic and professional qualifications, the teacher has many responsibilities and requires knowledge of professional ethics.

Professional ethics can be seen as a guide, which helps the teacher provide quality education based on healthy values. Professional ethics helps teachers understand their profession and their role. Teachers with professional ethics can bring desired changes in students' behavior but without becoming supreme and authoritarian in front of them. Teachers, with a sense of professional ethics, will treat their students with affection, care and commitment. (Karma Sherpa, 2018).

Importance of Professional Ethics for teachers

School is not only that formal agency that provides education for international students but is considered a microcosm of the heterogeneous society. Teachers play a significant role in the educational process to bring desirable changes in the behavior of their students and to provide quality education. The educational process has an important role in bringing development to society. Professional ethics together with pedagogy, content knowledge and teaching ability, must be at the fulfilment of the aims and objectives of teaching. In the case of international students who come from different backgrounds culturally, religiously and economically," fairly implies treating equals equally and unequals unequally" (Aristotle, 1980). Communication is a key element in the student-teacher relationship, and the learning process is influenced by this factor. The reverential relationship between teacher and student should be characterized by reciprocity, and teachers who achieve a high degree of professionalism will be impartial in the teaching and evaluation process.

A teacher must be a model of inspiration as well as a motivational source for his/her students. A lack of professional ethics from teachers can have a negative impact on the development of international students. If the teacher is also a practitioner in that work field, the students will follow his/her model directly or indirectly. The" ethical teacher" should demonstrate good behavior and a constructive attitude towards the profession and its students.

Because international students represent a "heterogeneous micro-society", the fundamental role of the teacher is to identify and solve the problems and barriers of students that arise in their development process. Many of the teachers who teach classes to international students face the problem of adaptation in the universities. If we want the teaching process to be successful, teachers who teach classes to international students must be well-trained and have a clear vision that will help to promote the potential of their students. In addition to the qualifications and teaching qualities, the teacher should have a high degree of professional ethics, and if these ethics are well understood and implemented, then it has high professional satisfaction.

The professional code of ethics for teachers

The professional code of ethics can be seen as a guiding principle, meant to help professionals in a certain field to carry out their activity with honesty, integrity, dedication, sincerity and commitment. A professional must follow the specific principles to his/her profession, performing tasks according to the requirements of the job. Professional ethics deals with the principles and values that the professional should implement in the workplace. Ethics can help professionals in carrying out their tasks at work (Bayles, 1989).

The professional code of ethics for teachers is designed to protect the rights of students, including international students. The teacher is responsible for the whole teaching and learning process, and the need to be active in the educational process will make the teacher encourage his/her students to be active using different strategies and techniques. Given the particularities of international students, it is expected that teachers understand the individual differences, intellectual level, environment, and education system from which their students came but also their interests and skills (Boon, 2011).

Teachers should also give freedom to all students so that they can express themselves without fear, abstracting from religion, ethnicity or color. The professional code of ethics plays an essential role in developing a teacher's personality and behavior, ensuring a successful type of teaching. The correct implementation of the ethic's code in the teaching profession directly results in the development of the university and their students, including the local academic community (Campbell, 2006).

Examples of professional codes of ethics for teachers:

1. The teacher, through his/her profession, should demonstrate that they respect cultural and spiritual values, social equity, freedom, diversity and democracy. Human dignity, along with equality, are the fundamental values that a good teacher promotes to international students who have a heterogeneous ethnic and cultural background.

An equidistant teacher must reach a few key elements:
- they must be interested in the ethnic background of their students,
- they must maintain a strict level of sensitivity to their students' language concerns,
- have a high level of expectations regarding the performance of their students,
- maintain an "inclusive" curriculum that promotes respect for socio-cultural differences among students,
- the role of instructor can be replaced with that of facilitator, to get higher results,
- use self-testing methods to reduce the stress of international students.

2. Teachers should be an example of professionalism, adapting as well as possible to the professional environment of the university. Teachers must cooperate with the leadership of the University and have good relationships with colleagues, respecting the educational system. This behaviour will positively influence the attitude of international students, in which the roles of all members of the university are respected, and all members of the education system are equally important. University teachers usually follow two different types of conceptual logic: the first is by respecting the decisions, policies and rules of the university; and the second is to follow their own attributes, interests and professional desires. These concepts are professionalism and governance (Macheridis & Paulsson, 2019).

3. Teachers should show empathy, care and seriousness with their students. Teachers must be concerned about cultivating a healthy relationship based on respect with the students. If the teacher is not able to establish a good reverential relationship with his/her students, the teaching process becomes useless. The teacher's wisdom, along with empathy and professional observation, will make an open channel of communication with international students. The teacher must know about the difficulties and problems of his/her students, to be able to offer them solutions or to teach them to remedy these problems. In a study conducted in 2002, with 34 teachers and analyzing over 125 documents following the subject "teacher empathy on culturally diverse students" three main themes from teachers' practices were obtained (McAllister & Irvine, 2002):
- positive interactions with culturally different students,
- creating a favorable classroom climate,
- more student-centered practices,

4. The teacher must understand the role he/she has in the university, along with direct and indirect responsibilities. The teacher must be a good professional, and in the case of the medical profession, they must be a

good practitioner. The teacher should be actively involved in the educational process, and their fundamental duty is to serve the University and its students,

5. A clear vision of the educational process must be the key point of the teachers. Effective planning and implementation of the educational process stages must be adequate to the needs and requirements necessary to teach international students,

6. Sincerity, kindness and dedication to the university and its students will make the teacher have professional integrity. Professional integrity is closely related to the professional commitments and responsibilities that the teacher has in relation to the educational institution and its students. Being fair, trustworthy and honest are key features of true professional integrity but also accepting one's mistakes. Taking responsibility for things that happen is not always easy, but this attitude can strengthen the self-esteem and value the teacher has in relation to his/her students (Davis, 2021),

7. Teachers must gain the trust of students, colleagues and the university leadership. This leads to the strengthening of professional integrity, honesty and fairness. A reliable teacher will be able to impose respect and will give strength to his/her actions in front of their students. From a cultural point of view, trust is an integral component of pedagogy, and without it, the teaching process would be null (Goddard *et al.* 2001),

8. Teachers must respect the privacy of his/her students and other members of their own university. It is necessary for teachers to maintain the confidentiality of information obtained during teaching, and if there are good reasons to disclose information, it must be done in accordance with the rules of the school and the legislation. Disclosure of confidential or sensitive information related to international students is prohibited, thus respecting the personal privacy of the students,

9. Teachers should not confuse personal life with professional life and do not bring their conflicts and problems to the school. If the teacher does not have the ability to separate conflicts between their professional work and private interests, this can have a demoralizing effect on his/her students, thus affecting the students' perception about their teachers and the university in general,

10. Teachers do not have to be biased while evaluating student performance related to the academic activities. Under no circumstances should teachers generate or maintain an inferiority complex that some international students may have, due to the particularities of the countries they come from. Teachers must respect all students and treat them equally, regardless of gender, age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, creed, sexual orientation, religion, family status, disability, region and community.

Unitary treatment of students will increase their morale and confidence, so the teacher can motivate them to perform well in academic activities.

Measuring ethical sensitivity and examining the effects on multicultural groups

Cultural, racial and religious intolerance must not necessarily involve physical violence or inappropriate behavior. Disapproving attitudes toward students from diverse multicultural groups can be transmitted in overt or covert modes. Even if attitudes of disapproval are transmitted both intentionally and unintentionally, those behaviors can negatively affect the way international students view themselves, their colleagues, and university. Intolerance and discrimination in a university education system have a negative impact both academically and psychologically (Selcuk *et al.* 2010)

University teachers and non-teaching staff of universities have an ethical responsibility to develop an awareness of their prejudices and to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to act in accordance with the ethical codes of their profession. Professional organizations have adopted codes of ethics; those indicate that professionals have an obligation to respond to unethical behaviour displayed by others.

Over time, there have been multiple attempts to educate university teachers and non-teaching staff to overcome stereotypes, increase tolerance and embrace diversity. Unfortunately, the results are contradictory. The need to increase cultural tolerance is more closely linked to demographic change and diversity, than to professional ethics. If education professionals understand that their jobs require certain types of ethical behavior, they are more likely to adopt these behaviors.

Improving the professional judgment of professionals from education has been made with the help of an ethics' course. This helps teachers deal effectively with ethical issues from the classroom. Some authors indicate that attending multicultural courses can increase the cultural competence of a professional. (D'Andrea, *et al.*, 1991; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999)

Morality, Racial and Ethical Sensitivity Test

Morality is a perception of behaviour that differentiates intentions, decisions and actions between good (or right) and bad (or wrong). A moral code is a system of morality (for example, based on a certain philosophy, religion or culture). Morality is a branch of ethics as well as a discipline of philosophy.

In 1983, James R. Rest changed the paradigm of morality and coined the term "ethical sensibility." Rest suggested that it is useful to view morality as a phenomenon with several interdependent psychological components (Rest, 1983).

Rest divided morality into four components:

- Component I – ethical sensitivity, is given by the identification of ethical aspects, in the case of a situation. Identifying ethical issues involves recognizing the different possible courses of action and how these choices will affect all stakeholders,
- Component II – moral judgment or moral motivation, involves the formulation of the course of moral action,
- Component III – the motive or will that is necessary to act in an ethical manner,
- Component IV – moral action or the moral character that must execute and implement "what ought to be done",

The advantage that the *Racial, Ethical and Sensitivity Test* (REST) has, does not require participants to choose from a set of standardized answers provided by the evaluator. Participants generate answers by identifying ethical issues in their "own way". Participants' responses are evaluated. The first direction is given by the number of identifications of the ethical problems produced. The second direction is given by the participants' ability to articulate the implications of the ethical violations.

Recognition tasks are much more used in psychological assessments due to their simplicity and the fact that they can be standardized. Participants in recognition tasks may be confused about the significance of any given task, so their answers may not reflect their real knowledge. Production tasks reflect the respondent's ability to use their inner resources and knowledge to respond to a particular situation or dilemma (Rest, 1986, Rest *et al.*, 1999).

REST is more appropriate when it comes to assessing the model of moral reasoning and ethical sensitivity, as it allows researchers to assess whether respondents can produce the appropriate response by identifying the ethical violation.

Ethical Challenges

"Multiculturalism has been described as the fourth force in psychology" (Locke ,1992). From the perspective of teaching, multiculturalism has become a central component of educational programs in the last four decades, the emphasis being on multicultural education. More recently, attention has been given to the teaching of multicultural students and the new challenges that appear in the classroom. The complexity of multicultural teaching increases the likelihood that some teachers will face multiple challenges. These challenges may arise because multiple layers of interpersonal and group dynamics react during class hours.

International students differ from each other; their power of understanding, awareness, degree of involvement and receptivity to the learning process are at

different levels. These individual variations in identity development can also be instructive challenges for university teachers. Moreover, the teacher's competence in terms of awareness, identity development and the level will have an impact on all aspects of the educational process.

University teachers need to hone their skills to maintain their own multicultural awareness on an ongoing basis and must ensure that they have adequate knowledge of the content of the course they will be teaching. Teachers need to be able to manage the classroom dynamics in a way that ensures a good working atmosphere as well as an optimal learning environment (Reynolds, 1995).

A major challenge for teachers is the methods of training and assessment. Most likely, the training and evaluation will be based on the moral values of the teacher or the educational institution in which he/she teaches. The teaching of international students' is influenced by several factors. An important one is the existence of gaps in existing codes of ethics and a lack of consensus regarding the process of training and multicultural education. Codes of ethics and consensus in this field are necessary for the curricular development of multicultural content that differs both between professional disciplines and within them. Even when there are standards for course content, teaching methods vary between teachers (Schoem *et al.* 1995).

The lack of consensus related to multicultural education, in which the content of the course is transmitted to the student, is a continuous challenge for the teacher and the educational unit. It should be noted that unquestionable efforts are being made to develop codes of ethics and new standards for assessing multiculturalism in university education. However, resources are insufficient for professors who teach multicultural courses, and gaining guidance in ethical decisions is reduced.

Ethics and teachers' education

The main problem that teachers face is providing ethical and efficient multicultural services (Lee & Kurilla, 1997). The authors highlight the need for continuous professional training of teachers who are multiculturally qualified. Bradley shows that "literature has virtually ignored the importance of ethical issues confronting supervisors". This is also valid for university professors, who want to provide effective, multicultural and ethical education based on professional standards and ethical codes (Bradley, 1989).

The challenges that arise in teaching to international students cannot be very well defined, because they frequently overlap and are difficult to organize into distinct, mutually exclusive categories. However, most of the challenges are to some extent generated by the teacher's level of competence. The teacher's competencies are not only given by the knowledge he/she possesses but also by

self-awareness. This self-awareness is superimposed on many levels. From here we notice the awareness of the potential concerns of international students and the dynamics of the class. The advantage of the university professor is the way he/she uses this awareness to create a good and captivating learning environment that supports the multicultural group and offers different constructive challenges.

The degree of competence of the university professor who addresses multicultural groups is based on the well-being of the students. The well-being of the students will change positively and the ability to provide a quality education in an optimal classroom environment. This is reflected by achieving one's learning objectives. Educational challenges are assessed according to the teacher's competence, by protecting the well-being of international students and overcoming the problems from training and the educational environment. Monocultural versus multicultural teaching is quite different, and the teacher who addresses international students must show pragmatism and professional ethics (Ramsey, 2000).

University teachers need to be aware of their personal ethnocentric and cultural biases, because that can change their educational decisions. This awareness of ethnocentric/cultural biases is crucial for multicultural teaching, because the principles, the beliefs, ideas, values and experiences of the teacher are channels through which the course content is taught to international students. Unfortunately, the separation between subject and self is reduced, despite the myths of neutrality and objectivity. (Sfier-Younis, 1995).

An important aspect for teachers is to stay focused on their teaching task and counselling approach. This is necessary because their take on assessing the activity of the international student may be perceived as insensitive or discriminatory. Another aspect of the approach is that teachers need to develop their own style of teaching, in order to satisfy the educational needs of different students from multicultural class groups. (Reynolds, 1995).

University teachers need to be aware of the danger of instructive abuses of power. The boundary between the abuse of instructional power and justified means is a fine line and is generated by the dominant culture. The teacher occupies a position of strength by the nature of the job, being practically an authority in front of the international student. This position of authority can go beyond the symbolic sphere, and the student can associate these things with social and political power. International students may experience this phenomenon of oppressive power at different levels, given by their personal experiences and previous reactions to authority and power (Paige & Martin, 1996).

Teachers who teach in multicultural groups must be aware of cultural discrimination, prejudice and oppression of the dominant culture; it can have a great impact on how multicultural courses are taught. The cultural groups that are examined may be limited to explorations of ethnicity and race or can be extended to include other elements of diversity like: age, sex, sexual and

religious orientation. In an effort to cover more cultural groups, it usually happens that "cultural stereotypes" are generated. In the opposite direction it can create feelings, such as invisibility for students whose membership in cultural groups has not been examined. Teachers should also be wary about their own limitations regarding certain cultural groups. If they come up with a superficial approach to these groups-it contributes to misperceptions and a lower quality of the educational process (Arredondo *et al.*, 1996).

The way the teaching process is carried out is that an optimal climate is maintained in the classroom, which will make the course content credible and well assimilated by international students. From the teacher's perspective, the effort to overcome a monocultural teaching style is quite high, with the risk of "cultural encapsulation". This cultural encapsulation can change the behaviour of the university professor by biasing him/her, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as the course continues.

The composition of the international students' group will generate ethical challenges and dilemmas; the homogeneity of the group can modify accordingly with the teacher's implementation of multicultural counselling concepts. When the class is made up of different multicultural groups, the teacher shouldn't have expectations from his/her students that they are representatives of their cultures. The fact that students are part of diverse cultural minorities will generate unjustified pressure, changing the right to participate in classes as they choose. The duty of the university teacher is to modify inappropriate stereotypical behaviour, because the student defines himself/herself according to a cultural group.

The values of the majority culture will change the ways in which teaching is done in the classroom with the specific tasks. Reflection of the values of the majority culture and impact brought on to the learning environment will be transposed through indications given by the teacher, so that the student solves the tasks in a competitive and individualistic way. This practice can be seen as discriminatory by students from different cultural backgrounds.

The way multicultural student groups are evaluated must be fair and effective and may be culturally biased. The evaluation and scoring process is subject to the teacher's personal interpretation and reflects the judgments and principles that are part of the cultural experience. It would be better for teachers to remain mindful of the institutional and social climate, because they affect the classroom. The teacher must be aware that what is taught to international students is not a commitment to diversity through which the institution and community reflect themselves. However, the teacher must overcome this experiment in an honest way and explore the current reality, in the absence of this commitment. The teacher must understand and anticipate systemic repercussions inherent in multicultural and qualified education when it comes to the implementation of systemic interventions to protect the student's welfare, institution and community affected by this type of training.

It is obvious that the teacher who teaches courses to international students will have several challenges and dilemmas throughout the educational process. Teachers need to be aware of these challenges, because the results come from the complexity of the course content. From the point of view of ethics, existing codes can be constantly reviewed, as the educational process is in a continuous change.

It is obvious that the dilemmas and challenges faced by the teacher tend to fall into broad categories of issues related to one's competence in terms of self-awareness, course content, in terms of someone's teaching skills, student well-being and the classroom environment.

Educational policies need to be forward-looking, but in most cases, they fail to implement explicit future concepts at the university level. A key element is to reposition the modality through which the learning process is achieved by connecting the university curriculum with the multifaceted futures of students from multicultural groups. This complex task will often generate or exacerbate existing tensions: the cultural role of a university/faculty, the expectations of the society in which the students learn, the degree of expertise and competence of the teachers and the increasingly diverse needs of international students (Bateman, 2012). Tensions generate real "ethical" issues about what is taught or what is omitted as content in a class and the direct and indirect consequences of these choices.

Ethical dilemmas, which occur during classes, are highlighted based on conflicts of values, especially competing intentions among the stakeholders. There is clear evidence that the projection and thinking about the future determines the "conflict" in an individual's perception of how the world should be or not to be, in his/her view of the world (Tirri & Husu, 2002). The way in which the university curriculum is made and improved represents a key point related to the choice of the course content that is taught/or not taught in a class, reflecting the ethical decisions taken by the teacher or by the educational institution (Carrington *et al.*, 2010).

Ethics of the curriculum

The way in which "teaching" is done, reflects the strategies that teachers use to implement and develop learning experiences for the class subjects they teach as well as for multicultural groups of students. What is taught in the classroom is related to the way the curriculum was built and is a reflection on public perceptions of what happens in schools. The differences between the non-cultural curriculum and the multicultural curriculum are large, and the difference is clear from what is to be taught and what is taught in the faculties. This makes the curriculum highly questionable and politicized, as it is a consequence of the policies set by governments and other directly interested

organizations. Such policies change the way in which "knowledge" is implemented in the educational process, and certain areas of knowledge are limited, or others are privileged by access to quality and up-to-date information. These policies reflect how the curriculum is constructed, will induce discussions about ethics and the perception of how valuable or valued a society is (Goodson & Anstead, 1995).

Curriculum is seen as a generalized statement of intentional learning, which will invariably raise ethical dilemmas. The formal curriculum represents a balance between ideology, control, competing tensions from the educational process and the power which is exercised by the author in the desire to implement a certain type of knowledge at a chosen time. From an ideological point of view, the monocultural curriculum is different from the multicultural one, because the experiences of the person who realizes and implements the curriculum at the university level must not contain ideological stereotypes. From a control perspective, control issues focus on "who has, who doesn't, why and in what sense?", this being concretized by attributing the value of the forms of knowledge in a certain way (Harris, 2005). The control and power over the way in which the curriculum is managed globally is assigned to governments that also implement the curricular policy, both during the first years of schooling and on the other budgeted forms of schooling (Ball *et al.*, 2011). Thus, it is preferable for universities to have autonomy in the way they create their curriculum to avoid this phenomenon, that would prejudice the educational process in multicultural groups and raise a series of ethical dilemmas (Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

Teachers and students have their own visions about the purpose of education, and these visions are not shared by international students in the same way. Teachers value knowledge and learning in their classrooms, projecting their goals for education into the future. Students do not share the value given to many curricular experiences in schools, because they do not clearly perceive the purpose of education. This is an important ethical dilemma when designing and implementing an effective curriculum. Another identified ethical dilemma lies between the sense of purpose and the aspirations of the international students in terms of education, against university policies and the subjectivity of teachers (Bezzina, 2012).

The realization and implementation at the university level of a curriculum requires ethical involvement and observance of ethical codes and standards in the field. However, the university reflects a local response to a broader policy, in a localized and specific context. Although the university's intention is to closely follow a formal curriculum policy, the constraints which will most likely arise from the organization of teaching (timetable, human resources, subjects) may limit an international student's opportunity to learn. These decisions are not only available to teachers but are made in accordance with university policies.

Conclusion

The way in which learning activities are perceived as "intentional and valuable" can also be confused with tensions that arise in a classroom. Expectations of international students are not always perceived as valuable or intentional learning, as they are not presented in a family/home context. Teachers need to be aware, because those expectations are attributed to curricular policy or to respond to contemporary educational research, are not appreciated in the same way by students from multicultural groups. This is due to direct conflicts with family or cultural values that in some cases have as a generator the material that is taught in a classroom. Not often, international students look differently at aspects presented in the course materials and are at odds with the teacher as well with the educational institution based on political, social and religious beliefs. A problem taken as seriously as possible in recent decades is teaching religion or spirituality in public schools, as this can lead to clashes of ethics from home to school, and school to home, thus resulting from the curricular practices of schools (Byrne, 2012; LaRocque, 2013; Wong, 2012; Hemming, 2011).

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CREATING MULTICULTURAL SKILLS AMONG TEACHERS

B I A N C A H A N G A N U , B E A T R I C E G A B R I E L A I O A N

Introduction

Currently, the educational process is strongly influenced by a multitude of factors, which determine diversity and mobility not encountered in the past.

On the one hand, political issues at national and international levels make it necessary to integrate students belonging to ethnic minority groups, migrant groups or asylum seekers (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017). European Union countries have become a place of refuge for many groups of migrants forced to leave their countries due to the unstable political context, wars, famine or natural disasters (Berlemann & Steinhardt, 2017; Szczepanikova & Van Criekinge, 2018).

On the other hand, the expansion of inter-institutional international academic relations is increasingly facilitating the attendance of higher education in a country other than one's home country. Thus, studying abroad is a "practice" progressively common in recent years and is an additional way of cultural enrichment, both for students and for the universities that host them (Budrow, 2015; Chiu, 1995). Students can finalise either a complete cycle of studies (bachelor's, master's, and doctorate) or a section of them, in the form of a semester or an academic year in Erasmus projects. There is also the possibility of summer schools, where students experience international culture and education during the holidays, benefiting from both educational and vocational training, as well as extra-curricular activities for cultural enrichment (Rienties *et al.,* 2012). These international educational experiences are possible on the one hand due to the changes in today's society, a society in which moving from one country to another in the European space has become easier, both in terms of travel documents and prices involved (Antón-Solanas *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, another reason for the increase in the number of international students in Western universities is related to financial and political aspects, related to market-based globalization and the reduction of public funds by some governments (Budrow, 2015; Juliá, 2000).

A series of peculiarities outline the multicultural educational environment: respecting the diversity of cultural values both by preserving and enriching one's own culture with cultural values specific to the other participants in the educational process; developing intercultural communication skills; adapting

the environment in order to carry out teaching activities to the new cultural components; tolerance of cultural differences (Dzalalova and Raud, 2012).

Multicultural competence – a necessity in the training curriculum

Due to extensive mobility, to the need or educational, cultural or professional enrichment, countries from the European Union, but also of the world in general, are facing a growing ethnic diversity (Den Brok *et al.*, 2010; Hordijk, *et al.,* 2018). This intensification of ethnic and implicitly linguistic diversity makes it necessary to create a multicultural educational environment adapted to the new requirements (Den Brok *et al.*, 2010). This necessary goal is, at the same time a major challenge for the educational process (Den Brok *et al.*, 2010), but can be achieved through the collaboration of all institutions involved in the educational process and materialized, on the one hand in including multicultural skills in the training curriculum of the teachers, and on the other hand in updating these skills permanently throughout their career. The United States has been implementing multicultural competencies in teacher training since 1968 (Juliá, 2000). This was preceded by a series of discussions on ethnic and racial diversity in the United States and was followed by a series of research on teachers' skills. The research results highlighted the need for multicultural competence courses and their inclusion as part of the national standards needed to obtain teacher qualifications (Hamilton, 2016).

The first interaction with representatives of a new culture generally creates discomfort, especially when there is no training in this regard. However, if we accept that we are different but just as valuable, we can establish a connection and reach the same "wavelength" (Budrow, 2015).

Defining the concept of multicultural competence

Referring to the general competence of teachers, we can characterize it as their ability to carry out their professional activity coherently, using the knowledge, skills and attitudes formed through their own education and later through experience, to meet the specific demands of the educational environment. (Den Brok *et al.*, 2010).

Multicultural competence is an essential part of the general competence of teachers (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012), which frames their abilities to be aware of the existence of other cultures, to have specific knowledge of them and to self-model in order to relate properly with students from different cultural backgrounds so that the activity environment is constructive and safe for all participants in the teaching act (Hamilton 2016). Spanierman *et al.* (2011) proposed the definition of multicultural competence as a cyclic process repeated continuously by teachers, a process that involves analysing how they perceive

other cultures and express their views on these perceptions in attitudes; they seek to progress in the knowledge and understanding of other populations; based on this knowledge and awareness of their teaching acts – both in terms of the teaching process and in terms of relationships with students from other cultures (Spanierman *et al.*, 2011). As an integral part of a teacher's professional education, multicultural competence influences teacher development, from a cognitive to a practical level, with application in the development of teaching activities (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012).

Multicultural competence is therefore complex, requiring on the one hand knowledge of other cultures and their connections, and on the other hand appropriate skills to apply the necessary methods in working with students. All this must be doubled by humanistic values, tolerance towards diversity and inclusion so that the relationship between teachers and students is effective (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012; Severiens *et al.,* 2014).

The need for multicultural competence in teacher training curriculum

In the absence of adequate theoretical and practical training, teachers in countries with rich cultural diversity risk failing to recognize and respect the diverse cultural load of the students they train (Cruz-Janzen & Taylor, 2004). Recent data confirm the lack of teacher training in the direction of cultural diversity encountered in student classes, especially in Western European countries and the USA, where there is an imbalance between the predominance of Caucasian teachers for large numbers of students from other world populations (Den Brok *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, the acquisition of this competence and its application in teaching will help to organize and maintain an appropriate environment for quality learning among students (Oakland, 2005).

When it comes to preparing teachers for activities with students, it supposes the acquisition of a series of competencies before the beginning of their career, supplemented later during practical application of the profession, depending on the needs of the environment in which they will carry out their activity. According to the European Commission, the essential competencies needed to enter the profession include "assessment skills, teamwork abilities, the social and interpersonal skills necessary for teaching, awareness of diversity issues, research skills, as well as organizational and leadership skills" (European Commission, 2013, p. 35). The inclusion of social justice and diversity in teacher training programs contributes to the acquisition of multicultural competences, in this case by improving awareness and respect for cultural diversity (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017).

Future teachers need specialized education in courses dedicated to interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds. They need to

acquire new skills, adapted to the cultural diversity that currently exists in all countries of the world, so that they can carry out their activity in an efficient, fair and equitable way. In this respect, multicultural education should be integrated as a compulsory component in teacher training curriculums and not as an optional component. Today's world is too diverse for multicultural education to remain an optional course (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017).

Models for preparing the multicultural competence

Multicultural training of teachers requires an intertwining of cognitive, affective and behavioural elements, which should be used to provide students with the right tools through which they can succeed in developing (Singelis, 2000).

Several authors have proposed different models of multicultural competence based on three major components, interconnected and interdependent.

Model 1: awareness, knowledge and skills (Hamilton, 2016).

Awareness that personal experiences and perceptions of one's own culture could be a barrier to gaining competence, leading to prejudices about other cultures. This component is closely linked to knowledge, because in order to overcome this barrier, detailed knowledge is needed both about one's own culture, other cultures and the acceptance of differences among them, ultimately valuing each member of another culture, in the fullness of its diversity (Miranda, 2014). Initiating the process of accumulating knowledge when it comes to cultural diversity can begin during the preparatory studies for the teaching profession, but it is important that this process continues throughout the career, given the increasingly intense cultural mobility. In addition to training in the educational process and as part of the curriculum, teachers can supplement their knowledge through personal reading and by constantly updating their knowledge. The interconnection and interdependence of these components mean, at the same time, awareness to avoid that the new knowledge gained about a culture leads to generalization and stereotypes. This can be done by being aware of the differences between individuals belonging to a certain group and knowing the particularities of the subgroups of a certain culture. The third component, skills, finds its applicability under the umbrella of awareness and knowledge, these helping the (future) teacher to acquire the necessary skills for quality practice with students from different cultures, including preventing or resolving cultural differences when in the same class students are diverse (Hamilton, 2016).

Model 2: cultural awareness and cognition, personality's value priority and motivation-based activities (Dzalalova and Raud, 2012).

- Cultural awareness and cognition. As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, knowledge and recognition of cultural diversity are essential for acquiring multicultural competence. The first step is to understand one's own

culture, the second step is to accept other cultures, and the third step is to intersperse multicultural principles in educational content. This component also includes encouraging the learning of foreign languages (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012). The Council of Europe (2015) supports the inclusion of language awareness in training programs for future teachers, given that language gives meaning to educational content (Council of Europe, 2015). All these elements will contribute to the efficiency of communication with people belonging to other cultures. And, communication is fundamental in pedagogical practice (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012). Moreover, learning a new language brings with it an increase in sensitivity and self-reflection (Council of Europe, 2015).

- Personality's value priority. In their educational path, teachers must acquire an operating system of humanistic values specific to cultural diversity, without which pedagogical practice cannot be complete. These values are necessary, both for the interaction between the teacher and the student/their families, and for the interaction between the teachers. Tolerance and positive ethnic self-identity, as well as psychological training for collaboration with other educational professionals in a multicultural environment, complete the "recipe" for teacher training (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012).

- Motivation-based activities. Activities involve interaction, and cultural diversity requires intercultural interaction. In order for the teaching work to be successful, the activities must be prepared methodically, using techniques specific to the multicultural environment, which teachers will be prepared to use the other two components mentioned above. The entire teaching activity must take place under the umbrella of humanistic interaction and respect for cultural diversity (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012).

Suggestions for programs included in the educational curriculum of teachers

In the modern academic world, which is enriched by great cultural diversity, it is necessary to include multicultural education in the curriculum for the training of future teachers, to help them develop their multicultural competence inclusively by reflecting their attitude towards diversity (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017). The way in which students develop professionally and socially in the educational environment and implicitly their academic results, depends to a large extent on the attitude shown by teachers towards cultural diversity (Hamilton, 2016).

The Council of Europe (2015) emphasizes the need to include language courses in teacher training curriculum, emphasizing the importance of language in teaching (Council of Europe, 2015).

Multicultural education does not mean abandoning the principles of one's own culture but identifying ways in which an individual's own principles as well

as the principles of other cultures can be combined and complement each other. This, in turn will ensure that self-identity is preserved and differences in interpersonal identity are respected. At the same time, it will contribute to the effective prevention or resolution of possible cultural conflicts (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012).

Dzalalova and Raud (2012) proposed a guide for the development of multicultural competence among teachers, starting from the restructuring of educational content in accordance with the rise of cultural diversity and values associated with each culture, as well as in line with the values of social development. Thus, the authors propose:

- implementation of new means for organizing educational content by involving both administrative staff and teachers,

- consistency of educational content – the need for disciplines to be studied in an orderly manner and to identify links between different disciplines, combining theoretical knowledge with their application in practice,

- involvement in modern scientific research in the field of multicultural education and intercultural communication and dissemination of research results in scientific events,

- encouraging participation in conferences held by specialists in the field, which address the subject of multicultural competence,

- active teaching and learning, through case studies and problem-solving exercises – all on topics in the field of cultural diversity,

- combining theory with practice, following the principles of multiculturalism, for example through study trips and organizing effective practice in educational institutions where international students' study,

- wholeness – the perception of the educational process of future teachers as a way to develop their personality, both in collective learning and in individual study, with identification and application of specific methods to achieve this goal,

- cultural appropriateness, referring to the knowledge on the one hand of the values common to the cultures of the modern world, and on the other hand, individual humanistic values of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity, all applied in solving concrete pedagogical tasks,

- involvement of administrative structures in creating working conditions adapted to studying in a multicultural environment,

- teaching the specific notions of each discipline in a student-centred manner,

- acquiring an appropriate multicultural background that supports and gives credibility to teaching methods,

- emphasis on the basic characteristics of the multicultural education process: humanistic features, tolerance, interactive and flexible way of teaching,

- the effective inclusion in the analytical program for the psycho-pedagogical module – where it does not already exist – regarding specific topics, such as multicultural education or intercultural communication.

The application of all these proposals allows the training of teachers both psychologically and theoretically, as well as at a practical level, so that teachers will be prepared to work professionally in a multicultural environment (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012).

Similarly, a proposal to the European Commission in 2017 by the Public Policy and Management Institute (2017) on acquiring multicultural competence among future teachers emphasizes the balance between concise and clear theory and field practice in multicultural communities, emphasizing the inefficiency of training that does not include practical activities directly in the field of work. In this document, the authors propose a series of programs, modules and courses that can be included in teacher training curricula in order to successfully cope with activities in the educational environment.

These proposals include:

- inclusion of cultural diversity in curricula,

- training to develop communication in different foreign languages by applying the theory in participating in classes with international students – as part of the process of training future teachers,

- diminish feelings of prejudice, stereotypes and teachers' expectations through adequate psycho-social training,

- inclusion of notions of citizenship education,

- expand the theoretical knowledge in the cultural and political fields of population migration and the social and anthropological differences of these population groups (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017),

- emphasize topics regarding racism and social exclusion, with the identification of ways to uproot concepts of social exclusion on racial grounds, with the complete elimination of racism from the educational environment (Gazeley & Dunne, 2013),

- integration of the notions of population, culture and ethnicity in all stages of teacher training, so that they can cope more easily and practice effectively with students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Lander, 2011).

Although the results of studies on the efficiency of international exchanges are not consistent, some authors suggest including an international educational experience in training programs of future teachers, supporting its advantage in increasing teacher training, including multicultural competence (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017).

Qualities of the multicultural competent teacher

The acquisition of multicultural competence by teachers involves an accumulation of theoretical notions, skills and their application in direct educational practice. The way in which they are applied depends, at the same time, on teachers' own perceptions and experiences and on certain qualities with which they must supplement their theoretical and practical training (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017).

Thus, the profile of the teacher prepared for the activity in multicultural educational environments as well as being multiculturally competent, is framed by the following elements:

- the teacher is aware of his/her own culture and multiculturalism in the educational process and society in general (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012; Hamilton, 2016),

- eager for continuous development and training,

- open-minded and self-reflective (Hamilton, 2016),

- empathetic, patient, tolerant (Dzalalova & Raud 2012; Hamilton, 2016; Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017)

- understanding towards those who are different (Washington, 2003),

- able to develop in students the skills that will help them cope with education in a multicultural environment (Dzalalova & Raud, 2012),

- has an efficient way of teaching and knows how to respond in a sensitive way to the demands of culturally different students (Hamilton, 2016), as well as to adapt the lesson content to the load of values, beliefs and experiences that each student presents (Echevarria, 2015).

Conclusions

The modern academic environment is dominated by a growing cultural diversity, so that multicultural competence among teachers becomes imperative. The teacher's path, in order to acquire this competence, includes both elements related to general knowledge about cultural diversity and the understanding and acceptance of cultural differences in the teaching process. For teachers who are about to enter the field of work, it is useful to integrate multicultural competence as a compulsory subject in the training curricula – for example, in the psycho-pedagogical module. For teachers already in the field of work, multicultural training can be achieved by participating in additional courses, conferences and international exchanges. At the same time, teachers need to be aware that training is constantly updated throughout their careers, depending on the new requirements of the educational environment. Humanistic values, such as tolerance, patience, sensitivity, empathy etc. must complete the professional training of all teachers. All this so that the relationship in the educational

environment is a friendly, fruitful and efficient one. A premise that guarantees the success of the didactic act.

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BURNOUT AMONG STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN MULTICULTURAL AND MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS

ROXANA CLAPONEA, MAGDALENA IORGA

Introduction

The student population is considered to be exposed to high levels of stress in comparison with the rest of the population. Intervention among students revealed that it influences emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment but almost no effect on depersonalization (Iancu *et al.*, 2018). In recent studies teacher burnout has been correlated with a lack of achievement, low test results and fewer achievement skills in literacy (Madigan & Kim, 2020).

Acknowledging the background of continuous development in the academic field and labour market combined with the development of technology, the individual has become more and more eager to evolve intellectually and professionally. Requirements from employers, which often exceed the limit of an individual's comfort zone, have created an extremely competitive labour market which needs a strong academic foundation.

In the past, the field of education was considered one of the least affected by burnout due to low workload, opportunities for studying abroad and convenience for professional development by participating in various conferences. Nowadays, against the backdrop of the challenges in the field of education, it is necessary to align with the new requirements of the market. Thus, in order to progress in a career, at an educational level, professors need to change their vision through innovation and intellectual progress. Professional development is influenced by experience, educational environment, culture and job satisfaction. It is felt as a stress factor when it is supplemented by an ever-growing workload and thus can turn into physical and mental exhaustion (Khan *et al.*, 2014).

Burnout syndrome

Although burnout syndrome was mentioned randomly in the past, the emphasis on the phenomenon began in the 1970s in the United States (Maslach, 1976 *as cited in* Maslach, 2017). It has been identified, especially with employees working in the service sector and occupations which entail direct contact with customers (Maslach, 1982).

Burnout syndrome implies three distinct dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and professional efficiency. According to initial research, the

dimension of emotional exhaustion was described as a state of exhaustion characterized by a lack of energy and fatigue. The dimension of cynicism was initially called depersonalization, given the nature of occupations in the field of services, as well as negative or inappropriate attitudes towards customers, irritation or lack of idealism. When dealing with cynicism, it should be considered a distancing from individual work, including the development of negative attitudes towards work in general, thus generating a lack of commitment and enthusiasm. The dimension of professional efficiency was initially called reduced personal achievement and was described by low productivity, overwork and reduced productivity. (Maslach, 1982)

Burnout syndrome among students consists of three dimensions. The first dimension, emotional exhaustion, analyses the feelings of being exhausted, taking into consideration the high demands necessarily for the learning process. The second dimension, disbelief, is associated with a cynical attitude towards their studies, and the third-dimension, professional effectiveness, is defined by a feeling of incompetence (Tomaschewski-Barlem *et al.*, 2014).

Burnout is often associated with depression as both are characterized by common elements, such as sleep deficiencies, digestive disorders, feeling exhausted, decreased professional performance, reduced ability to carry on a dialogue and a feeling of emotional emptiness (Iorga *et al.*, 2020a).

The role of Alexithymia

Alexithymia is defined as the difficulty in identifying emotions, as well as communicating emotions felt by another person. Alexithymia is often associated with distress, depression and burnout mainly, with a dimension of depersonalization. Perceived stress, which is described in terms of an overall burnout, is correlated with a lack of interest in one's job, poor interpersonal relationships and problems regarding physical conditions. Perceived social support is a protective factor against stressor components (Popa-Velea *et al.*, 2017).

In a study among medical students attending preclinical years, it was revealed that a high level of depression is correlated with high levels of alexithymia (Iorga *et al.*, 2018b). For example, when analysing the relationship between alexithymia and burnout among medical students studying at the University of Medicine Bucharest, the preponderance of burnout was reported only at 15%, with the highest percentage in depersonalization, both for female and male students. At the same time, a lack of perceived social support was associated with burnout mostly for women, and alexithymia was correlated with burnout mostly for the male respondents. The authors of the study also suggest ways of mitigating burnout, such as counselling and a secure environment to express emotions felt which can be best used to prevent alexithymia. In terms of

gender, women seem to be more exposed to burnout, mainly in terms of emotional exhaustion (Popa-Velea *et al.*, 2017).

The role of Emotional intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence has been associated with emotional and physical health, job satisfaction, maximizing commitment and reducing the manifestation of burnout syndrome (Soto-Rubio *et al.*, 2020). Mayer and Salovey define emotional intelligence as *the ability to recognize, understand and regulate one's own and others' emotions, to distinguish between them and to use this information to guide thoughts and actions* (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Scholars point out that e-learning and emotional intelligence have a considerable effect on stress resulting in the learning process, alike to burnout and performance. The pandemic could generate issues regarding mental health and wellbeing of students (UNESCO, 2020). Due to the physical and emotional demands of the academic requests, students became more exposed to psychological pressure (Alam *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, physical events, educational actions and gatherings were blocked, and students' mobility was more restrictive (Tesar, 2020). For instance, according to Martel (2020)., nearly 90% of the U.S. institutions have estimated a decrease in international student enrolment In previous studies, a high level of emotional intelligence was associated with coping methods against psychological pressure and stress among students.

Another interesting idea pointed out that poor countries are more affected by a lack of interaction between the professor and student. Bonal and González (2020) suggest that emotional intelligence has a great impact when it comes to coping with situations under pressure; this in turn prevents stress and burnout and emphasizes academic performance (Yusoff *et al.*, 2021). The lack of physical participation and the large amount of time spent at home was responsible for a huge impact on the students' performance (Chandra, 2020). Moreover, Rohman *et al.* (2020) suggested that online learning has an impact on health, psychosomatic complaints, sleeping disorders, anxiety and depression.

Predictive factors

Extra factors that provoke stress or anxiety among students are consequences of a modern society which are also linked to unemployment after graduating higher education. In the academic field, various variables that predict burnout could be considered, such as, insights, society or interpersonal causes. Academic variables may include poor communication between students and professors, poor academic administration of a university, high levels of demands or complicated disciplines. Among the environmental variables, it could be mentioned that there are few employment possibilities after graduating because of competition among students and the lack of financial and family support.

Also, it is advisable to consider interpersonal variables, like the ordinary learning process, the student's gender or the short time allocated for studying during the exam period (Salgado & Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2021).

One important predictor of student burnout is considered to be a lack of school engagement which can bring about further consequences, such as achieving a low level of academic performance and dealing with low levels of wellbeing. School engagement is characterized by the student's sense of identification with a school, which highlights active participation in studying. Hence, attending courses, completing assignments on time and listening to the professor, describe a student who is committed (Akbaşli *et al.*, 2019).

In the past, high levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism were associated with the desire of changing the job, high levels of cynicism and reduced academic efficacy were correlated with poor academic performance. A lack of reduced academic efficacy was also associated with reduced academic achievement. Hence, students with a high level of burnout have intentions of taking a chance on the speciality studied (Atalayin *et al.*, 2015).

In training and education of medical students, coping resources should have vital importance due to the high amount of learning demands and the short time reserved for free time. Thus, the balance of personal and professional life plays an important role for future medical careers. Stressor factors, triggered by the personal life of the students and a lack of time allocated for these kinds of activities, such as childbirth, marriage or the begging of a new job can be also identified (Grimm *et al.*, 2017). In these conditions, medical students report that they are afraid of asking for professional help, despite signs of deterioration of their wellbeing (Mian *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, substance and alcohol usage are commonly spread among physicians along with thoughts of suicide which are considered to be more predictive for the death of doctors more than diabetics or pulmonary disease (Mian *et al.*, 2018).

Consequences of burnout among students

Burnout can generate consequences materialized in low levels of academic performance and self-efficacy, negative opinions about the university's environment, the inability of managing difficulties and fear of engaging in entrepreneurship actions. Therefore, it is important to minimize the consequences of burnout because low levels of engagement and academic achievement will minimize the university's value (Akbaşli *et al.*, 2019).

Burnout can generate both external and internal consequences. Low levels of academic achievement and motivation are considered external consequences of burnout, while internal ones are driven, mostly, by the interpersonal process which might affect wellbeing and generate low levels of life satisfaction and academic success. For example, in a study among preclinical students in Turkey,

the authors suggested that workload is a direct predictor of emotional exhaustion and an indirect predictor of cynicism, by using emotional exhaustion as a mediator. The findings also reveal that cynicism is predicted by emotional exhaustion, and high levels of cynicism predicts reduced academic efficiency. Therefore, emotional exhaustion, cynicism and academic achievement have a considerable effect on academic satisfaction, achievement and the desire of becoming a graduate student (Atalayin *et al.*, 2015).

The impact of burnout on Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is seen as a social result and reveals that students who perform well during their studying years generally display improved health and a higher feeling of wellbeing, along with better remuneration and contribution to the tax-base by using competencies developed through the studying years and continuous training (OECD, 2016).

In the field of academic achievement, a diversity of predictors is associated with personal, social and environmental factors like personality, professors or the university. Therefore, mental abilities, social support, intellect, interest, learning accuracy or feedback, play an important part in academic achievement. At the opposite pole, anxiety, stress, absenteeism or switching schools are negatively correlated with achievement (Madigan & Curran, 2021). Taking into consideration all the stressors and requirements in the academic field, burnout is common among professors (Iancu *et al.*, 2018). As expected, burnout is prevalent for students, admitting that the long learning process involving assignments, projects or structured activities are like having a job (Madigan & Curran, 2021).

Burnout among Medical students

Among students, one of the main categories exposed to burnout is represented by medical students due to the nature of this speciality, which is a demanding one and is characterized by constrained time for studying and limited resources to complete the whole process. Hence, it is imperative to understand this phenomenon, taking into consideration the fact that burnout among medical students can degenerate until they start their professional life; this is turn will compromise their career and patient care. In a study conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal in March 2021, among medical students, it was suggested that burnout affected 65% of the students, with 12.7% of them feeling emotionally exhausted, 11,4% feeling disengaged and 10,0% feeling neither emotionally exhausted or disengaged (Shrestha *et al.*,2021).

The medical specialty is thought to be one of the most difficult ones due to the duration of the study and the emotional demands, mainly in the preclinical years. Thus, burnout was correlated with health issues, drug use and suicidal

intentions, which can affect the professional life of a future physician manifested in cynicism, a low sense of compassion or quitting. Another alarming issue is regarded to the feelings of depression, which is identified at high levels in students, mainly among medical ones with high scores in women (Iorga *et al.*, 2018a).

An interesting and less debated point of view is offered by the study of Wachholtz and Ragoff (2013), who examined the influence of religion in prevention of burnout among medical students. The study was conducted on the medical students attending university in New England and revealed that a high level of spirituality could limit the experience of burnout. Another research project among U.S. medical students suggested that the participants who considered themselves active participants of their religion could minimize the risk of appearance of burnout. (Haghnegahdar *et al.*, 2021).

High workload levels and the importance of achieving clinical performance, accompanied by a lack of support of their peers, might create a hostile work environment for medical students and resident doctors. Despite adverse circumstances, there have been studies which emphasize that these kinds of environments can develop positive learning, as well as opportunities for medical students and resident physicians. Another concern for students is sleep privation which is related to burnout, medical errors, lethargy and negative attitudes. An additional issue considers emotional regulation due to the fact that medical students will later embrace the profession of being physician. They will have to deal with ill patients and, in some cases, with dying patients. Therefore, emotions are outlined as necessary elements which facilitate the education of professional medical practices. Recent studies have also revealed that emotional intelligence is a predictor of a doctor's wellbeing (Lin *et al.*, 2016).

Protective factors for medical students are the relationship with their close family and friends, with an emphasis on social life. Therefore, studies have shown that positive learning environments during the studying years can mitigate the level of perceived stress (Shapiro *et al.*, 2017).

Prevention programs are also important in stress management of students, mainly for the ones attending medicine which could mitigate the stress produced by the learning process. Hence, programs designed for developing skills which could minimize the level of stress felt, managing their emotions and keeping an open social life could support the wellbeing of the individual following a medical career (Brennan & McGrady, 2015). Furthermore, programs which embrace mindfulness and relaxation exercises, as well as napping periods during active learning and work in the medical units could be considered useful (Hoff, 2004).

Mentoring programs were found to be also encouraging, and their application involves guidance for the career chosen, boosting student research programs, exercising, empathy and learning how to create a connection with their future patients (Frei *et al.*, 2010).

Burnout among International students

Students attending universities in other countries are susceptible of becoming stressed out and depressed due to the high level of assignments, deadlines, overloaded schedule, a lack of friends and families in the host country, financial difficulties or unhealthy meal schedules. One of the most vulnerable categories of burned-out international students is the medical one which might encounter difficulties regarding communication, understanding the patient doctor relationship or facing life ending issues (Iorga *et al.*, 2020b).

Romania has become a host country for a high number of international students, mainly for ones studying medicine because of financial aspects (affordable prices for daily expenses, accommodation and transport, low taxes for attending university) or past experiences of their family and friends studying in Romania (Muraru *et al.*, 2020).

In a study performed in Portugal, burnout had lower levels of manifestation for students attending extracurricular activities or for students with high levels of freedom in choosing their courses. Also, in the case of following their vocation, students were less exposed to burnout, which consequently may enhance motivation. According to the study, well-being can be improved by using new methods in the learning process and adding some more classes and curricula options. Students who consider their professors less competent, developed cynical attitudes. Lastly, students who had to deal with low opportunities in the employment market and higher expectations when enrolling in a higher education institution were more exposed to burnout because of the uncertainty of their career goals (Salgado & Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2021).

According to OECD (2021), *international students are those who received their prior education in another country and are not residents of their current country of study.* According to the OECD statistics (2021) the highest percentages of international students for 2019 was 48.6% for Luxemburg, followed quite far back by Australia with 28, 4% and New Zealand with 20,8%. At the opposite pole, India and Brazil were at 0.1% and Colombia with 0,2% in 2019. This indicator shows the number of university students as a proportion of the total tertiary students enrolled in the destination country. According to the UIS-UNESCO Database (2021) for inbound international students, the inbound mobility rate for Romania was in 2019- 5.68% and for outbound students, the outbound mobility rate by host region was 6.59%.

Another concerning problem involves the need of using medication which may generate a high level of burnout. Hence, the students taking medication weekly or monthly registered higher scores than the ones who did not use any. When taking into consideration the type of medicine used, the study of Salgado & Au-Yong-Oliveira (2021) showed that the ones taking antidepressants, anxiolytics, sleeping medication or food supplements/multivitamins, showed

higher levels of burnout compared to those who did not take this type of medication. Also, it was determined that students using medication that prevent emotional exhaustion and improved academic achievement, likewise registered higher levels of burnout

International students are usually expected to obtain academic achievement in a short period of time in their host country. For example, the Chinese and Korean culture put great value on academic performance, which may generate pressure for those students (Jin *et al.*, 2021). As defined by Maslach *et al.*, (1986), academic burnout can bring about emotional exhaustion caused by a large amount of learning demands, cynicism, disengagement and low self-efficacy. Therefore, in a study conducted in South Korea in seven universities, 673 international students were participants in the research. Thus, independent motivation was associated with wellbeing using acculturation as a mediator. Controlled motivation was correlated with academic burnout using acculturation similarly as a mediator. Independent motivation among the Chinese international students was correlated with commitment in achieving their career goals and following their vocation. Hence, studying in another country, by using autonomous motivation, helped the international student in gaining psychological well-being and preventing burnout (Jin *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, academic burnout is a state of emotional mental and physical exhaustion which is affecting more and more students, mainly during the pandemic era (Kochuchakkalackal, 2021).

Another research project which examined the burnout rate among agricultural students in Iran, showed that academic burnout is manifested through the three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, academic cynicism and academic efficacy. All three had significant negative effect in academic achievement (Kaabi, *et al.*, 2021)**.**

Acculturation and burnout

The pandemic situation is developing a breach for the international students who left their countries in order to achieve a high standard education. In terms of international students, acculturation has its origins in the endeavour of the individual to solve the issues regarding cultural differences between the culture of origin and the dominant one in the host country. This process is difficult, which may provoke stressful psychosocial experiences, discrimination, feeling of missing for their families and obstacles regarding learning in a different language (Kochuchakkalackal, 2021).

A high priority of importance should be provided to the factors that could generate acculturation. Those arise from the host country's society, such as the locals' vision about immigrants, cultural and religious perspectives as well as interest in creating a common friendly multicultural environment (Iorga *et al.*, 2020b).

This is why, in a comparative study among Japanese international and domestic students, (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019) depression is more prevalent for international students than for resident students with 37.8% than 29.85%. Another common issue is the dimension of acculturation stress, due to the constant rise among inbound and outbound students all around the world. Therefore, to find support, Japanese college students ask for friends and siblings. The findings also reveal that the most preferred sources for seeking help were the informal ones with low interest in seeking help in a formal way. Formal ways of helping were defined as mental health professionals and doctors. Examples of informal methods of helping were friends, siblings and religious leaders. Diverse ways of help being used were phone helplines, the Internet or getting help by yourself. Regarding the differences between the two kinds of students, the literature reveals that international ones are more likely to deal with emotional issues by themselves and more open to find help on the Internet. In terms of acculturation, acculturative pressure was positively associated with formal, informal and diverse help seeking actions similar to those for the international or domestic students; depression was negatively associated with the desire for international students to search for help through informal ways (Nguyen *et al.,* 2019).

For international students, several factors which could generate acculturative stress are personality, social status, language and cultural obstacles, as well as gender or age (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

Dealing with burnout among international students

Prevention methods that mitigate the appearance of burnout emphasise the wellbeing of the individual. Suggested methods of prevention promote the awareness of burnout which may appear after using online communication tools for an extended period, the constant use of breaks during the learning process in order to relax the eyes of the student, wellness campaigns which make use of sports' activities, breathing exercises, postcards in order to facilitating learning, sharing emotions in a secure environment and reducing the use of caffeine or smoking (Mheidly *et al.*, 2020).

Students with a deep desire to learn, allocated more time than usual to the whole learning process (online and studying after courses). Findings like this could develop interventional methods which have the aim of preventing burnout. It can also be acknowledged for the professor to monitor his/her students which will allow for better ability to cope with stress. Therefore, students who allot a considerable amount of time for online learning are more exposed to burnout, and consideration of adequate time must be reserved by each professor for attending online classes, as well as planning projects and

resolving assignments. This will allow for better understanding of the subjects studied (Sunawan, *et al.*, 2021).

Each learning and training process has specific objectives and involves academic achievement to improving wellbeing. Thus, in a study regarding psychology, students and the authors revealed that grades are considered predictors of student engagement, including burnout, but well-being is not considered preliminary for academic performance (Paloş et al., 2019).

Master and PhD students' level of burnout

Graduating students experience high levels of stress due to their enormous workload, such as research projects, courses, teaching activities and grant applications. Recent theories have put forward the fact that doctoral tensions among students can have circumstances equivalent to role conflict, lack of a healthy relationship between the coordinating professor and student future perspectives (Mackie & Bates, 2019). In another recent research project, regarding doctoral graduate students, revealed that besides burnout this category is more exposed to anxiety and depression in comparison to other corresponding category of the educated population or working individuals (Levecque *et al.*, 2017).

Another alarming issue consists of unhealthy ways to manage stress and burnout, such as prescription drug use (Varga & Varga, 2015). Moreover, the risk of suicide is an eminent issue which needs special attention (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2019). Another interesting discovery suggests that graduate students do not feel comfortable when it comes to concealing difficulties. This appears due to the fear of being treated unfairly and feeling disapproved (Krause & Harris, 2019). Thus, taking care of PhD students could have long term positive results which might improve academic achievement (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018).

According to the Council of Graduate Schools, (2008) approximately 57% of American graduate students do not achieve their doctoral diploma, which is a big loss both for the students, due to the time loosed and financial aspects accorded to their academic development, as well as a loss of mentorship and scholarships for universities. A research project with student participants in the speciality of psychology revealed high levels of social support and community feeling but also the perception of burnout among 60% of the participants in the study, along with anxiety or stress (Park et al., 2021).

Burnout among teachers working with multicultural groups

Burnout could be identified in any kind of occupation (Leiter and Schaufeli, 1996). The most affected professions were proved to be healthcare professionals and teachers.

Burnout has been recognized as a serious health problem among teachers. High rates of prevalence were reported at various educational levels and in different countries. Burnout syndrome was associated with different factors such as: personality traits (the presence of high neuroticism and extraversion), self-efficacy, emotional competence, emotional reactivity, adverse working conditions, work-related stress, lack of social support, interpersonal conflict, school type, relationship with colleagues, motivation for choosing teaching activities, administrative bureaucracy and low salaries. Studies have proven that the main motivation for continuing one's teaching activity is the satisfaction with their job but not satisfaction with the salary.

The scientific literature provided also different scores of burnout syndrome among teachers, considering age, the level of education, marital status and work environment. (Carlotto, 2011; Borges *et al.*, 2012)

Burnout has negative impact on mental and physical health and was related to poor performance and adverse student outcomes. High levels of burnout were associated with job withdrawal-absenteeism, poor teacher-student relationship and turnover intention with important negative consequences on students' motivation, autonomy and academic performance.

Diversity-related burnout

Many universities are experiencing an important increase in enrolment of international students from all continents and with different cultural backgrounds. Due to constant changes, the multicultural groups that teachers have to face each academic year may lead them to burnout syndrome. In this context, self-efficacy is one of the protective factors that diminishes the level of burnout and helps teachers deal with multicultural groups. Self-efficacy beliefs are *judgements of personal capabilities in successfully executing a specific task* (Bandura, 1977) and it has proven to be strongly related to low levels of burnout among teachers working in multicultural and multilingual environments. A study conducted on teachers working with international students in Canadian universities showed that multicultural efficacy was found to be a protective factor of Personal Accomplishment dimension of burnout. (Chahar Mahali, 2019)

Conforming to Dubbeld *et al.*, (2019), teachers could be divided into three groups:

(1) teachers with relative assimilative attitude,
(2) teachers with no pronounced assimilative attitude,
(3) teachers with moderate assimilative attitude.

The authors identified that teachers who prove they have not a pronounced assimilative attitude showed the highest chance for developing a high level of burnout.

Dealing with culturally diverse students on a daily basis may put pressure on teachers, especially those with no experience in working with multicultural and multilingual groups or who have proven to be more *assimiliationist – a person who advocates a policy of assimilating differing racial or cultural groups*.

A study conducted by Tatar and Horenczyk (2003), among Israeli teachers, showed that diversity-related burnout is empirically distinguishable from the traditional notion of teacher burnout. The researchers identified that diversity-related burnout was predicted by several variables, such as grade level, job role, school organizational culture, openness to multiculturalism and school heterogeneity. The opinion of the teacher, regarding multiculturality and migration, influences the level of burnout to a great extent.

Similar findings were revealed by Gutentag *et al.* (2018) who identified that the teachers' positive perception of the immigrant student was in strongly related to lower burnout and to higher immigration-related self-efficacy. Glock and his team (2019) conducted another research and found that teachers, who were confronted with a highly culturally diverse groups, proved higher feelings of burnout and stress and lower self-efficacy than teachers presented with a school low in cultural diversity.

Burnout during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Academic learning has suffered several changes during the Covid-19 pandemic as the whole learning process was and still is related to online classes and social distancing among students. They used to spend a lot of time together, as well as studying in teams with their colleagues. Hence, the quality of student life has changed and affected academic performance. Another discovery from Brazil put forward the fact that young female students showed high levels of psychological disorders, such as depression or anxiety, as well as a high level of burnout. The highest level of burnout was considered for the medical students and for the ones in the Exact Sciences (Azzi *et al.*, 2021).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the learning process went online by using applications, such as Skype, Zoom, Face Time and GoogleClassroom which were thought to be keys in keeping the educational, economic and health sectors alive. Face to face learning and meetings with students were lost. Telecommunication (screens, tablets, smartphones) began to be the only providers for socializing, which caused a high level of stress and burnout. Some studies showed that prolonged use of smartphones affects more females than males, and personality traits put extraverted individuals closer to burnout (Meymandpour & Bagheri, 2017).

Covid-19 pandemic became a stress factor among medical students in the U.S. Therefore, in the case of medical students with the desire of specializing in neurosurgery, burnout was reported by 15% of the respondents, a rank which is

lower than the pre Covid-19 period. Hence, burnout was correlated with a lack of persuasion, feelings of uncertainty about the future and medical career. These findings are also related to the Covid-19 pandemic because the students embraced the opinion that the future in clinical medicine will be affected at a high point during and after the pandemic. An interesting point of view of this study is the fact that a low rate of burnout can be seen as an opportunity for interventions at the beginning of feeling concerned about burnout (Khalafallah *et al.*, 2021).

Differences in student burnout from levels of education during the Covid-19 Pandemic adjusted learning and training activities due to the switch from face-to-face activities to online classes. In research, which has the aim to investigate if burnout is different among levels of education during Covid-19 pandemic, revealed that the most affected are junior and senior high school and university students who attended and attend online classes between 1 and 3 hours per day. The study also suggests that it should be considered a discrepancy among the length of the learning process, the education level and the level of burnout. The pandemic has brought about concerns for a huge number of domains, such as, the medical sector, the economical one, as well as the educational sector. Hence, online learning was and still is applied on various levels of education, starting from elementary to the university level. There were cases when students encountered difficulties in understanding the material delivered by the professor, and in these cases complaints also appeared regarding the results of the studies. This comparative study shows that higher levels of education results in higher levels of burnout in learning domains. Therefore, the university students reported a higher level of burnout than the high school students who attended online classes for more than 9 hours per day. We could also consider that online courses, mainly at the beginning of the pandemic, were not planned enough due to the fact that learning activities were forced to be performed online, and they became a requirement and not an alternative method of learning (Sunawan, *et al.*, 2021).

Conclusion

Burnout syndrome can be defined as a psychological response to stress at work and implies emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment at work (Maslach & Jackson, 1987 *as cited in* Grandey, 2000). The emotional requirements from work can lead to burnout and other stress display actions. Over time, an individual's emotional intelligence develops more effective ways of managing and regulating emotions, which are often achieved through the use of lifelong learning and or the accumulation of experience (Chen *et al.*, 2016).

A multicultural environment is a challenging one due to the fact that studying in another country can follow positive outcomes, as well as negative ones. With reference to the positive ones, we could mention opportunities for developing intellectual outputs, professional and personal development. At the opposite pole, we can mention risks that threaten the maintenance of wellbeing. The mental dimension of well-being is commonly found in universities, mainly in the case of international students (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019).

Students who manifest burnout syndrome can develop frustration or become melancholy. It should be mentioned that students who feel more relaxed can develop motivation, academic achievement and feelings of enthusiasm, happiness or joy. On the other hand, burnout can also have health issue consequences, materialized in terms of diabetes, heart disease, obesity, fatigue or mental disorders (Salgado & Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2021).

Due to the desire to perform as many tasks as possible, as well as the desire of achieving academic performance, students may not be aware of setting limits and rejecting inappropriate ways of studying. Hence, it is important for the student to discover what professional life to embrace to feel motivated and fulfilled with their career path chosen during the studying years.

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INTERNATIONAL ADULT LEARNERS IN DIFFERENT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

M AGDALENA   I ORGA

Introduction

The great waves of migration in recent decades have been debated from several points of view. The historical-political explanations are intertwined with the ethical-moral analyzes. Migration caused by conflicts and wars, poverty and lack of resources has also been strengthened by the need for labor, so necessary in some European countries. Millions of migrants and refugees have found a job and a home with their families. Policies applied at national and European levels have been built for integration of migrants. Social integration and the provision of social assistance services have become the strong points of Host National Connectedness. Through education, however, migrants have been able to take small and safe steps to adapt to the host country.

In 2015, the number of migrants reached 244 million, which represents 3% of the world population. (GMDAC) In 2014, the European Union (EU) counted 3.8 million migrants with 1.9 million refugees, coming from non-member countries. (EUROSTAT) In 2015, over 65 million people migrated, and 50% of them came from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Even if it is a European problem for all 28 countries included in the EU, migration is a problem that impacts most countries in southeast Europe. For example, Greece welcomed nearly one million migrants in 2015. (UNCHR, 2016) In 2016, Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees (approximately 2.8 million) of any country. Within Europe, four countries received the greatest numbers of asylum applications in 2016. (EUROSTAT, 2017)

There are diverse reasons for individuals to move to a new continent or country: marriage, studies, work or humanitarian reasons. Some more reasons should be taken into consideration. For example, migration might be voluntary or forced: and Maurrice *et al.* (2017) mentioned persecution, displacement caused by environmental disasters, prolonged conflict, grinding poverty, climate change and dispossession of land.

Many European countries implemented resettlement programmes for migrants and refugees that seek to facilitate their integration into the host society. (Colic-Peisker & Waxman, 2004) The *World Health Organization* (WHO) promoted guidelines related to a need for reliable global data on migration and health, especially referring to undocumented migrants and those not able to access formal services. (WHO, 2016)

A study conducted by Lindert *et al.* (2009) identified that there are increased rates of depression and anxiety among migrants and refugees as well as significant statistical differences among the scores obtained by the two investigated groups. Their meta-analysis identified that the rates for depression were 20% among labor migrants vs. 44% among refugees; for anxiety the combined estimates were 20% among labor migrants vs. 40% among refugees.

Education is key to helping migrants break out of social and economic disadvantages. Public spending on education of migrants can be a profitable social investment: it may yield long-term economic returns through accelerated growth and better sustainability of public finances. Closing gaps in language, cultural knowledge and skills early is especially profitable. However, there are no "one size fits all" policies for better education of migrants, as populations with immigrant backgrounds in the Member States are highly diverse. (Bonim, 2017)

Aoki and Santiago (2018) showed language proficiency is a golden key to better integrate into the society. The authors found that better English language skills significantly improve educational attainment and adult health.

Many of migrants are, at the beginning, away from family and relatives which makes their colleagues or peers become the most intimate environment for a young adult migrant. It was highlighted that social support from the closest environment is extremely important in helping them adjust to their new culture and diminish the level of psychological stress. That is why the support offered by teachers that are involved in training (language, digital courses, etc.) is extremely important to determine these migrants to be resilient with training and programs. (Putri & Nurstanti, 2020)

Fig. 1. Policy measures required to tackle the social determinants of health for migrants and ethnic minorities
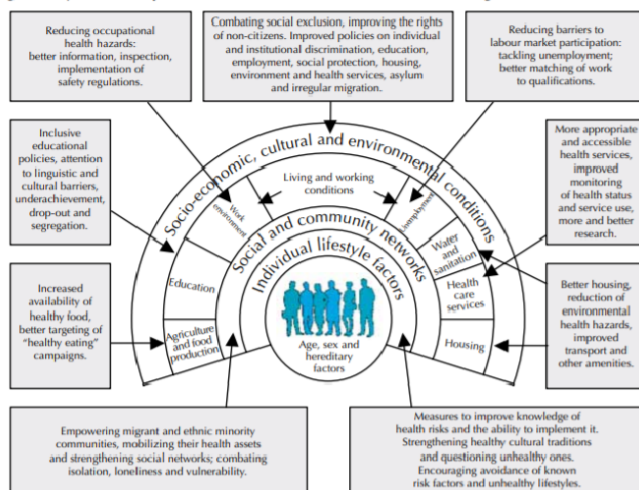
Source: The diagram is inspired by a presentation from Dr Nani Nair, TB Regional Advisor, on 15–16 September 2005 at the WHO Region Office for South East Asia consultation on the social determinants of health, subsequently adapted by Theadora Koller to address determinant of the health of socially excluded migrant populations, and further adapted for the purposes of this policy briefing. The well-known "rainbo is from Dahlgren & Whitehead (1991).

Nowadays women represent the majority of migrants coming to Europe, looking for more well-paid jobs. Some others come to work because in their native countries this is not allowed. Also, there are women who come to reunite with their families (husbands who found job in a European country).

Research

An online questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of this study and was distributed among adult learners (enrolled in different training courses) using GoogleDocs in some European countries. The items were addressed in the English language.

The tool had several parts, collecting socio-demographic data, information about the family type, family of origin, the reason for migration, professional level and medical data. Also, self-rated items wanted to investigate the opinion of migrants regarding the integration in the host-country and details about the lifestyle.

The results are presented in the sections below, and a profile of a migrant is provided. The results were useful when it came to constructing guidelines for teachers and trainers working with migrants, providing information that should help them create a new and supportive environment and help them cope with stress, related to migration.

Socio-demographic data

73 international adult learners responded to the questionnaire. Most of the respondents were female (52.1%). Their mean age was 34.43 years (± 8.79 years, min. = 22 years, max. 59 years). Details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic data

Variable	*Levels*	*N*	*%*
Gender	Female	38	52.1
	Male	35	47.9
Relationship status	Single	32	43.8
	In a relationship	41	56.2
Is your family of mixed origin?	No	51	69.9
	Yes	22	30.1
Education level	Primary	6	8.2
	Secondary	13	17.8
	Highschool	17	23.3
	University	37	50.7
How many languages do you speak (except your native language)	1	29	39.7
	2	31	42.5
	3	11	15.1
	4	2	2.7

Variable	Levels	N	%
What is your reason for choosing to live in the host country?	Looking for a job	30	41.1
	Running away from a conflict area	13	17.8
	Being with my partner (marriage or couple)	12	16.4
	Study	11	15.1
	Other	7	9.6
	No	26	35.6
	Sibling	2	2.7
	Cousin	2	2.7
Other acquaintances in the host country	Friend	7	9.6
	Family and friends	36	49.3
How many years have you been living in the host country	0-5	36	49.3
	6-10	18	24.7
	11-20	13	16.8
	21+	6	8.2
Other acquaintances living in the same city.	No	26	35.6
	Family of origin	13	17.8
	Friend	11	15.1
	Family (husband/wife)	23	31.5
Does anyone from your family come from the host country?	No	66	90.4
	Mother	2	2.7
	Father	2	2.7
	Both parents	2	2.7
	A grandparent	1	1.4
Did your parents have the same nationality as you?	No	3	4.1
	Yes	70	95.9
Total number of siblings	0	13	17.8
	1	21	28.8
	2	26	35.6
	3	9	12.3
	4	3	4.1
	5	1	1.4
Mother's education level	Primary	23	31.5
	Secondary	20	27.4
	Highschool	8	11.0
	University	22	30.1
Father's education level	Primary	21	28.8
	Secondary	16	21.9
	Highschool	13	17.8
	University	23	31.5

Variable	Levels	N	%
In how many countries have you lived for more than 1 year (except your native country)	0	18	24.7
	1	37	50.7
	2	14	19.2
	3	4	5.5
How many times per year do you visit your native country?	0	29	39.7
	1-3	40	54.8
	4+	4	5.5
Accommodation	Living by myself	34	46.6
	Sharing	39	53.4
Do you have a chronic disease?	No	71	97.3
	Yes	2	2.7
Have you developed any diseases since coming to the host country?	No	67	91.8
	Yes	6	8.2
Do you smoke	No	55	75.3
	Rarely	4	5.5
	Yes	14	19.2
Do you consume alcohol	No	45	61.6
	Rarely	16	21.9
	Yes	12	16.4
Do you consume drugs	No	69	94.5
	Rarely	3	4.1
	Yes	1	1.4
Have you received medical care in the host country?	No	34	46.6
	Yes	39	53.4

The respondents studied in various countries across Europe: Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Romania and others (see Table 2). Most of the respondents spoke one (39.7%) or two (42.5%) other languages fluently, aside from their native one. Most of them (50.7%) had a university degree.

Also, 49.3% of subjects were in the host country for less than five years. Most of them had family and friends in the host country (49.3%) and family living in the same city (31.5%). Most of the respondents (90.4%) did not have their origins in the host country. 41.4% of the respondents came into the country looking for a job.

The respondents came from families with more than one child (82.2% of them had at least one sibling) and with a high degree of education (30.1% of their mothers and 31.5% of their fathers had a university degree). 56.2% of them were in a relationship and 75.3% of them reported that they had lived in another country (except their country of origin) before coming to their current host country. 53.4% of the respondents lived in a house shared with others.

Table 2. *Host country*

	Frequency	Percent
Spain	20	27.4
Italy	12	16.4
Lithuania	10	13.7
Cyprus	8	11.0
Romania	6	8.2
Greece	5	6.8
Ireland	5	6.8
Hungary	2	2.7
Germany	1	1.4
Morocco	1	1.4
Scotland	1	1.4
UK	1	1.4
USA	1	1.4

Most of them reported that they did not have a chronic disease (97.3%), did not smoke (75.3%), did not drink alcohol (61.5%) or consume drugs (94.5%). More than half of them received medical care in the host country (53.4%).

Respondents came from different countries. Details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Nationality*

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Albanian	6	8.2	Mexican	1	1.4
American	3	4.1	Moldovan	3	4.1
Argentinian	2	2.7	Moroccan	5	6.8
Belarussian	1	1.4	Nigerian	1	1.4
Brazilian	2	2.7	Pakistani	2	2.7
Cameroonian	4	5.5	Paraguayan	1	1.4
Chinese	2	2.7	Romanian	10	13.7
Congolese	1	1.4	Russian	1	1.4
Ecuadorian	1	1.4	Serbian	1	1.4
Gambian	1	1.4	Syrian	4	5.5
Georgian	2	2.7	Ukrainian	5	6.8
Greek	4	5.5	Uruguayan	2	2.7
Indian	3	4.1	Venezuelan	4	5.5
Libyan	1	1.4			

The countries of origin are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Country of Origin*

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Albania	6	8.2	Morocco	5	6.8
Argentina	2	2.7	Nigeria	1	1.4
Belarus	1	1.4	Pakistan	2	2.7
Brazil	2	2.7	Paraguay	1	1.4
Cameroon	4	5.5	Republic of Moldova	3	4.1
China	2	2.7	Romania	10	13.7
Congo	1	1.4	Serbia	1	1.4
Ecuador	1	1.4	Syria	4	5.5
Gambia	1	1.4	Turkey	1	1.4
Georgia	2	2.7	Ukraine	5	6.9
Greece	3	4.1	Uruguay	2	2.7
India	3	4.1	USA	3	4.1
Libya	1	1.4	Venezuela	4	5.5
Lithuania	1	1.4			
Mexico	1	1.4			

The students were asked to declare their mother-language and the number of languages they speak fluently. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 5. *Native language*

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Albanian	6	8.2	Lithuanian	1	1.4
Arabic	5	6.8	Moldovan	3	4.1
Bengali	1	1.4	Moroccan	1	1.4
Chinese	2	2.7	Portuguese	2	2.7
English	4	5.5	Romanian	10	13.7
French	5	6.8	Russian	2	2.7
Georgian	2	2.7	Serbian	1	1.4
Greek	3	4.1	Spanish	11	15.1
Hindi	1	1.4	Syrian	3	4.1
Igbo and English	1	1.4	Turkish	1	1.4
Indian	1	1.4	Ukrainian	4	5.5
Limbum	1	1.4	Urdu	2	2.7

Socio-demographic data gathered information about their religious orientation. The results are detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. Religion

	Frequency	Percent
Agnostic	1	1.4
Atheist	13	17.8
Buddhism	1	1.4
Catholic	13	17.8
Christian	13	17.8
Islam	14	19.2
Jainism	1	1.4
Orthodox	14	19.2
Protestant	2	2.7
Sikh	1	1.4

The research focused on identifying the variety of professions that migrants have. The details are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *Profession*

	Frequency	Percent
Unemployed	6	8.2
Caregiver	4	5.5
Sales assistant	4	5.5
Beautician	3	4.1
Economist	3	4.1
PhD student	3	4.1
Student	3	4.1
Worker	3	4.1
Agriculture	2	2.7
Delivery	2	2.7
Manager	2	2.7
Teacher	2	2.7
Activist NGO	1	1.4
Architect	1	1.4
Baker	1	1.4
Businessmen	1	1.4
Call center	1	1.4
Cashier	1	1.4
Classicist	1	1.4
Construction worker	1	1.4
Content creator	1	1.4
Cook	1	1.4
Data Analyst	1	1.4
Engineer	1	1.4
Entrepreneur	1	1.4
Farmer	1	1.4

	Frequency	Percent
Installer	1	1.4
Journalist	1	1.4
Lawyer	1	1.4
Manicurist	1	1.4
Marketer	1	1.4
Nurse	1	1.4
Online seller	1	1.4
Optometrist	1	1.4
Peddler	1	1.4
Pharmacist	1	1.4
Postdoctoral researcher	1	1.4
Project manager	1	1.4
Researcher	1	1.4
Salesmen	1	1.4
Shopkeeper	1	1.4
Social entrepreneur	1	1.4
Software creator	1	1.4
Technical consultant	1	1.4
Tourism	1	1.4
Translator	1	1.4
Truck driver	1	1.4
Waiter	1	1.4

Adaptation to the host country

Most of the respondents consider they are comfortable (32.9%) or *very comfortable* (38.4%) with the host country's language. They are also comfortable (30.1%) or *very comfortable* (47.9%) with the language that is taught in the host country. Most of the respondents consider that the local language is not a barrier when it comes to communicating with their colleagues (74%).

75.3% of the respondents consider that they were not discriminated against. However, some of them were discriminated against by the local people (19.2%), by their teachers (1.4%), or by their colleagues (4.1%).

58.9% of the students consider they are *very comfortable* with the climate, while 30.1% consider they are mostly comfortable. 89.1% of them are comfortable or *very comfortable* with the local transportation. Regarding the local food, 89% feel comfortable or very comfortable. 86.3% of the respondents feel safe on the streets. Most of the students feel neutral, at worst, with the costs of living (accommodation, living expenses, local taxes).

Most of the respondents report good or *very good relationships* with their colleagues and local administration. 95.9% of the respondents made new friends in the host country. 41.1% of the respondents asked for individual meetings with

their teachers to discuss job-related issues and 17.8% of them to discuss personal problems.

Table 8. *Adaptation to the host country*

Variable	Levels	N	%
How comfortable are you with the host country's language?	Not at all comfortable	6	8.2
	Mostly not comfortable	3	4.1
	Neutral	12	16.4
	Mostly comfortable	24	32.9
	Very comfortable	28	38.4
How comfortable are you with the language the classes are taught in?	Mostly not comfortable	1	1.4
	Neutral	15	20.5
	Mostly comfortable	22	30.1
	Very comfortable	35	47.9
How comfortable are you with the climate in the host country?	Not at all comfortable	0	0
	Mostly not comfortable	1	1.4
	Neutral	7	9.6
	Mostly comfortable	22	30.1
	Very comfortable	43	58.9
How comfortable are you with local transportation in the host country?	Not at all comfortable	1	1.4
	Mostly not comfortable	1	1.4
	Neutral	6	8.2
	Mostly comfortable	34	46.6
	Very comfortable	31	42.5
How comfortable are you with the food in the host country?	Not at all comfortable	1	1.4
	Mostly not comfortable	1	1.4
	Neutral	6	8.2
	Mostly comfortable	26	35.6
	Very comfortable	39	53.4
How comfortable are you with the customs and habits in the host country?	Not at all comfortable	0	0
	Mostly not comfortable	1	1.4
	Neutral	4	5.5
	Mostly comfortable	32	43.8
	Very comfortable	36	49.3
How comfortable are you with everyday communication the locals?	Not at all comfortable	0	0
	Mostly not comfortable	4	5.5
	Neutral	14	19.2
	Mostly comfortable	21	28.8
	Very comfortable	34	46.6
How safe do you feel on the streets of the host country?	Not at all safe	0	0
	Mostly not safe	1	1.4
	Neutral	9	12.3
	Mostly safe	27	37.0
	Very safe	36	49.3

Variable	Levels	N	%
Have you ever been assaulted in the host country?	No	66	90.4
	Yes	7	9.6
How satisfied are you with the accommodation fees in the host country?	Very dissatisfied	1	1.4
	Dissatisfied	14	19.2
	Neutral	23	31.5
	Satisfied	18	24.7
	Very satisfied	17	23.3
How satisfied are you with the monthly living expenses in the host country?	Very dissatisfied	1	1.4
	Dissatisfied	13	17.8
	Neutral	21	28.8
	Satisfied	21	28.8
	Very satisfied	17	23.3
How satisfied are you with the local taxes in the host country?	Very dissatisfied	0	0
	Dissatisfied	8	11.0
	Neutral	42	57.5
	Satisfied	15	20.5
	Very satisfied	8	11.0
How satisfied are you with the relationship with your work colleagues?	Very dissatisfied	3	4.1
	Dissatisfied	2	2.7
	Neutral	8	11.0
	Satisfied	30	41.1
	Very satisfied	30	41.1
How satisfied are you with your relationship with the local administration?	Very dissatisfied	0	0
	Dissatisfied	5	6.8
	Neutral	28	38.4
	Satisfied	30	41.1
	Very satisfied	10	13.7
Do you feel that the local language is a barrier in communicating with colleagues?	No	54	74.0
	Yes	19	26.0
Have you ever felt discriminated against?	No	55	75.3
	Yes, by local people	14	19.2
	Yes, by colleagues	3	4.1
	Yes, by teachers	1	1.4
Have you made new friends in the host country?	No	3	4.1
	Yes	70	95.9
Have you asked for an individual meeting with one of your teachers to discuss any job-related/employment difficulties?	No	43	58.9
	Yes	30	41.1
Have you ever asked for an individual meeting with one of your teachers to discuss a personal problem?	No	60	82.2
	Yes	13	17.8

Variable	Levels	N	%
How comfortable are you practicing your religion in the host country?	Not at all comfortable	0	0
	Mostly not comfortable	3	4.1
	Neutral	15	20.5
	Mostly comfortable	21	28.8
	Very comfortable	34	46.6
How comfortable are you practicing your hobbies in the host country?	Not at all comfortable	0	0
	Mostly not comfortable	1	1.4
	Neutral	11	15.1
	Mostly comfortable	24	32.9
	Very comfortable	37	50.7
How easy is it to find your favorite foods in the host country?	Not at all easy	1	1.4
	Mostly not easy	7	9.6
	Neutral	8	11.0
	Easy	23	31.5
	Very easy	34	46.6
Do you like spending your free time with friends?	No, I do not like going out	3	4.1
	No, I prefer to chat/message friends in my spare time	5	6.8
	Yes, sometimes I go out with colleagues or friends	31	42.5
	Yes, I like going out with colleagues or friends in my free time	34	46.6

Academic issues

54.8% of the international adult learners consider that their teachers present information in a clear way, 52.1% of them consider that their teachers show respect toward international students, and 46.6% of them consider that their teachers try to adjust to the cultural diversity in their classes.

91.8% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that their teachers encourage academic collaboration. 67.2% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that their teachers know how to manage ethnic, religious or racial conflicts during discussions. 85% of them consider that their teachers respect racial, ethnic and religious diversity.

No respondent considered that he/she has been humiliated by the teachers and only 5.5% of them had conflicts with their teachers. 94.5% of the students believe that the teachers evaluate their students objectively. 95.9% of the adult learners would recommend the host country as a place to live in.

More than a quarter of them (28.2%) sustained that they were undecided whether they would return to their native country, 12.3% wanted to return to their home country, 11% wanted to go to another country and 47.9% preferred to stay in the host country.

Table 9. *Academic Issues*

Variable	Level	N	%
Most of my teachers present the information clearly.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Neutral	5	6.8
	Agree	40	54.8
	Strongly agree	28	38.4
Most of my teachers show respect to all international students in my class.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	1	1.4
	Neutral	4	5.5
	Agree	30	41.1
	Strongly agree	38	52.1
Most of my teachers try to adjust to the cultural diversity of my class.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	1	1.4
	Neutral	11	15.1
	Agree	34	46.6
	Strongly agree	27	37.0
Most of my teachers encourage academic collaboration among international students.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	1	1.4
	Neutral	5	6.8
	Agree	33	45.2
	Strongly agree	34	46.6
Most of my teachers know how to manage ethnic, religious or racial conflicts emerging during class discussions.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	7	9.6
	Neutral	17	23.3
	Agree	28	38.4
	Strongly agree	21	28.8
Most of my teachers respond positively when students look for school-related or personal help.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	3	4.1
	Neutral	4	5.5
	Agree	39	53.4
	Strongly agree	27	37.0
I consider that the students' language level is a barrier to developing a good relationship with the teachers from the host country.	Strongly disagree	4	5.5
	Disagree	18	24.7
	Neutral	13	17.8
	Agree	22	30.1
	Strongly agree	16	21.9
I consider that the language level of the teachers from the host country is a barrier when it comes to developing a good relationship with their students.	Strongly disagree	8	11.0
	Disagree	26	35.6
	Neutral	12	16.4
	Agree	17	23.3
	Strongly agree	10	13.7

Variable	Level	N	%
Most of my teachers show respect for the racial, ethnic and religious diversity of my class.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	1	1.4
	Neutral	10	13.7
	Agree	31	42.5
	Strongly agree	31	42.5
Teachers adapt their methods to consider the diversity of my class.	Strongly disagree	1	1.4
	Disagree	1	1.4
	Neutral	17	23.3
	Agree	36	49.3
	Strongly agree	18	24.7
Teachers provide academic support to students in case of poor results.	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	3	4.1
	Neutral	14	19.2
	Agree	40	54.8
	Strongly agree	16	21.9
Have you ever been humiliated by one of your teachers?	No	73	100
	Yes	0	0
Have you had conflicts with teachers in class?	No	69	94.5
	Yes	4	5.5
Do you think teachers evaluate students objectively?	No	4	5.5
	Yes	69	94.5
Would you recommend the host country to others as a place to live in?	No	3	4.1
	Yes	70	95.9
Would you like to return to your native country?	Not decided	21	28.8
	Yes	9	12.3
	No, I would like to stay in the host country	35	47.9
	I would like to go to another country	8	11.0

Satisfaction with the host country

Most of the participants (53.4%) strongly agree that their host country is a place where the law and human rights are respected. They also consider that the host country is welcoming with people from other countries (92.6% agree or strongly agree) and that it provides good job opportunities (61.9% agree or strongly agree) and good quality of life (87.7% agree or strongly agree). 91.8% of the respondents are satisfied with their life in the host country, 61.6% of them agree or strongly agree that it is easy to obtain welfare benefits in the host

country, and 64.4% consider that it is rather easy for people from other countries to live in the host country.

Table10. *Satisfaction with the host country*

Variable	Level	N	%
The host country is a place where human rights and the law are respected.	Strongly disagree	1	1.4
	Tend to disagree	1	1.4
	Neither agree or disagree	10	13.7
	Tend to agree	22	30.1
	Strongly agree	39	53.4
The host country welcomes people from other countries.	Strongly disagree	1	1.4
	Tend to disagree	1	1.4
	Neither agree or disagree	10	13.7
	Tend to agree	28	38.4
	Strongly agree	33	45.2
The host country provides good job opportunities.	Strongly disagree	1	1.4
	Tend to disagree	11	15.1
	Neither agree or disagree	16	21.9
	Tend to agree	29	39.7
	Strongly agree	16	21.9
The host country offers a good quality of life.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Tend to disagree	2	2.7
	Neither agree or disagree	7	9.6
	Tend to agree	37	50.7
	Strongly agree	27	37.0
It is easy for people from other countries to come and live in the host country.	Strongly disagree	4	5.5
	Tend to disagree	7	9.6
	Neither agree or disagree	15	20.5
	Tend to agree	28	38.4
	Strongly agree	19	26.0
It is easy to obtain welfare benefits in the host country.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0
	Tend to disagree	9	12.3
	Neither agree or disagree	19	26.0
	Tend to agree	25	34.2
	Strongly agree	20	27.4
I am satisfied with my life in the host country.	Strongly disagree	1	1.4
	Tend to disagree	2	2.7
	Neither agree or disagree	3	4.1
	Tend to agree	33	45.2
	Strongly agree	34	46.6

Statistical analysis – international adult learners

In order to analyze the data, we employed several statistical methods: *correlations*, *independent samples t-tests*, *one-way ANOVAs and chi square tests*. The analysis revealed some important results which are detailed according to the tests used.

We found some significant correlations between the years spent by the respondents in the host country and some variables regarding their adaptation in the host country:

- The respondents who lived in the host country for a longer time were also more comfortable with the food (r = .23, p = .04).

We found some significant correlations between the years spent by the respondents in the host country and some variables regarding their academic issues:

- The respondents who lived in the host country for a long time consider that teachers show less respect to all the students in their classes (r = -.23, p = .05).
- The respondents who lived in the host country for a long time consider that teachers show less respect for racial, ethnic and religious diversity (r = -.27, p = .02).

We found some significant correlations between the number of countries the respondents have lived in and some variables regarding their academic issues:

- The respondents who lived in more countries consider that their teachers present the information less clearly (r = -.23, p = .04).
- The respondents who lived in more countries consider that their teachers encourage less collaboration among their students (r = -.26, p = .02).
- The respondents who lived in more countries consider that their teachers know less about how to manage religious, ethnic and racial conflicts (r = -.26, p = .02).

We identified some significant differences based on sex:

- Women (M = 4.44, compared to men (M = 4.02) feel more comfortable with the language of instruction (t = 2.21, p =.03).
- Women (M = 3.84) more than men (M = 3.11) are more satisfied with the accommodation expenses (t = 2.99, p = .004).
- Women (M = 3.92) more than men (M = 3.14) are more satisfied with the monthly living expenses (t = 3.27, p = .002).
- Women (M = 4.44), more than men (M = 4.17), consider that their teachers present the information in a clear way (t = 2.01, p = .048).

Significant differences based on the student's relational status were identified:

- Those in a relationship (M = 4.51) consider that the host country is safer (t = -2.12, p = .03) compared to those who are single (M = 4.12).
- Those in a relationship (M = 3.85) are more satisfied with the accommodation expenses (t = -3.41, p = .001) compared to those who are single (M = 3.03).
- Those in a relationship (M = 3.92) are more satisfied with the monthly living expenses (t = -3.67, p < .001) compared to those who are single (M = 3.06).
- Those in a relationship (M = 4.39) consider that it is easier to find their favorite foods (t = -2.48, p = .016) compared to those who are single (M = 3.78).

We found some significant differences based on accommodation:

- Those who live alone (M = 4.25) are more comfortable with the language of the host country (t = 2.34, p = .02) compared to those who share accommodation (M = 3.58).
- Those who live alone (M = 4.73) are more comfortable the climate of host country (t = 3.12, p = .003) compared to those who share accommodation (M = 4.23).
- Those who live alone (M = 4.61) are more comfortable with the food of host country (t = 2.46, p = .01) compared to those who share accommodation (M = 4.17).
- Those who live alone (M = 4.58) are more comfortable with the habits of host country (t = 2.18, p = .03) compared to those who share accommodation (M = 4.25).
- Those who live alone (M = 4.41) are more comfortable with everyday communication with the locals in host country (t = 2.18, p = .03) compared to those who share accommodation (M = 3.94).
- Those who live alone (M = 4.61) feel safer in the host country (t = 3.09, p = .003) compared to those who share accommodation (M = 4.10).
- Those who live alone (M = 4.41) consider that it is easier to find their favorite foods (t = 2.27, p = .002) compared to those who share accommodation (M = 3.87).

The analysis of data showed significant differences based on religion for the following variables:

- Comfort with the local customs (F = 4.26, p = .008). The participants who were atheist (M = 4.64) and those who were catholic (M = 4.61) reported higher scores compared to the participants who were Muslim (M = 4.14).
- Comfort with the language of instruction (F = 7.02, p < .001). The participants who were atheist (M = 4.64), those who were orthodox (M

= 4.71), and those who were catholic (M = 4.38) reported higher scores compared to the participants who were Muslim (M = 3.64).

- Comfort with practicing religion in the host country (F = 4.10, p = .011). The participants who were catholic (M = 4.76) reported higher scores compared to the participants who were Muslim (M = 3.71).

We found significant differences based on the level of education for the following variables:

- Comfort with the language of teaching (F = 8.17, p < .001). The respondents with a university degree (M = 4.64) were significantly more comfortable with the language compared to those who completed only primary education (M = 3.50), secondary education (M = 3.84) or high school (M = 3.94).
- Satisfaction with the relationship with local administration (F = 4.45, p = .006). The respondents who completed high school (M = 3.76) or had a university degree (M = 3.78) had higher scores compared to those who completed only secondary education (M = 2.92).
- Satisfaction with practicing religion (F = 3.43, p = .02). The respondents who had a university degree (M = 4.45) had higher scores compared to those who completed only secondary education (M = 3.69).
- Teachers present education clearly (F = 4.32, p = .008). The respondents who completed high school (M = 4.52) or had a university degree (M = 4.40) had higher scores compared to those who completed only secondary education (M = 3.84).
- Teachers show respect to all students (F = 9.69, p < .001). The respondents who completed high school (M = 4.52) had higher scores compared to those who completed only secondary education (M = 3.84). The respondents with a university degree (M = 4.40) had higher scores compared to those who completed only secondary education.
- Teachers adjust to cultural diversity (F = 4.26, p = .008). The respondents who had a university degree (M = 4.40) had higher scores compared to those who completed only primary education (3.84).
- Teachers know how to manage ethnic, religious and racial conflicts (F = 4.13, p = .009). The respondents who had a university degree (M = 4.08) had higher scores compared to those who completed only primary education (M = 3.00).
- Students' level of language is a barrier in developing good relationships with their teachers (F = 4.15, p = .009). The respondents who had a university degree (M = 3.00) had lower scores compared to those who completed only a primary education (M = 4.50).
- Teachers' level of language is a barrier in developing good relationships with their students (F = 4.58, p = .006). The respondents who had a

university (M = 3.62) or a high school degree (M = 2.62) had lower scores compared to those who completed only secondary education (M = 3.84).

- Teachers show respect for diversity (F = 5.15, p = .003). The respondents who had a university degree (M = 4.51) had higher scores compared to those who completed only primary education (M = 3.50).
- Teachers adapt their methods for diversity (F = 6.94, p < .001). The respondents who had a university (M = 3.13) or a high school degree (M = 4.16) had higher scores compared to those who completed only primary education (M = 2.83).

Also, statistical significant differences based on the reason for emigration were identified for the following variables:

- Comfort with the language of teaching (F = 3.25, p = 017). Those who were in the host country for studies (M = 4.81) had higher scores compared to those who were in the host country to be with their family (M = 3.66).
- Comfort with the climate of the host country (F = 4.03, p = .005). Those who were in the host country for studies (M = 3.81) had lower scores compared to those who were in the host country for a job (M = 4.70).

We found significant differences based on whether the respondents had other acquaintances in the same city for the following variables:

- Comfort with local food (F = 4.09, p = .10). Those who had close relatives (mother, father, siblings) (M = 4.76) or the spouse (M = 4.52) in the same city had higher scores compared to those who had friends (3.72).
- Ease to find favorite foods (F = 3.05, p = .04). Those who had close relatives (mother, father, siblings) (M = 4.13) in the same city had higher scores compared to those who had friends (3.45).
- Ease to obtain welfare benefits in the host country (F = 3.82, p = .014). Those who were alone (M = 4.34) and those who had close relatives (mother, father, siblings) in the same city (M = 4.46) had higher scores compared to those who had friends (M = 4.18).

The analysis of data showed that there are significant differences based on the sex of the respondent, meaning that men (17.1% responding "yes") reported being assaulted ($\chi 2$ = 4.25, p = .035) compared to women (2.6% responding "yes). Also, we identified some significant differences based on the level of education of the respondent:

- 30.8% of the participants who completed only secondary education reported being assaulted ($\chi 2$ = 9.48, p = .024), compared to 11.7% of those who completed high school, 2.7% of those who had a university degree, and 0% of those who completed only primary education.
- 23.1% of the participants who completed only secondary education reported having a conflict with a teacher ($\chi 2$ = 10.27, p = .016), compared

to 5.9% of those who completed high school, 0% of those who had a university degree and 0% of those who completed only primary education.

Open-ended questions

Q1 – Please name 3 strong points that you appreciate about your teachers from the host country.

Some of the respondents did not offer three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 163 units of text are grouped into 6 categories. The most frequent category is "teacher's behavior", followed by "teacher's knowledge"," teaching process", "cultural awareness", "language proficiency" and "organizing activity".

Table 11. *Please name 3 strong points that you appreciate in your teachers from the host country.*

Category	Frequency	Examples
Teacher's behavior	115	"They are very helpful.", "Sense of humor.", "Friendly"
Teacher's knowledge	20	"They know the subject.", "Well prepared."
Teaching process	20	"Teachers adapt their methods to the diversity of their students.", "They use interesting teaching methods."
Cultural awareness	5	"They were aware of the situation in Pakistan."
Language proficiency	3	"They speak English."
Organizing activity	1	"Good environment."

Q2 – Please name 3 weak points that you do not like about your teachers from the host country.

Some of the respondents did not offer three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 59 units of text are grouped into 5 categories. The results can be seen in *Table 12.* The most frequent category is "language proficiency", followed by "teacher's behavior", "cultural discrimination", "teaching process" and "institutional organization".

Table 12. *Please name 3 weak points that you do not like about your teachers from the host country.*

Category	Frequency	Example
Language proficiency	22	"Language competences", "Most of them only speak Spanish (and a little bit of English)", "Language skills – some speak too quickly"
Teacher's behavior	17	"not too communicative, slightly unavailable, detached", "Some of them should be more curious", "Some lack communication, leadership and development skills"

Category	Frequency	Example
Cultural discrimination	15	"Lack of consideration towards the different methods of learning the international students are used to", "Not much knowledge about other countries, lack of international experience", "Not too interested in the cultural, communication and, in general, life integration of their learners (they focus more on the transfer of competences than the job interest)"
Teaching process	9	"Sporadic clarity issues, tight deadlines, late replies", "They were not helpful in some cases, unapproachable and some of them used straight boring teaching strategies."
Institutional organization	6	"Their work is not recognized by the central government", "Bureaucracy"

Q3 – Please name the hardest thing concerning your experience as a migrant/refugee in the host country.

Some of the respondents did not offer an answer. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 63 units of text are grouped into 10 categories. The results can be seen in Table 13. The most frequent category is "cultural differences", followed by "language", "leave nation country behind", "institutional organization", "job searching", "social relationships", "finances", "starting a business", "transportation" and "health".

Table 13. *Please name the hardest thing concerning your experience as a migrant/refugee in the host country.*

Category	Frequency	Example
Cultural differences	17	"Finding my local food", "Adaptation", "Social integration", "Racism", "acceptance of some rules/policies imposed by the local community, which are different from our cultural way of being"
Language	9	"It took time to learn the language and become self-sufficient", "The local language", "Communication"
Leave native country behind	9	"Escaping from my country was very hard", "Understanding that the war may last years and years", "Leave from Romania"
Institutional organization	6	"Migration office – one big problem", "Bureaucracy", "Obtaining a visa"
Job searching	6	"Looking for a job", "To find the job I was looking for"

Category	Frequency	Example
Social relationships	6	"Difficulty in having strong interpersonal relationships", "To leave my family and friends in Argentina"
Finances	4	"Expensive medical care", "Opening a bank account", "Looking for accommodation"
Starting a business	3	"Bureaucracy in order to open my restaurant", "To set up my own shop"
Transportation	2	"Public Transport"
Health	1	"I had a bad experience when my father got sick"

Q4 – Please name the nicest thing concerning your experience as a migrant/refugee in the host country.

Some of the respondents did not offer an answer. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 70 units of text are grouped into 9 categories. The results can be seen in Table 14. The most frequent category is "native people", followed by "family unity", "financial opportunities", "intercultural community", "quality of life", "develop romantic relationship", "personal development", "chance at a new life" and "make new relationships".

Table 14. *Please name the nicest thing concerning your experience as a migrant/refugee in the host country.*

Category	Frequency	Example
Native people	27	"My colleagues, nice Lithuanian people", "Spending time with my neighbors", "Acceptance", "The people who speak to me and want to know more about my country"
Family unity	8	"The fact that I managed to set up my family here", "My partner and her family are here", "To stay with my family"
Financial opportunities	7	"To set up my own business", "It was very easy to find a job in the construction sector", "When I got a job in the agriculture sector"
Intercultural community	7	"Getting to know the diversity", "It is easy to be a Muslim migrant in Spain (religious matters)", "Experiencing a new culture"
Quality of life	6	"Standard of living"
Personal development	4	"How I was able to overcome every problem, I am proud of myself", "I became more openminded, probably thanks to exposure to lots of cultures", "I am a responsible person. I managed and received the opportunity of the host country to succeed at an educational and professional level"

Category	Frequency	Example
Chance at new life	3	"I feel that I have a future", 'I feel free now"
Make new relationships	3	"I have got a lot of friends"
Develop romantic relationships	3	"Meeting my partner perhaps?", "My husband"

Q5 – Please name 3 things that you miss most in the host country.

Some respondents did not offer three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 113 units of text are grouped into 15 categories. The results can be seen in Table 15. The most frequent category is "family", followed by "friends", "food", "home", "culture", "way of life", "hobbies", "weather", "nature", "society", "car", "entertainment", "language", "pets" and "religion".

Table 15. *Please name 3 things that you miss most in the host country.*

Category	Frequency	Example
Family	37	"Parents", "Family", "Relatives"
Friends	24	"Face-to-face convos with my Romanian friends", "My friends"
Food	14	"I miss some types of food.", "Food"
Home	10	"Walking around the old-town in the summer", "My village"
Culture	8	"Local traditions", "Culture"
Way of life	5	"The silence and the privacy", "Freedom"
Hobbies	3	"Football", "My favorite Romanian habits"
Weather	3	"Sun", "Good weather"
Nature	2	"Mountains"
Society	2	"Honesty of people"
Car	1	"Access to cars"
Entertainment	1	"Bengali festivals"
Language	1	"Speaking my language"
Pets	1	"Pets"
Religion	1	"St. Parascheva Metropolitan Cathedral"

The profile of the international adult learners

73 international adult learners took part in this study. They come from every continent (except Australia) but with two exceptions (Morocco and USA); all their host countries are European (Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Cyprus, Romania, Greece, Ireland, Hungary, Germany, Scotland and England). They have various educational backgrounds, although most of them have a university degree.

The respondents were comfortable with using the language of their host country as well as with the language of instruction. Most of them did not have

problems with the climate, local transportation and habits. Food and everyday communication were also less important problems for the adult learners. Most of them felt safe on the streets and there were no gender differences in regard to this issue. They felt satisfied with their relationships with their colleagues and slightly less comfortable with the relationship with the local administration. Many asked a teacher for help when they needed some job advice, but not when they had personal problems.

The majority considered they were not discriminated against in their host country and felt good about practicing their religion and hobbies. They considered that the local people discriminate more than their colleagues and teachers. The higher educated participants were more comfortable with living in the host country.

Most of the respondents believe that their teachers organize their lessons well. They see their teachers as respectful towards their diversity. A few of the respondents reported conflicts with their teachers. More than 95% of the respondents would recommend their host country as a place to live; 47.9% of them would remain in the country in the future. The respondents with higher levels of education were more satisfied with their teachers. On the contrary, we found a negative association between the time the respondents spent in the country and satisfaction with their educational experience as well as a negative link between the number of countries the respondents lived in and satisfaction with their educational experience. The longer they spent in the country and the more countries they lived in, the less satisfied they were regarding some aspects of education.

Many of the respondents appreciate their teachers' behaviors and knowledge. They consider their teachers to be passionate, helpful, funny and friendly. They also appreciate their level of knowledge. However, some teachers were considered as less communicative, more detached and oblivious of the cultural differences in their classes.

After arriving in their host country, they had problems with cultural differences, including racism, language and some of them with bureaucracy. Still, they made new friends, appreciated the locals and the quality of life. Many were happy to have their families near them. From home, they mostly missed their family, friends and food.

Most of the respondents considered that their host country is a good country to live in. They appreciated the job opportunities, welfare benefits, respect for human rights and the law. For the respondents who migrated due to war their host country, this was an opportunity for a new beginning.

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DIETARY HABITS AND HEALTH-RELATED PROBLEMS IN THE MIGRANT POPULATION

L A V I N I A - M A R I A P O P , M A G D A L E N A I O R G A

Introduction

There is concern about the very large increase in the number of migrants arriving in Europe and elsewhere, with studies showing that almost 90% of refugees worldwide are housed in economically developing nations. The distinction between migrants and refugees is an important topic to discuss (Matlin *et al.,* 2018).

The International Organization for Migration defines migrants as those persons or groups of persons who are adversely affected by a progressive or a sudden change in their environment or life conditions and tare forced to leave their homes or choose to do so, either by permanently or temporarily moving to another city or country (IOM, 2009).

Refugees are a subset of migrants who, due to fears of persecution on grounds of race, nationality, religion, membership in a particular social organization or political attitude, are outside the nationality of their country and cannot benefit from the protection of that country (Matlin *et al.,* 2018).

The globalization of migration in the last few decades has made the global society more diversified from a multicultural point of view. Thus, between 2005 and 2010 the annual influx of immigrants was estimated at around 2.7 million, with around 100 million migrant workers in 2009 (Devillé *et al.,* 2011). In order to understand the health care requirements of a society that is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, it is essential to know the detailed differences in health transitions that can occur throughout life between migrants and non-migrants. Possession of such knowledge is also useful for policy makers who can tailor their interventions to provide equitable health services, with equity being one of the most important pillars of health systems. (Reus-Ponce *et al.,* 2018).

Migration is often associated with considerable changes in human behaviour. The environment and genetic structures of the population play a key role in shaping health disparities among countries (Darmon & Khlat, 2001). Studies have shown that the pattern of morbidity and mortality in migrant populations seems to be similar to that of the host country's population. This has been identified in cardiovascular diseases such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia and cancer (Hammar *et al.,* 2009).

Also, migration has been associated with a decline in the health of immigrants. The main risk factors for the development of degenerative diseases

may be: increased consumption of unhealthy foods, sedentariness, genetic predisposition, as well as stress related to migration and settlement – which includes changed and irregular eating patterns due to little money and long working hours (Gilbert & Khokhar, 2008). However, maintaining traditional behaviours, such as healthier dietary habits and greater family support, can protect migrants from economically related illnesses in host countries (Darmon & Khlat, 2001).

Determinants of dietary changes among migrants

Community changes in dietary patterns are recognized in the literature under the term nutritional transition, the key factors underlying this transition being the globalization of the food distribution system, rising incomes and falling food prices, advances in technology and urbanization. Nutritional transition is characterized by a reduction in high-fiber foods, such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and an increase in animal products, oils, sugar and high-calorie refined foods. Migration from rural to urban areas is associated with dietary changes among migrant populations as they adopt a diet higher in fat and calories and lower in dietary fiber. This has the potential to strongly increase overweight and obesity levels. Moreover, migrant women coming from rural to urban areas appear to be particularly vulnerable to BMI growth (Peters *et al.,* 2019). Also, a longer stay in another environment can negatively change the health status of migrants and can lead to the development of chronic diseases. Risk factors that contribute synergistically to this process may be changes in dietary patterns (Parackal *et al.,* 2015).

The effects of migration seem to be felt after 10-15 years, when significant unhealthy weight gain can occur, and the overweight and obesity rates of migrants approach or exceed those of the host population. However, this change may vary due to real differences among groups, such as ethnicity, gender, age at migration and period of residence in the new country: a Canadian health report found that black immigrant women have a greater predisposition to being overweight, regardless of time when they immigrated. Moreover, the length of residence in the host country is significantly positively correlated with weight gain, while other studies have identified an inverse relationship between the age of the participants at the time of immigration and being overweight or obese (Delavari *et al.,* 2013).

The population categories that are particularly sensitive to poor health are women and children, due to the vulnerability and abuse suffered before and during migration or due to reduced use of health services afterwards. Moreover, poor housing conditions, low income and education, lack of jobs and poor language skills are structural barriers that impede health care and can lead to reduced absorption of screening and immunization programs, as well as

inadequate support or cultural insensitivity from healthcare providers. Deteriorating physical health and, in particular, adopting poor health behaviors can be exacerbated when it comes to the age at which they reach the new environment: immigrants might submit to unhealthy behaviors for the first time. An example of this would be the initiation of smoking in critical moments of life or development, when the adoption of such behaviors is more expected. Immigration at a young age is also linked to a higher risk of breast cancer and lower birth weight, while immigration later in life is linked with lower self-esteem (Kearns *et al.,* 2017).

Changing eating habits among migrants after settling in another country is widely undeniable, and the degree of these modifications depends on several factors: the economic condition, the country of provenience and living context in the host country. Also, the acculturation factors of one's diet can be represented by time restraints, effects of new social relationships, ignorance of food acquisition patterns, lack of knowledge about nutritional information implemented by the dietary guidelines of the host country and ignorance of country-specific foods and techniques for cooking. In addition, the socio-economic status of immigrants plays an important role in the dietary transitions of immigrants, with obstacles to adopting a healthy diet among adults (aged 59 to 81) being represented by low levels of education, poverty and transportation restraints. Immigration stress has been shown to contribute to communication barriers, social isolation and financial insecurity, which in turn can affect migrants' eating behaviors and health (Sanou *et al.,* 2014).

Migration processes and dietary changes

The migration process is linked to *acculturation* – "a process by which migrants and their children acquire the values, behavioral norms and attitudes of the host society", one very important aspect being represented by the dietary acculturation. Usually, immigrant groups carry their own traditional convictions and habits related to food and nutrition, which are a component of cultural uniqueness. Adaptation to eating manners is often last for a new civilization and plays an important emblematic, spiritual and social role in the lives of everyday people (Popovic-Lipovac & Strasser, 2015). In addition, a greater number of people migrating from low-income to high-income countries eventually follow obese behaviors, experience weight gain and have a higher body weight than their local counterparts, a change that is directly proportional to their length of time migrants spent in the host country. This fact has been correlated with negative effects for migrants, including additional stressors, limited management resources and poorer psychological health (Delavari *et al.,* 2013).

Conversely, some migrants may not cope with these negative effects of immigration by preserving traditional heritage and less assimilation into the

culture of the host country. This phenomenon, called *enculturation,* has proven to have beneficial effects both socially and on the health of migrants and has been associated with the maintenance of several protective factors, such as social / family support, common sense of ethnic identity and the continuous practice of traditional values. Unfortunately, only a few studies have studied this phenomenon, and existing research has failed to separate the differential impact of acculturation from that of enculturation (Delavari *et al.,* 2013).

The process of dietary acculturation is very complex, as it depends on the unique background of each immigrant as well as the different characteristics that anticipate the degree to which new immigrants can change their perspectives and conceptions about food (Popovic-Lipovac & Strasser, 2015). For example, changes in Hispanic eating practices include: low consumption of many traditional vegetable-rich dishes; low consumption of the corn tortilla which is replaced by the "flour" tortilla, which can lead to higher fat consumption; a reduced use of lard that is replaced by butter, oil, salad dressing, mayonnaise and cream, increases consumption of white bread, sweetened drinks and fast food (Gordon-Larsen *et al.,* 2003). A similar trend has been examined among immigrants from Asia due to a large discrepancy between a traditional Asian diet that is based on the consumption of rice, vegetables and noodles and the North American diet which is rich in animal protein, fat and sugar and can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer (Satia *et al.,* 2001).

Another study compared the eating habits between Finnish twins migrating to Sweden and their co-twins who have always lived in Finland, showing that migration has a very large influence on eating behavior and eating patterns among migrants of both sexes. Significant differences have been identified in the decrease of bread intake (especially black bread), potatoes and berries. To their detriment is an expanded consumption of rice and pasta and a lower intake of alcohol among men. Healthier eating behaviour in the group of migrants was represented by an increased intake of fresh fruit and a low consumption of pastries and high-fat foods. The reduced alcohol intake was mainly due to a reduction in beer intake, which may be associated with a lower total calorie intake. Unhealthy eating behaviour was indicated by high salt intake which is associated with an increased risk of hypertension, so that on clinical examination, co-twins who lived in Sweden for at least 20 years permanently had a higher diastolic blood pressure and a higher predisposition to hypertension than co-twins living in Finland (Hammar *et al.,* 2009).

In China, where an estimated 25 million migrant adolescents live, the dietary habits of local adolescents differ significantly from those of migrants. Although there is an abundance of fruits and vegetables in southern China throughout the year, a higher frequency of vegetable and fruit consumption has been identified among Chinese adolescents than in other studies. Students in the migrant groups eat vegetables and fruits less often than their local counterparts.

Migrants also skip breakfast more often than the locals, and this trend is especially noticeable among families with lower socio-economic status, a low level of education and low professional status of migrant parents. However, migrant students have a lower intake of Western fast food than has been observed among young Chinese, a possible explanation being that Western fast food is more expensive than Chinese fast food (Wang *et al.,* 2011).

The progressive loss of traditional food patterns has concerned different countries in recent decades, including Mediterranean countries. This nutritional transition can be achieved faster in the case of migrants, precisely because of the large differences between traditional food patterns and lifestyle in their new surroundings. In France, for example, the dietary habits of some groups of migrants coming from Mediterranean countries (Italy, Spain), Portugal and North Africa were likened with those of French locals. Thus, it was found that that breakfast and snacks are the meals that undergo the greatest cultural transformations among migrants, while dinner continues to stay closer to their traditional food environment. Migrants, unlike the French, consume less meat and dairy products; have a higher consumption of cereals, legumes and fruits (excluding North African men and Iberian women); and higher fish consumption was recorded among Iberian migrants of both sexes. It has been shown that, as the Mediterranean guide indicates, Portuguese and North African migrants consume more olive oil, potatoes and citrus than French locals with similar socio-economic status. However, studies indicate that ethnic or cultural eating behaviors specific to citizens of Portugal, Asia and North Africa (rejection of pork and preference for lamb in the North African culture or, conversely, rejection of lamb and preference for pork in the Asian culture) are persistent as they play a consolidating role in the society. In contrast, Muslims respect the ban on alcohol less than the ban on pork, indicating that compliance with practices is probably based more on cultural than religious factors (Darmon & Khlat, 2001).

Immigrants (especially those of Asian descent) are generally at higher risk of inadequate calcium, iron and protein intake, and prolonged exposure to the Canadian lifestyle tends to be associated with a higher intake of sodium and fat. Continuing conventional eating habits and consuming particular ethnic meals can increase the risk of an unhealthy diet in general and a high-sodium diet in particular, which has been shown to be as high as 238–474% of the daily intake recommended for some people. In contrast, positive dietary behaviours regarding fruit and vegetable consumption have also been reported among Chinese women living in Vancouver (Sanou *et al.,* 2014).

Health-related problems in migrant populations

Studies indicate that an important role in explaining the differences between the transition of health to older migrants compared to non-migrants is given by the origin of migrants as, for example, the risk of deteriorating self-assessed health and the risk of developing diabetes is higher among older non-Western migrants. This is thought to be caused by a combination of genetic and physiological factors, malnutrition and changes in health-related behaviours that may occur after migration. Moreover, non-Western migrants may be more likely to suffer from depression than non-immigrants, although the risk of becoming depressed was not different between the two population categories studied (Sanou *et al.,* 2014).

Also, stress is one of the most commonly cited factors when it comes to cardiovascular diseases and diabetes among South Asians, without distinction for age or generation, with many South Asian migrants believing that their immigrant condition – living and adjusting to life in another country – adds common stressors to their life. The desire and effort to maintain ethnic and cultural integrity makes it increasingly difficult for migrants to cope with life situations such as finding a job and raising children. Excessive attribution of BCV development to stress has led to a decrease in attention to diet and physical activity among South East Asians (Patel *et al.,* 2012).

In Europe, older migrants are more likely to have their health deteriorate, unlike younger ones due to the negative effects of a relatively low socio-economic position throughout life (material deprivation, poor living conditions, language barriers, precarious work, loneliness, limited access to services), including harmful effects on their health (Reus-Ponce *et al.,* 2018).

In Germany, there is a higher prevalence of overweight, high cholesterol levels and reduced use of preventive medicine services among migrants. Compared to German residents, the highest risk for the development of cardiovascular disease (≥3 risk factors for CVD) seems to belong to immigrant women from Turkey, Eastern Europe and German emigrants from the former Soviet Union. In England, the prevalence of type 2 diabetes is 2-3 times higher among immigrants from Bangladesh and India as opposed to the general population, and the risk of being overweight or obese is higher due to the increased waist-to-hip ratio of women in India and Bangladesh. In Sweden, immigrants are more prone to develop chronic diseases and the prevalence of overweight and obesity is increasing among migrant women from Chile, Finland, Hungary, Southern Europe and the Middle East, compared to Swedish residents. A higher risk of developing diabetes and cardiovascular disease may occur among migrant women from Iran and Turkey (Popovic-Lipovac & Strasser, 2015).

It should not be underestimated that migration is associated with stress, depression, anxiety or even somatization. Depression has been reported among Moldovan women migrating to Italy, with middle-aged groups having a slightly higher predisposition. Also, the prevalence of anxiety increases five times in Moldovan women aged between 45 and 64 years than in their Italian counterparts. It has been found that the warning signs usually associated with anxiety, depression and exhaustion are daily headaches, sleep problems and extreme fatigue, considering that they come as a direct consequence of an underlying stress. Moreover, chronic pain changes the level of stress hormones and can affect the ability to work in social activities and hobbies, as well as lower self-esteem. Sleep disorders, tiredness, difficulty concentrating and decreased appetite are other complications that can occur as a result of chronic pain. All these negative transformations can diminish one's disposition, which can lead to the development of depression and anxiety. A high vulnerability to stress has also been described among groups of Eastern European citizens migrating to the West. In addition, such precarious physical and mental health conditions can be transported to the countries of origin of migrants on their return, a process called the "Italy syndrome", which is a kind of psychosocial suffering felt by migrant women in Europe and is characterized by: poor moods, distress, weight loss, decreased appetite, sleeplessness, tiredness, loss of motherhood and divided identity (Vianello *et al.,* 2020).

Health-related problems, psychological issues and social integration among international students

Student migration is a widespread phenomenon, which has grown rapidly in recent decades. The number of years of study is a long enough period to be able to bring about lifestyle changes and, at the same time, it is long enough to be studied. Studies show that international students are more vulnerable in terms of food insecurity as opposed to national students. Dietary habits of international students are found to oscillate between the new and traditional dietary cultures. The increase in the consumption of food specific to the host country is considered to be determined by the unavailability of traditional foods and ingredients specific to the culture from which each migrant comes. However, in a study conducted by Satia *et al.* (2002), it was shown that where home country foodstuffs are available and affordable, foreign students may choose to stick to their traditional dietary practices and thus many students end up consuming fewer meals from their new food environment over time (Shi *et al.,* 2020).

Therefore, numerous studies have highlighted the changing lifestyle of students who migrate for study, taking into account several variables: gender, cultural experience, age, length of time spent in another country, religion,

parental or peer support, previous experience in staying in another country, motivation for undergraduate or graduate studies. Foreign students are more likely to show higher levels of depression, anxiety, home sickness and stress, low levels of self-esteem, social support, more frequent psycho-somatic, social and financial problems and were found to be less motivated to seek psychological services than their domestic peers (Orth *et al.,* 2014; Korrelboom *et al.,* 2012).

Consistent research has identified the difficulties of adaptation among students migrating to other countries. The data are extremely important for professionals in the field of migration, social workers and policy makers but also for those working in the university environment, precisely to be able to attract, retain and support students, especially in countries that are considered popular study hubs for international students.

The changes identified in the lifestyle among this population are extremely diverse and strongly related to acculturation. Some of the studies (Dovey *et al.,* 2008; Liu *et al.,* 2020) focus on the concept of food neophobia (the phenomenon of rejection to eat unfamiliar or unknown food) and show an increased score after the very first three months in the new country. Alakaam *et al.* (2015) conducted a study on international students enrolled in universities in the Unites States, pointing out the dietary changes that students face during their academic years. The authors highlight the most important ones from both a physical and psychological perspective, such as weight gain, high blood pressure, increased serum glucose and cholesterol levels, as well as psychological problems like stress, depression and anxiety. Alshehri *et al.* (2021) identified that international students coming to the USA from East Asia, Europe and North America proved to exhibit unhealthier behaviors compared to students from other regions of the world. The authors also identified that the amount of time spent in the USA increased the risk but living with a family member decreased the risk for unhealthy behaviors. One of the most important conclusions of the study was that healthy eating habits, developed in the family, with the presence of one of the members of the family, are an important predictor for international students' healthy eating behaviors.

Wu & Smith (2016) showed that Chinese students migrating to the USA experienced weight gain and declared that they started to have unhealthy behaviors with great impact on their physical health. Other authors identified (Yan & FitzPatrick, 2016) that most international students in the United States were unsatisfied with the food on campus. In order to solve this problem, the respondents mentioned that they started to order food outside the campus (restaurants, supermarkets). A large majority declared that they were very uncomfortable with the drinking culture. As for a positive aspect, the study showed that a large majority of international students became more physically active after they arrived in the United States due to the accessibility to places

where they can practice sports, weight management and role modelling during their free time.

Studies show that among international students in the US, it was reported lower sugar consumption and a reduction in fruits and vegetables and an increase fat intake. (Alyousif & Mathews, 2018)

Another study explains that dietary changes could be related to the costs of fruits and vegetables, the taste of traditional food, transportation challenges and language issues that migrants face in the US (Patil *et al.,* 2009). The authors identified that cooking behaviors learned from childhood and cooking skills may be an important cause related to the dietary pattern of the immigrants after coming to their host-country. Similar findings were also presented by Al-Farhan *et al.* (2018) who identified that students encountered a lot of difficulties in finding their ingredients, and that they cannot cook their desired food. So, their traditional dietary habits diminished due to the fact that students have limited access or availability of typical or traditional cultural foods and also due to the lack of food cooking skills. Almost a quarter of the students rated their cooking skills as quite poor, as they were unable to cook, did not have access to cooking facilities, did not know where to buy their favourite foods or were too expensive. International students included in the research of (Satia *et al.,* 2002) mentioned that traditional beliefs, taste preferences, convenience, cost and food quality were the most important factors that determined them to choose among different types of food. When eating American foods, the respondents pointed out that the most important criteria is how close to their traditional foods the meal is. The research identified that foreign students eat some items because were available and affordable.

Dietary changes seem to have changed over the years. (Garnweidner *et al.,* 2012) For example, breakfast and lunch were typically associated with the new food culture, while dinner was mostly comprised of traditional foods. A negative aspect of the student diet is a lack of variety of food and fast-food consumption, with great impact on weight and health.

Liu *et al.* (2020) show that marital status is important when analysing dietary changes among international students, identifying that those participants who declared that they were single were more likely to experience dietary change.

All aspects of the lifestyles of international students influence their adaptability to their new culture. Cultural comfortability must be one of the goals of institutions of higher education that attract students from all over the world. Food accessibility, physical activity facilities, psychological, social and financial support, including cultural integration should be among the priorities of tertiary institutions.

Conclusions

The degree of cultural transformation of families indicates at the same time the degree of nutritional transition to a nutritionally unhealthy diet, a higher BMI and even an obese nutritional status (Delavari *et al.,* 2013). Dietary acculturation is a phenomenon that occurs among migrants and is based on unhealthy food choices, such as diets high in fat and sugar and low in fruits and vegetables, as well as a low level of physical activity. These changes in eating patterns and dietary habits may increase the risk of developing some chronic diseases, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, mental illness and even cancer (Popovic-Lipovac & Strasser, 2015).

The role of preventive medicine is to design specific programs and interventions to help reduce the high prevalence of diseases among migrants, as well as to maintain health among this population. An understanding of migration and mobility is an important aspect when it comes to understanding social change.

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ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS – A LITERATURE REVIEW

OCTAV CANDEL

Abstract

The modern education environment is characterized by a high level of mobility among countries. Each year the number of international students is growing, as is the economic benefit for the countries that receive numerous students. Although highly advantageous for the host countries, studying abroad might provide numerous challenges for the students. Like all the migrant populations, international students go through the process of acculturation. Some of them might also face one of its negative psychological consequences, namely acculturative stress. With this review, we aimed to emphasize the outcomes of acculturative stress, to discuss the risks and protective factors associated with it and to present the interventions developed to diminish it. This review is based on the ABC models of acculturation (The Stress and Coping Model, The Culture Learning Model and The Social Identification Model) and includes 84 qualitative and quantitative studies of acculturative stress. We found that acculturative stress predicts various physical and psychological issues (addictive behaviors, depression, anxiety, eating disorders or the severity of premenstrual symptoms). Also, numerous demographic (gender, age, length of stay in the host country, etc.), internal (among others, personality, attachment, self-esteem, coping), social (social support, the use of the Internet) or cultural variables (perceived cultural differences, attitudes, orientations) can function as risk or protective factors for acculturative stress. Finally, the interventions were mostly supported by theory, but the majority were in the early stages of development and testing. Although the research on acculturative stress evolved to incorporate new theoretical developments and many current trends in student mobility, this review shows that it still lacks because of some limitations. During the final part of this study, we discuss what theoretical and methodological changes should be made to enhance future research on acculturative stress among international students.

Introduction

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, in 2017 there were more than 5.3 million international students (UNESCO, 2019). The same data shows that the number is 2 million students higher than in 2000 and almost 1 million

students higher than in 2011. Thus, there is a considerable upper trend, the number of international students increasing constantly during the last decades. Countries like the United States of America, The United Kingdom, Australia and Germany represent the most common host countries for the students, while China, India, South Korea, Germany and France are the countries offering the most students (UNESCO, 2019). Mobility has an important impact on the host country's economy and social environment. In 2018, the USA's economy gained more than 48 billion dollars from international students (with most of the sum coming from outside the country) (NAFSA, 2019). Moreover, having numerous international students on campus offers various opportunities for inter-cultural learning and collaboration among the international students and host students and university staff (Nachatar Singh, 2019; Volet & Ang, 1998).

However, numerous studies show that, although the countries receive many benefits from this process, for the students the situation is rarely as fortunate. Previous reviews show that many international students are under constant stress during their stay in the host country, a fact that can lead to a low quality of life and various mental-health problems (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). The issues faced by international students are usually a result of the acculturation process, i.e.: "the dual process of cultural and psychological changes that take place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2017, p. 15). In this study, we were particularly interested in the psychological changes affecting the students, namely acculturative stress (Berry, 2006). Although the two previous reviews addressed the issue of acculturative stress (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), we consider that both offer only a partial framework for understanding it, together with its causes, covariates and outcomes. Firstly, Zhang and Goodson (2011) focused only on international students from the United States, thus neglecting almost 75% of the potential samples around the world (Project Atlas, 2019). Also, their review was aimed at discussing the broader concept of psychosocial adaptation, which leads to treating acculturative stress as a secondary concept. Secondly, Smith, and Khawaja (2011), while expanding their focus on a far more diverse sample, also insisted more on the stressors leading to acculturation and far less on the outcomes of acculturative stress or on the variables that can buffer or intensify the effects of acculturative stress. In addition, they include a series of intervention studies that tackle the problem of acculturation but not specifically that of acculturative stress.

Building on the results highlighted by previous reviews, we aim to further expand the knowledge on acculturation stress. Firstly, we considered the stressors that lead to acculturative stress. Secondly, we present the effects of acculturative stress, both from physical and psychological standpoints. Thirdly, we were interested in the factors that were related to acculturative stress. We explored other psychological variables that could increase or decrease the level

of stress and how some of these variables might protect against the negative consequences of stress. Finally, we reviewed the interventions specifically designed to reduce the level of acculturative stress.

Acculturation and stress

More and more people move from one country to another in search of better living conditions. And, in a world characterized by such mobility, acculturation becomes a part of life (Van der Zee, Benet-Martínez & Van Oudenhoven, 2016). Acculturation leads to changes in both social structures and people's lifestyles and behaviors (Berry, 2017). They must learn the language, accept, and understand the cultural identity of the host country as well as adapt to the social environment of that country. As previously mentioned, acculturation can be seen as a process developing on two main axes: a cultural one (two cultures come in direct contact with each other, which bring changes to one or both) and a psychological one (everyone is influenced by both cultures and thus changes to adapt) (Berry, 2017).

However, based on more recent research, four other dimensions can be added to the acculturation process (Berry, 2017). Firstly, by cultural diffusion, one culture can influence others through indirect contacts, such as news, entertainment or the Internet. Secondly, long-time interactions were present. Many cultures have influenced each-other through the ages; thus, the process is not "here and now" but continuous. Thirdly, we cannot talk about only two cultures that interact in the present-day multi-cultural environment. Finally, acculturation does not necessarily involve geographically different cultures but can be found among internal migration too (moving from a rural society towards a metropolitan area). Furthermore, during the acculturation process, people might develop one of four possible attitudes: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization (Berry, 2017).

Although acculturation might not be inherently stressful (Rudmin, 2009), the experience can still provide sufficient causes to increase the level of stress when facing it (Berry, 2017). Moreover, this problem might be particularly pressing in the student population, given the younger age of those exposed to acculturation and the necessary coping mechanisms might not be developed enough. According to the acculturation process presented by Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001), the adaption of the migrant population can be influenced by various societal-level variables (describing both the society of origin and the host society), by the characteristics of the person (personality, the reason to migrate, acculturation strategies) and by the characteristics of the situation (length of contact, cultural distance, number of contacts with the host nationals). This view, also known as the ABC models, is also supported by three of the most important models of intercultural contact: The Stress and Coping Model, The

Culture Learning Model and The Social Identification Model (Ward *et al.*, 2001; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008). The Stress and Coping Model postulates that life changes are stressful and that coping strategies might be developed to eradicate mental health problems in migrant groups. Also, according to his model, adaptation is a function of various psychological and situational resources. The Culture Learning model proposes that the knowledge a migrant has regarding their new culture can affect the degree of adjustment. Those with better language or communication competences and generally know more about the host culture will adjust better. Thus, the final goal of migrants should be to learn the necessary skills to adapt to the host culture. Finally, The Social Identification Model has the premise that during acculturation, the cultural identity of the migrant might be at risk. Cultural similarity or knowledge of the host culture affects the degree of adjustment, and one can improve its adaptation by emphasizing intergroup similarities and understanding.

These three models present people as being able to respond and resolve the problems caused by the changes they are going through. With this review we aimed to understand the factors affecting the adaptation process of international students, thus creating higher levels of acculturative stress. We expected to find that the factors would overlap with the theoretical standpoints of all the models, having cultural, societal and individual origins. We also aimed to explore the variables that help international students to lower their acculturative stress. As with the risk-factors, we considered that these protective factors would come from the same direction. Finally, we aimed to investigate the interventions against acculturative stress and took a look at whether they took advantage of the increasingly diverse theoretical frameworks.

Method

We were interested in reviewing the articles that explored the issue of acculturative stress among international students. For this, we conducted several searches within three electronic databases: Web of Science, Scopus and PubMed. The last search was conducted on the 19th of August 2020. We searched the databases using the following terms: "acculturative stress and students", "acculturative stress and university", "acculturation stress and students" and "acculturation stress and university". We found a total number of 1100 articles using these key terms.

During the following steps we removed the duplicates and investigated the titles and the abstracts to eliminate the studies that did not take acculturative stress into account. After these steps, 139 articles were retained. We further eliminated the articles that were not in English, the reviews and the articles that were not centered on international students. In the end, this review included 84 qualitative and quantitative studies.

Acculturative stress was generally related to lower mental and physical health (Lee, Koeske & Sales, 2004; Ogunsanya, Bamgbade, Thach, Sudhapalli & Rascati, 2018; Taušová *et al.*, 2019). It can also be a factor contributing to higher general illness, sleep disturbance, anxiety and dysphoria, lower health promotion behavior and lower health-related quality of life (Bhandari, 2012; Kin & Yo, 2016; Qu, 2015).

More specifically, it might lead to various physical and psychological issues. Facets of acculturative stress, such as poorer sociocultural adjustment and greater perceived discrimination and predicted subsequent risk of eating disorders among female Malaysian students from the UK (Swami, 2016). Female Korean international students, higher in acculturative stress, also reported more severe premenstrual symptoms (Lee & Im, 2016). Those suffering from more pronounced acculturative stress were more exposed to addictive behaviors, such as smoking and drinking (Yang & Yang, 2017; Sa, Seo, Nelson & Lohrmann, 2013; Hunt, Martens, Wang & Yan, 2016). Lower resilience, another important outcome of acculturative stress, mediated the relationship between the level of stress and binge drinking (Kim & Cronley, 2018).

Multiple studies with culturally diverse samples indicate a strong link between stress and poor mental health. Acculturation stress predicted higher depression, more psychological distress and lower life satisfaction (Bai, 2016; Bashir & Khalid, 2020; Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004; Nguyen, Le & Meirmanov, 2019; Tonsing, Tse & Tonsing, 2015; Wu & Mak, 2012). Students higher in acculturation stress reported lower positive emotions (Pan, Wong, Chan & Joubert, 2008; Pan, Wong, Joubert & Chan, 2008; Taušová *et al.*, 2019), higher negative emotions (Pan & Wong, 2011) and higher anxiety (Kim & Cronley, 2018). Lower self-confidence, a lower meaning of life. Deficient sense-making coping and post-migration growth mediate some of these associations (Liu *et al.*, 2015; Pan, 2011; Pan, Ye, Chen & Park, 2019). Gender can play an important role in shaping the relationship between acculturative stress and mental health. For male Arab students in Israel, a low sense of coherence and low active coping mediated the indirect link between acculturative stress and depressive symptoms. However, for the female students, the results established both a direct and indirect association (by a low sense of coherence and high avoidant coping) between the two (Abu-Kaf & Khalaf, 2020).

Social relationships were also affected by acculturative stress, which can lead to lower social support and academic adjustment (Lashari, Kaur & Awang-Hashim, 2018; Ladum & Burkholder, 2019). For married international students, partaking into academic activities might imply spending less time with their partner or children (Kim, 2012). Also, acculturative stress can determine the students to become more oriented towards their host culture which mediates the relationship with psychological distress (Tonsing *et al.*, 2015).

Risk and protective factors

Demographic variables

Age, gender, and academic path affect international students in different ways. Some quantitative studies show that men and older students are more affected by stress (Gebregergis, Huang & Hong, 2019; Ye, 2006). However, these findings were not supported by a Romanian study where female international students were more affected by acculturative stress (Iorga, Soponaru, Muraru, Socolov & Petrariu, 2020). In a qualitative study, Yan and Berliner (2011) also found that older students suffer from more stress. Their results also imply that men and women have different reasons for being affected by acculturative stress (men are more stressed about their future opportunities, and females are more affected by dating and financial problems). The field of study also has a role to play (in STEAM, language proficiency is less important, and the financial opportunities are more prevalent compared to social sciences or humanities).

Being closer to a member of the family-of-origin, having some members that had previous experiences with the host culture or simply having more experiences with any other foreign culture seem to have some effect when it comes to alleviating stress. Students reported lower stress when other family members were studying in the same country and when at least one parent spoke the language or was of host-native descent (Iorga *et al.*, 2020). Also, students who previously travelled more were less affected by stress (Gebregergis, Huang & Hong, 2019). On the contrary, being married is a significant stressor, unmarried students reporting lower acculturative stress (Yu *et al.*, 2014)

European international students from the USA reported lower acculturation stress compared to those from Asia, Africa or South America (Yeh & Imose, 2003). However, isolation from family and friends, the pace of living, financial issues, different values (*i.e.* workaholism) also affects European students going to the United States (Poulakis, Dike & Massa, 2017).

Differences in classroom activities and organization, especially the lack of language proficiency seem to be important factors contributing to the stress of the mainland Chinese individuals studying in Hong Kong (Taušova, Bender, Dimitrova & van de Vijver, 2019; Vyas & Yu, 2018). International students from the USA who had English as the first language had lower scores in acculturative stress (Hansen, Shneiderman, McNamara & Grace, 2018). The lack of English proficiency, even when English is not the main language of the host country, might also act as a stressor (Kashima *et al.*, 2017; Yeh & Imose, 2003). However, these results were contradicted by Greenland and Brown (2010), who found no relationship between language proficiency and acculturative stress.

Although some theoretical models propose a U-Shaped form for the temporal development of acculturative stress (Berry, 1988), various results create a far more complex picture. Some studies found that acculturative stress

decreases with a longer stay in the host country (Ayoob, Singh & Jan, 2011; Bailey & Dua; 1999; Iorga *et al.*, 2020; Lin & Betz, 2009), while others did not (Greenland & Brown, 2010; Taušova*et al.*, 2019). A possible reason for that is found in a study by Wang and the collaborators (2012). They show that not all students go through the same pattern of stress development. 22% of Chinese students from their study have a continuously high level of stress, even after two semesters in the host country. Fortunately, 65% of the students reported constant low levels of distress, and 14% reported higher levels of distress before leaving China and subsequent lower levels after arriving in the USA.

Social support

Social support plays a crucial role in shaping acculturative stress. A high number of studies focused either on the negative consequences brought by the lack of support or on the positive outcomes of having a supportive social network. Firstly, we will focus on the studies showing the aggravating nature of low social support.

Having social ties is an important factor contributing to socio-cultural adaptation during the acculturation process (Berry, 2006). However, a series of factors can gravely damage international students' chances of establishing healthy social relationships. Perceived discrimination, social exclusion and loneliness are related to more acculturative stress for international students (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013; Guo, Li & Ito, 2014; Tonsing *et al.*, 2015). Also, the students that are not well-equipped to function optimally in social contexts, especially those with higher intergroup anxiety and higher social needs, suffer from higher acculturative stress (Greenland & Brown, 2010; Behl, Laux, Roseman, Tiamiyu & Spann, 2017).

On the contrary, acculturative stress was negatively related to social connectedness or social support (Kim & Yoo, 2016; Ladum & Burkholder; Nguyen *et al.*, 2019; Ra & Trusty, 2016; Yeh & Imose, 2003). Satisfaction with social-support and having a higher level of bonding social capital was related to lower acculturation stress (Gou *et al.*, 2014; Yeh & Imose, 2007). Another study found that social support strengthens cultural adjustment and life satisfaction, which in turn, lower the level of stress perceived by international students (Rujiprak, 2016). Moreover, receiving social support alleviates the deterioration of mental health because of acculturative stress (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser & Kumar, 2013).

However, not all types of social support bring about the same benefits. Past studies show that the source of social support is important. Also, not all students are keen on searching for the support of others. Chinese and French students tend to seek social support from their families and native friends. Support from the host-nation friends or colleagues is far less used (Bertram *et al.*, 2013; Matusitz, 2015; Yan and Berliner, 2011). However, only receiving social

support from the host nationals was beneficial, being associated with lower acculturation stress (Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, *2015).* Some Chinese students use social leisure activities to cope with acculturation stress. They talk to their host-nation friends, volunteer in campus activities or partake in sports. However, many prefer quiet and solitary activities, thus making them susceptible to some negative outcomes and higher levels of stress. Some might not be interested in parties, clubbing and dating, the leisure activities most common among US students (Zhou, Zhang & Stodolska, 2017). One study showed that international students prefer informal sources of help and support (family, friends, colleagues) compared to formal ones (a counselor from the University). However, only a few of them were willing to seek help, the majority preferring to overcome emotional difficulties alone (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). Even for those who used the counseling services, the outcomes were not always positive**.** According to Wei, Tsai, Chao, Du, and Lin's (2012) study on East-Asian international students, both the advisory working alliance and perceived English proficiency account for a significant positive relationship between acculturation stress and psychological distress. However, this happens only if the advisory working alliance is strong, and the perceived English proficiency is weak. Although counterintuitive, these results can be specific for the East-Asian population, where students want to honor their advisors but feel they are ill-equipped to do that, thus becoming more affected by their constant threat of failure due to low English proficiency.

In recent years, many studies were interested in the benefits of the Internet and the various social networking sites (SNS). Their results, however, point towards an intricate picture. The use of the Internet can alleviate the level of acculturative stress, but this depends on various factors. For example, being in an online ethnic support group that was specifically created for international students may have positive implications for the international student. Higher satisfaction with the support network, but not the size of the network was associated with lower acculturation stress. Higher levels of perceived informational support were also linked with lower stress (Ye, 2006). Contrasting with these findings, SNS communication with co-nationals from the host country or the origin country was not associated with acculturation stress (Li & Peng, 2019). Moreover, international students who used Facebook (an SNS that allows them to be in contact with people from all around the world) had lower acculturation stress compared to those who used only an SNS specific to their country or both. Also, home-country SNS use predicted higher levels of stress (Park, Song & Lee, 2014). Finally, both SNS communication and non-SNS communication with host nationals were indirectly associated with lower acculturative stress through social support (Li & Peng, 2019). Yet, when compared with other methods of communication with the host country, using the Internet in some specific way

was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress. Higher levels of stress were related to higher telephone use but with lower email use (Kline & Liu, 2005).

Culture

The way international students view their own and host culture reflect how well they adapt to their host country (Berry, 1992). This theoretical standpoint was also supported by various empirical results.

Cultural differences were reported as important stressors (Bertram *et al.*, 2013; Li, Wang, Liu, Xu & Cui, 2018; Malekian, Shafeq, Khan & Ahmad, 2017; Mukminin, 20012). Also, acculturation (explicitly or implicitly measured through a go/no-go association task) was associated with higher acculturation stress (Anderson & Guan, 2017; Padilla *et al.*, 1985).

Still, the cultural attitudes of international students play a major role in their later development of acculturative stress. Cultural mistrust and cultural distance predicted acculturation stress for international students (Al-Krenawi, Alotaibi & Elbedour, 2020; Galchenk & van de Vijver, 2007; Pan *et al.*, 2008; Perez-Rojas & Gelso, 2018). Immersion in a student's native culture was positively associated with acculturative stress. On the contrary, immersion in the host culture was negatively associated with acculturative stress (Hansen, Shneyderman, McNamara & Grace, 2018). Also, students with a higher sociocultural adaptation (interpersonal communication, academic/work performance, personal interests, and community involvement, ecological adaptation, and language proficiency) reported lower levels of acculturative stress (Mahmood & Burke, 2018).

Other studies show that the students who are more able to adapt to their new country will also have lower levels of stress. The link between cultural attachment and acculturative stress was supported by Hong, Fang, Yang, and Phua (2013). In their study, the students who were higher in attachment anxiety towards both their host (Singapore) and native culture (Indonesia) as well as those with higher avoidance towards their native culture reported higher levels of acculturation stress. Cultural intelligence predicted lower acculturative stress (Ayoob, Wani, Ahmad, Jan & Dar, 2015; Gebregergis *et al.*, 2019). However, the way a student views cultural intelligence might vary. In a longitudinal study developed over a three-year period, both fixed implicit theories of cultural intelligence (believing that this ability is stable and cannot be trained or developed (Dweck, Chiu & Hong 1999) and external causal attributions determined higher levels of acculturation stress. The relationship between these two dispositional variables and stress was mediated by two psychosocial variables, perceived social support and cultural identity (Cuadrado, Tabarnero & Briones, 2014).

Concluding, sociocultural maladaptation predicted subsequent acculturative stress (Wu & Mak, 2012). Supporting Berry's (1992) model of acculturation, the students who want to integrate into the host culture (maintain native cultural

values while also having relationships with the host culture) have lower acculturation stress compared to those who assimilate, separate or are marginalized (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). Similar results were found by Taušova, Bender, Dimitrova and van de Vijver (2019), who reported that students who were more oriented towards the host country perceived less stress, while those who were more oriented towards the native country perceived more stress.

For the students, however, the process of acculturation continues after returning to their home country. There, they are forced to re-adapt to the culture and to the social environment they left behind. This might also lead to acculturative stress. In a qualitative study on Korean students, they reported that they used leisure activities to reduce stress. They took an interest in these activities to feel a sense of belonging, creating or recreating social networks, enhancing family relationships, maintaining physical health or understanding Korean culture (Ryu, Kim & Lee, 2016).

Personality and self

Few studies have focused on the relationship between personality traits and acculturative stress. They found that some traits, such as neuroticism, are related to higher stress, while others, such as extraversion, have a positive link with acculturative stress (Kashima *et al.*, 2017; Park *et al.*, 2014). Attachment anxiety and avoidance both predicted acculturations of stress, although the relationship between stress and anxiety was stronger (Qu, 2015).

Higher interest was found in discussing the role of self (and other related variables). Lower unconditional self-regard and lower self-esteem predicted higher acculturation stress (Lin & Betz, 2009; Padilla, Wagatsuma & Lindholm, 1985). Self-esteem indirectly influences acculturation stress through self-efficacy (Kin & Yoo, 2016). Related to their language proficiency, when the students reported lower self-efficacy in English-speaking social contexts, they also reported higher levels of stress (Lin & Betz, 2009). Low maladaptive and self-critical perfectionism buffered the effect of acculturation stress on depression (Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero & Anderson, 2012; Wei *et al.*, 2007). Finally, female international students, higher in sense of coherence, reported lower levels of stress (He, Lopez & Leigh, 2012). A higher personal growth initiative had an indirect effect on acculturation stress through host country's orientation (Taušova *et al.*, 2019).

Coping

Coping was related to lower acculturation stress (Ra & Trusty, 2016). However, not all forms of coping are beneficial. In a study on 220 Asian International students studying in the US (Ra & Trusty, 2015), the results showed that emotion-oriented coping strategies were positively related to stress, while task-oriented and avoidance-oriented strategies were negatively related to

stress. Thus, Asian students might decrease their acculturation stress by focusing on the problems related to their acculturation process (task-oriented strategies) or by finding alternative activities rather than confronting the stressors (avoidance-oriented strategies). However, given their usually reserved and avoidant attitudes towards their emotions, using an emotion-oriented strategy might prove to be counter-productive in managing stress (Karabushckenko, Ivashchenko, Pilishvili & Sungurova, 2017; Ra & Trusty, 2015). Newly arrived Asian international students from Australia tend to use more collectivist coping strategies, but the level decreases with their stay. However, during their first six months, the use of collectivist coping predicts higher levels of stress (*Bailey & Dua, 1999).* Acculturation stress was not associated with forbearance coping (minimization of problems in order not to bother those around them) or identification with heritage culture (Wei, Liao, Happner, Chao & Ku, 2012). However, higher acculturation stress and lower association with the heritage culture interacted with higher forbearance coping in predicting higher psychological distress. Finally, being mindful protects against acculturation stress, while the need for closure acts in favor of acculturative stress (*Kashima et al.*, 2017).

Interventions

As previously shown, international students do not seek counseling support that often, a result that was found in both Asian and European samples (Poulakis *et al.*, 2017; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Also, even when searching for professional help, some results show that acculturation stress was not related to the indicators of the counseling process (real relationship, working alliance, session quality, session depth; Perez-Rojas & Gelso, 2018). Still, some interventions were proposed to diminish acculturative stress among international students.

Most of these programs use various counseling strategies to help students understand the acculturation process and the changes they encounter while facing it. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was used to help Chinese students to cope with the stress of studying abroad (Xu, O'Brian & Chan, 2020). The program involves two two-hour sessions guided by a specialist. During the first session, the participants discuss their symptoms related to acculturation stress, how they already control the feelings of stress and new ways to control it. In the end, they receive homework for the next session, usually to practice mindfulness and identify new "stress buttons". During the second session, they review their homework and discuss various ways to facilitate acceptance as a measure of stress control. At the follow-up, the participants reported lower levels of stress and depression and had a favorable opinion towards the intervention.

For the international students that were suffering from acculturation stress, both expressive writing (disclosing about the stressors they encountered) and assertiveness training proved to be beneficial. These students reported increased positive affect after the expressive writing program or increased positive affect and decreased homesickness after the assertiveness training program. However, these two programs were not useful for students with low acculturation stress (Hijazi, Tavakoli, Slavin-Spenny & Lumley, 2011).

Beri and Mehta (2020) propose a four-module intervention program for reducing acculturation stress. This would help students deal with homesickness, isolation, discrimination, cultural shock, poor self-image, guilt academic challenges and low social support. However, this program remains untested.

Al-Jaberi *et al.* (2020) also proposed a research protocol intended to reduce acculturation stress. The researchers propose 7 sessions over eight months. Some of these sessions offer an introduction about the host culture and customs, information useful to understand acculturation and acculturative stress, methods to develop coping strategies and adjustment strategies.

Other studies involved mentorship programs intended to increase social support from a native host. Thomson and Esse (2016) paired international students with same-gender Canadian host students in a mentorship program. The students met weekly and also had monthly group sessions. After a semester, the level of acculturation stress was significantly decreased. Also, compared to a control group, the intervention group reported lower acculturation stress at the end of the program.

Finally, others focused more on psychotherapy. Using the cognitive behavioral therapy framework (Beck, 2011), a program consisting of 8 weekly sessions with a duration of 3 hours resulted in reduced acculturation stress at the end of the program as well as after a 3 month follow up (Pan, Ng, Young & Caroline, 2017). During the sessions, the students identified their thoughts and emotional and psychological responses to stress, identified their dysfunctional thoughts, replaced them with more constructive ones and identified and trained their behavioral activation strategies.

Discussion

Inspired by Ward and his collaborators' regarding the ABC model of the acculturation process (2001), this review investigated the factors that contribute to both the development and the decrease of acculturative stress for international students. Our review follows the studies of Smith and Khawaja (2011) and Zhang and Goodson (2011) but explores acculturative stress in a more complex manner. The results generally support that acculturative stress is related to a vast number of personal, social and cultural factors encountered by

the students. It also can have a considerable damaging effect on the students' psychosocial and mental health.

We found that a series of demographic stressors was thoroughly explored through the included studies. Personal factors like age, gender, language proficiency or academic domain have a great influence on the development of acculturative stress. Nevertheless, being close to at least one member of the family or having previous experiences with the host culture (or with other foreign cultures) seems to be beneficial for the students. These results support the assumption that the acculturation process can be influenced by cultural diffusion or long-lasting contact between the countries (Berry, 2017). Nowadays, the world consumes more and more products related to American culture, a fact that can help international students coming to the USA (the country that receives the highest number of students). Thus, they can indirectly improve their English skills and receive precious information about American culture before arriving there. Also, having a close relative that speaks the host language or is of host descent can be helpful (Iorga *et al.*, 2020). In a world where migration and intercultural relationships are more common, having a parent or grandparent that once lived in the host country is not only helpful but happens very often. However, cultural distance remains an important stressor despite this new development. Our results show that European students from the USA are less stressed compared to the Asian ones, and Asian students that study in another Asian country are less stressed compared to those who study in Australia. Although it is exponentially easier nowadays to experience other cultures, even before leaving for college, cultural distance remains a factor that diminishes a student's chance to adapt.

We found that acculturative stress can be affected by social support and better cultural learning; the results empirically confirm the ABC models, when low, social support was associated with higher acculturative stress (Ward *et al.*, 2001). Surprisingly, however, the studies found that international students do not search for social support. Moreover, when they do, they usually seek support from their relatives or friends from their home country in contrast to native students or faculty representatives. This behavior could be maladaptive given that only social support from host-natives was associated with better adaptation and less stress. Also, the use of the Internet can be helpful, but mostly when keeping in contact with host natives. Although the Stress and Coping Model view social support as an important resource for adjusting to a new culture, it seems that international students have problems asking for and obtaining it. We consider that this finding can be explained by the complex pathways existing between social support and acculturative stress. Firstly, most students do not seem to suffer from acculturative stress (Wang *et al.*, 2012). However, those affected by high levels of stress either come to the host country already stressed or develop stress immediately after arriving. Besides, some studies show that

higher acculturative stress leads to lower social support (Lashari *et al.*, 2018; Ladum & Burkholder, 2019). Thus, many students will not seek social support from the host natives because there is stress, whereby they develop even more acculturative stress because of a lack of social support. Our findings regarding the role of culture and cultural views in the development of stress support Berry's model of acculturation (1992) as well as the models of Culture Learning and Social Identification. The students that are more inclined towards the host culture are less affected by acculturative stress. On the contrary, those with greater cultural mistrust, cultural attachment, or those with a fixed view of cultural intelligence suffer from more stress.

We found that relatively few studies used variables related to personality and self in relation to acculturative stress. However, those with more adaptive personality traits (low neuroticism, higher extraversion) and with a healthy view of themselves (good self-efficacy or self-esteem) suffer less from acculturative stress. Also, having a secure attachment style is beneficial. Finally, regarding coping, most studies show that Asian international students use various maladaptive coping mechanisms that expose them to greater acculturative stress.

All the models from the ABC framework can be used to develop different kinds of interventions (Zhou *et al.*, 2008). And although in relatively low numbers, the interventions we found drew considerably from this model. Some tried to develop the students' coping strategies, used a mentorship program to enhance social support or presented tools necessary for better emotional regulation. Thus, they adhered to the Stress and Coping Model. Others tried to enhance self-esteem, reduce homesickness and present various opportunities to learn about the host culture. These interventions were more inspired by the Culture Learning and Social Identification models.

Limitations of the literature and future developments for research and practice

Our review explored acculturative stress among international students and the various risk and protective factors associated with it. Although the literature about acculturative stress is far richer, it is important to discriminate among those affected by the stress. Different groups have different powers, resources and attitudes during the process of acculturation (Berry, 2017). Some have to permanently deal with acculturation, while others are only temporarily exposed to other cultures. International students are found in the second category. They might have experiences, and some of the pathways leading to acculturative stress are characteristic only to them.

Thus, reviewing the literature on this topic is extremely important. However, we must not minimize the inherent limitations of the studies. Most of them are cross-sectional studies, a design that limits the possibility to extract real causal conclusions from the results. Although we found some longitudinal

studies (see Cuadrado *et al.*, 2014; Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013), they represent the minority. Moreover, acculturative stress acted as both a predictor and an outcome in different studies. Without proper longitudinal designs, such relationships would remain poorly understood. Also, most studies concentrated on Asian populations. Although Asian international students are the most numerous and probably the most affected by acculturative stress (especially when studying in the USA, Australia or Europe), the cultural differences among Asia, Europe, and the USA allow for some uncertainty when concluding that all the students follow the same pathways. Thus, better developed comparative studies are needed to understand the real differences among cultures (both native and host) when discussing acculturative stress. Moreover, more numerous samples should be used, the studies with less than one hundred participants being common among our sample.

Having numerous studies with better designs is crucial for the further development of intervention strategies. The few studies from this category also suffered from important limitations. Firstly, two of them were only during the trial phase and did not offer any results. The other two had small samples that did not permit the use of a control group. Although promising, all the interventions should be further tested in other host cultures, with international students coming from different parts of the world and employing more trustworthy designs with control groups and more than one follow-up test.

Furthermore, even the concept of acculturative stress has been criticized by some authors (see Rudmin, 2009). The author points out that it can be difficult to differentiate between acculturative stress and other forms of stress. Also, many multi-dimensional scales for acculturative stress have the problem of not differentiating among the concepts. In conclusion, future studies (and reviews) should carefully consider the theoretical framework they apply, use multiple control variables and assess the concepts with better measurement tools.

The review itself also suffers from some limitations. Firstly, we did not assess the quality of each study. We can presume that some studies are underpowered or present results based on limited samples. Secondly, we did not use any statistical method to assess the significance of our findings. In the future, these limitations can be overcome by conducting a series of meta-analyses for the relationships between acculturative stress and its more important outcomes and predictors.

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this review provides a vast number of insights on the topic of acculturative stress among international students. Using the ABC models presented by Ward *et al.* (2001) and building upon the studies of Smith and Khawaja (2011) and Zhang and Goodson (2011), we show that acculturative

stress can be highly damaging on the mental and physical health of the students. Also, we explored the most important risk and protective factors by considering the individual's social and cultural variables that can interfere with the process of acculturation. We also present the more recently developed interventions concerning acculturative stress and discuss their usefulness. Finally, we highlight the necessity of improvement for both general research and intervention, outlining the continuous transformations in the educational and intercultural environments.

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THE ADAPTATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. A LITERATURE REVIEW

I O A N A   B U C U L E I

Introduction

International students are a group of individuals who have common situations but are different in terms of religions and political systems. It is well known that when international students start to attend faculty in a foreign country they must adapt socially and culturally; during the adaptation process they encounter some difficulties, like adjustment to the habits and rules of the people living in the country. Psychologically they are under a lot of stress and anxiety. In addition, depression disorders can appear with an impact on academic performance. (Yu, 2012) All these types of adaptation that students must undergo in a foreign country are intertwined.

Adaptation is a continuous process of acclimation to the surrounding conditions. (Yu, 2013) When students go to a foreign country to study, they must adjust to the cultural environment from that country and make new connections with students, teachers and other people who might have different beliefs, religions or customs and to establish and maintain different types of relationships with them; this is called intercultural adaptation. (Yu, 2016) Academic adaptation is the most important type of adaptation for international students, because they want to have good academic results but also for universities in which these students study. This form of adaptation has an impact on socio-cultural and psychological adaptation. (Yu, 2012) Psychological adaptation is influenced by the way in which students adapt from a psychological point of view to their new environment. It has been shown that this is positively associated with English proficiency, with the way in which the students interact with other local students, make friendships with them as well as receiving social support. (Yu, 2019)

Students who study abroad must face a lot of challenges: cognitive, socio-cultural, linguistic and academic. To adapt to the new environment and academic life the students must work hard and not give up. A good deal of literature reviews describes three types of adaptation: positive and connected, unconnected and stress or distressed and risk-taking. (Fayzullina, 2019; Russell, 2010; Hoang, 2018; Tran, 2011)

There are four types of psychological challenges international students must surpass. Psycho-emotional pressure, mental changes, homesickness and

sometimes climatic changes form the first type of challenge, the psycho-physical barrier. The second type of challenge is the educational barrier. This includes language difficulties, the traits of a new educational system and the adapting to a higher form of education. The difficulties imposed by the new environment as well as the different beliefs and customs of the foreign country and people are part of the third type of challenge, the socio-cultural barrier. The last type of challenge are the challenges students encounter form the point of view of dormitory accommodation. It is called the household barrier. (Biserova, 2019) To surpass these types of psychological challenges, foreign students need to be motivated, have a desire to make new friends, including adapting to the new beliefs and customs of the local people.

Academic performance is an important aspect for students but also for faculties. That is why it is very important to understand the way in which universities can help international students adapt on all levels. For example, high language fluency can cause a foreign student to be more confident when interacting with local people. This has a positive impact on socio-cultural adjustment problems because they can find social support easier and form interpersonal relationships. (Ward, 2004)

The region or country from which international student are from, can be used by universities to better know how to help students and increase the access to the informal culture. It is very important that universities start to focus on the way in which social and academic adaptation takes place and what the different aspects are depending on the student's origin, instead on focusing on the differences existing between local and foreign students. (Glass *et al.,* 2014)

Adaptation of international students in the US

United States leads the ranking of countries that have been chosen by international students, because of the number of international students that come to study in this country, and it remains the first option for international students who want to study abroad. Between 2019 and 2020, the US had over one million international students. (Israel, 2021)

Psychological and socio-cultural adaptation of this category of students studying in US was examined by Wang in a study. A questionnaire was applied to 169 participants, from 31 different countries. The psychological adaptation of the students was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale consisting of 5 statements. This scale contains 21 items. From the psychological adaptation point of view, the results reveal that students go through some phases: upon arrival in the US they were generally satisfied. This is followed by a period of unsatisfaction and negative feelings. After that, adaptation is done slowly. (Wang, 2018)

The adaptation of students studying abroad in new academic and cultural environments in US was studied by Cemalcilar and Falbo in a longitudinal study, which included 1000 students. All the students passed the Toefel exam and spoke English fluently. The instruments used were The Acculturation Index (AI), Generalized Contentment Scale (GCS) and Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS). The data collected showed that, even for students who speak and understand English very well, it is challenging to adapt to a new environment, and this had a psychological impact. (Cemalcilar, 2008)

Social and psychological adjustments regarding international students in the US was also studied by Jackson in 2013, with the purpose of seeing if depression and sociocultural adaptation and if self-esteem, optimism, hope, coping, social support and acculturative stress can anticipate depression and sociocultural adaptation difficulties. 70 participants were included in the study and asked to respond to an online questionnaire. Depressive symptoms were more present in the participants with a high level of acculturative stress and a low level of social support. Hope and optimism seemed to be linked to a low level of depressive disorders. (Jackson, 2013)

Adaptation of international students in the UK

The UK is the second option for students who want to study abroad. Between 2019 and 2020, 538,615 international students were studying in the UK. (UKCISA, 2020)

In a literature review by Lillyman and Bennett (2014) showed the main problems that international students encounter when studying in UK and the main methods in which these problems can be resolved. The studies included in the review were published between 2010 and 2012, but because the authors did not find many studies published regarding foreign students in the UK, they also included other studies conducted in other countries with results that could also be applied to the UK context. A total of 87 studies in this area of interest were included. The results shows that these types of students have to face a lot of challenges, but with the support and help of the university, teachers and colleagues they are capable to surpass them. The level of the English language is a very important aspect for the academic and social adaptation of international students studying in UK and studies show a positive relationship between high level knowledge and academic success as well as psychological adaptation. (Lillyman, 2014)

Young and Schartner (2014) studied the role that cross-cultural communication education has on the adjustment of international students. 352 of the participants of the study completed a cross-communication education program, and 328 completed a program design to improve the English of people

who live in English-speaking countries. The result of the study shows that a CCC education can improve the academic adjustment in this category of students.)

Adaptation of international students in Ireland

Ireland is one of the countries considered by students who want to study abroad. Reilly conducted a study in 2010 with the purpose of answering 3 questions about adaptation of foreign students that choose Ireland as the country in which they want to study. The questions were related to the adaptation of this category of students who wanted to live in Ireland, to the way in which adaptations improve or not over time and to the differences existing related to the experience of foreign students and local students. In the study, 124 students were enrolled, 80 international students and 44 Irish students. The participants were divided into three groups and asked to complete a questionnaire at different times. The results show that the international students included in this study adapted well from a socio-cultural point of view. The reason seems to be the fact that they lived with other international students, which provided support and with whom they shared their experiences of living in a foreign country. The fact that the students included in the study scored high on their English proficiency exams, which also seems to have had an impact on adaptation. (Reilly, 2010)

Adaptation of international students in New Zealand

Bethel conducted a study with the purpose to evaluate a predictive model of psychological adaptation. 1527 participants were included in the study and asked to participate in an online survey about self-reported English language proficiency, psychological adaptation, cultural distance, host national connectedness and perceived cultural inclusion. Host national connectedness was shown to be a very important factor for international students' adaptation. The Satisfaction with Life Scale was used to assess psychological adaptation and showed that the social interaction with local students and managing to make new friends plays an important role. (Bethel, 2020)

Butcher and McGrath studied the needs and responses of international students in New Zealand by reviewing the existing literature in this domain and addressed subjects like student experience, academic needs, social needs, health and safety, financial needs and the way in which the needs can be met. The conclusion of the study was that international students in New Zealand have important needs and, in some institutions, exists a need of major changes. In other instances, there is a need to switch from a reactive response to proactive pastoral care. (Butcher, 2004)

Adaptation of international students in China

The Chinese government implemented a programme called `Study in China` with the purpose that by the year 2020 China will have 500,000 international students. (Hao, 2009)

In a survey, An (2016) evaluated the academic and sociocultural adaptation of foreign students that choose China as the country in which they will continue their education. Three hundred and thirty international students from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America were enrolled in the survey and asked to respond to a questioner. The first year of study seemed to be the most difficult. The author identified that psychological adaptation is the most challenging aspect and language difficulties improved over time. (An, 2016)

127 international students in different Chinese universities were asked to participate in a study conducted by Ruirong and Yi and to complete three questionnaires: The Acculturation Scale, The Cultural Intelligence Scale and The Social Support Scale. The data obtain was analysed and An *et al.* (2016) concluded that cross-cultural adaptation was not high. Also, in the case of social support, the authors found the same results. A positive corelation was found between cultural intelligence and social support; these two factors were positively correlated with cross-cultural adaptation. (Ruirong, 2015)

Adaptation of international students in Germany

Germany is considered a second option for international students who want to study abroad. The main reason for this seems to be the language barrier; the first option are countries with English as a native language. (Verbik, 2007)

Grünwald *et al.* (2018) conducted an empirical study between 2016-2018 on a category of international students that were studying in a master's programme at Hochschule Wismar with the purpose of studying socio-cultural adaptation of international students theoretically and empirically by using a new research questionnaire about the criteria of socio-cultural adaptation of this category of students. The main concepts and their meaning were studied, and the results show that cultural standards, values of teachers and this specific category of students at that specific Master's programme are different. (Grünwald, 2018)

The roll of the Internet in socio-cultural adjustment of this category of students was studied by Shubba and Rani (2017). In the study, 32 participants were included and asked to answer a questionnaire. The main finding of the study showed that the Internet is a helpful instrument that international students can use to remain in contact with family and friends, it can be used for academic purposes and also to keep them up to date with what is happening worldwide as well as in their country. Because of this, the Internet plays an

important role in social and cultural adjustment and can make the process of adaptation a lot easier.

Adaptation of international students in Australia

A study conducted by Yu and Wright (2016) on six higher degree research students with different nationalities, confirmed the data from other studies. It shows the main problems the students came across. At the beginning of the study, the participants were asked to participate in a semi-interview and were also asked to keep a dairy during a six-week period. From a socio-cultural adaptation point of view, all the participants reported that for them it was very important to meet Australians and form networks. They believed this was a way to get to know Australia. Unfortunately, they encountered some barriers like the language barrier. One of the students interviewed stated that it is easier to form relationships and to communicate with people that speak his native language. The absence of a solid student community was also a barrier for social-cultural adaptation. The participants reported that students tend to individualize their research and not discuss their work with each other. From an academic adaptation point of view, the students reported existing barriers, such as poor support from the administrative staff of the faculty, which made it tougher for them to understand university policies. Language was also a barrier regarding academic adaptation. The participants reported that during classes if they didn't have PowerPoint support or other forms of following what the lecturer was teaching, it was difficult for them to understand everything the lecturer was saying. (Yu, 2016)

A study conducted by Yu, in 2013, regarding Asian international students' academic and social adaptation to the Australian University Style, included 261 Asian international students who were asked to participate in a survey about the integrative motivation, competence in L2 communication, academic adjustment, sociocultural adjustment and perseverance of the students. The author concluded that teachers could help with the adaptation of international students and gave some specific methods, such as forming groups of international and native students and let them select roles for each of the people in the group, roles such as keeping the time, conducting the discussion and taking notes. This is a form in which a teacher can help international and native students interact. (Yu, 2013)

Adaptation of international students in Russia

Students that are from other countries have to overcome a good number of obstacles when they first go to study in Russia. This was shown in a study done by Merenkov and Antonova (2015). The problem of adaptation was studied on 374 students with the help of a survey. The most important difficulty was the

language barrier because students were not fluent speakers of Russian language, and this caused them to have problems regarding educational adaptation. Another problem highlighted by the study was the difficulty with which foreign students adapt to everyday life on campus.

Beregovaya and Kudashov (2019) focused on the language barrier and its impact on academic adaptation of international students studying in Russia, in a study in which 310 participants were included and asked to complete an online survey. Only 5.6% of the participants reported that they consider they speak the Russian language very well, 48% good, 37% satisfactory and 9.3% poor. 83% of the respondents thought they needed extra lessons to master the Russian language. The results show that foreign students need to improve their language skills, because it has an impact on their academic life but also on their social life.

Adaptation of international students in Canada

In 2015 Canada was the world's seventh most popular destination for international students, with a total of 336,497 of international students studying in 2014 in Canada. (CBIE, 2015)

Liu (2016) conducted a study to assess the intercultural adaptation of 18 international students studying in Canada. The students were asked to participate in a personal interview. The primary problems that emerged after the analysis of the data obtain were cultural shock, earning in a foreign culture and the impact that campus service and support have on these problems. The conclusion of this study was that institutions need to understand different cultures, hire employs that can speak different languages and involve international students in the design and planning of campus activities. These are measures that can be adopted to help this category of students to adapt from a sociocultural and academic point of view. (Liu, 2016)

A new scale for grading the cross-cultural adjustment of foreign students that study in China and to find what can be applied to help students adapt more easily were studied by Peng *et al.* (2019) The new scale was found to be reliable. In addition, host communication competence, host social communication and intercultural transformation are very important for cross-cultural adaptation and can be used to predict this type of adaptation.

Adaptation of international students in Romania

Foreign students who study in Romania go through a process of socio-cultural and academic accommodation. Public transportation and the climate of the country can be different for some of the students, so they also have problems to adapting to this. The language is also a barrier. All of these were shown in research done by Muraru *et al.* (2020) on 100 participants who were asked to respond to a questionnaire. From a socio-cultural point of view, the students that

participated in the study had problems in making new friends; they were discriminated (ask to pay more than the locals) and were treated badly by their neighbours.

A study conducted by Socolov *et al.* (2017) in which 128 international freshman students studying in Iasi, Romania, participated. Students from 23 countries were included. The participants had to answer to some questions, and the results show that international students choose were they want to study by criteria like university prestige, trust in the academic offer, city life and personal advantages. These criteria`s should be taken into account by universities and their staff if they want to help international students become part of the community.

Discussions

As was shown above, international students, regardless of their country of origin, face a number of problems and must do a lot of adjustment work when they go to study in an unfamiliar country. By assessing the information obtained from different studies conducted in 10 different countries about the challenges and barriers, these types of students must overcome them. We can claim that there are no differences regarding the problems and the actions that should be taken to help foreign students integrate in their new society and obtain high academic results, but this is not the case. The first action that should be taken is to identify the challenges and barriers they can encounter, and the second action should be to find ways in which the universities, teachers and other staff can help in overcoming these problems and make the adjustment much easier for them.

International students have about a great deal of stress; they feel pressure to succeed in the academic field they chose, because they do not what to let down their parents who made a lot of sacrifices for them to be able to study abroad. Also, they feel that their academic skills are not that good compared to local students.

In the matter of academic skills, universities and teachers should pay attention to the learning systems of the native country of the foreign students and apply some of the methods of the teaching process they are accustomed to or explain the way in which the methods used at the university work and how these methods can improve the learning skills of the students. Communication between students and teachers play an important role. Teachers should make sure international students understand the information provided by asking questions, making sure that they are not talking too fast; this makes it hard for foreign students to keep up and to understand the information provided in the lecture. (Robertson, 2020) Workshops and courses can help teachers, that come in contact with international students, to improve their teaching skills when it

comes to international students and to recognise different academic and also socio-cultural problems that international students from specific countries can deal with.

Language seems to be another issue that international students face. Studies conducted in English speaking universities observed that students coming from countries that do not have English as their native language face more problems that native English-speaking students. This problem has an impact on the academic results of the students and can be addressed by providing supplementary courses in the English language. Teachers can also help foreign students by speaking more slowly during the courses, making sure all the students understand and provide feedback on the writing skills of the students to help them see their mistakes and correct them. (Andrade, 2006)

Regarding the subject of social adjustments, foreign students have a harder time when trying to make friends and receive support from the people around them. This seems to be related to the fact that their close friends and families are a great distance away, and the only means of communication is by phone and videocall. International students find it harder to make close friends with the local students; they find it easier to communicate with students that are from their own country. We think that this problem can be addressed by creating more opportunities for local students and for foreign students to interact. F example, teachers can assign local and international students to work together on different projects or ask international students to talk about their native country regarding their customs and beliefs. Another problem identified by studies is the fact that international students spend more time learning and improving their academic skills and less time socializing, because they want to succeed from an academic point of view and not let down their parents and relatives. The results of the studies presented above confirm that an international student's region of origin can moderate access to an institution's informal culture through participation in recreational activities, which affects the formation of cross-cultural friendships.

Discrimination is another aspect that must be considered as a problem encountered by international students. It can have an impact on the state of mind of the students but also on social adaptation. This problem is perceived as a lasting one, and an example is the grudge that foreign female students feel from the local people because their customs and religion is to wear veils or saris. (Sherry M, 2010) International students who experience discrimination can suffer from depression and will avoid interaction with the local people. (Muraru, 2020; Smith, R. A., 2011)

Behavioural intervention can be used to help international students. In 1999, Mak *et al.* elaborated a program intended to help students to overcome some of the intercultural and social barriers with the purpose of increasing sociocultural adaptation as well as academic skills and confidence, by helping

them to do this while maintaining their cultural identity. The students were asked to participate in 6 group sessions with a 3-hour duration each. These groups were made up of approximately 20 foreign students who had to make social contact, to actively participate in conversations, to discuss the problems encounter by them or others and find solutions. The efficacy of this program was assessed by different studies that found it to be beneficial for international students. The studies conducted showed that the program helped students reduce the tendency to avoid local students and people and helped them enhance their social skills. The program is used in different universities as a way to help international students. (Smith, R. A., 2011) This is only one example of such a program; other programs like this one were created and also used. International students have significant needs, but programmes and procedures cannot easily meet those needs, even though they can partially help them. In some universities fundamental changes are needed, and other universities need to reallocate some of their resources.

In a study Sherry *et al.* (2010) formulated some recommendations to help international students adjust socially and academically with the help of local students and the university. The suggested aim was to raise awareness in the way in which international students are perceived by the local students and teachers, to improve intercultural comprehension and provide more chances for international students to solidify their interactions with the local and university community. Suggestions regarding the way in which this can be obtained were given by students; they came up with the idea to make a habit of having an 'International Students' Week', where students of same nationality and local community organisations will present their cultures and customs. Another idea was that the newspaper of the university could publish stories about international students, presentations, awards and degrees. Free meeting conducted by foreign students who manage to adapt to the country or foreign students who obtain their degree at the local university is also an idea that should be considered. (Sherry M, 2010) Moreover, while it is largely the responsibility and role of the institutions that recruit and enrol international students to address their needs, it is also the responsibility of the communities and cities in which they live and of the nation to which they make an important contribution.

The information obtained from different articles and studies highlight the importance of relationships between international students and local students. The findings are discussed in relation to strategies that could improve the bond among students, host students and universities during the cross-cultural transition.

Conclusions

International students must overcome a lot of barriers and challenges regardless the country in which they choose to study. The challenges are the same for almost all international students; there are peculiar challenges depending on the foreign country. The common factor are the students who have all sorts of personalities, customs and religions and respond different to all types of barriers and challenges they encounter. Some of the students adapt quickly to their new environment and others at a slower pace. The language barrier seems to be problematic which has an impact on the socio-cultural adaptation of these students. Students who do not speak the local language tend to have more difficulty adapting, because they do not receive support from a social point of view. It is hard for them to form interpersonal relationships. Language is also a barrier regarding academic adaptation because international students encounter problems when paying attention and trying to follow the lectures. Other barriers, such as poor support from the administrative staff of the faculty, make it harder for students to understand university policies.

Foreign students' academic success is affected, undoubtedly, by sociocultural adaptation and persistence. Universities, teachers and other staff play an important role in helping foreign students adapt to their new environment and make it possible to create links between foreign and native students, because this plays a significant role in the adaptation of foreign students. The factors that seem to have a great impact on the adaptation process are the way in which these types of students manage to integrate into the community, interact with other students and the relationships they have with their teachers, supervisors and faculty staff.

Future studies in this field are needed. All sorts of methods and means, like the Internet, should be used to help international students. Longitudinal studies on the motivational effects on the adaptation of international students from different countries is an example of further research that can be considered. (Yu, 2012)

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING IN ROMANIA

MAGDALENA IORGA

Introduction

In 2018, more than 5.6 million students left their home country and decided to study abroad. The number was, in fact, doubled, compared to 2005 (OECD, 2020). The reasons were very different: more comfortable living conditions, a change in academic lifestyle, finding better jobs and higher financial income, working in a very specific professional domain. So, the reason for studying in another country for a different kind of education must bring a higher level of personal and professional fulfilment. Students who migrate to another country to study will experience a different stress type than domestic students, which is acculturative stress. However, some researchers identified that international students tend to experience negative psychological functioning as much as domestic students who do not opt for studying abroad. (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Lowinger *et al.,* 2015; Bai, 2016; Banjong, 2015)

International students have to face a good number of challenges: new language, new environment, long distance form home, being far away from family and friends, difficulties in concerning food, practicing one's religion or local transportation, homesickness, loss of support systems, loneliness, a lack of meaningful relationships with host nationals, perceived discrimination, cross-cultural transition, financial problems, culture shock, acculturative stress and reluctance to receive support by sometimes rejecting medical or psychological assistance because they avoid to be seen as weak or vulnerable. (Sherry *et al.,* 2010; Mori, 2000; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Mesidor & Sly, 2016)

Well-being is a broader, more encompassing concept than health, one which includes the health dimension as a sub-component. In many different types of research wellbeing was measured to establish the level of the psychosocial adaptation of international students. As the authors identified, international student life has two broad areas of interest:

a) the academic needs (levels of English language proficiency appropriate for successful participation in university studies (Mulligan and Kirkpatrick 2000; Borland and Pearce, 2002) and student expectations (Biggs and Watkins 2001)

b) physical and psychosocial health needs.

Academic institutions are more focused on the first dimensions, assisting in academic integration, host-country language acquisition and performance support but sometimes completely ignoring the second area of need.

The reasons for choosing to study abroad is very different, as different is the impact on international students' life. Many factors are influencing the adaptability of students in the new country. Researchers showed that the most important are age, previous experience in another country and social support. In addition, Ward *et al.* (2001) identified that cultural distance or degree of difference between the sojourner's culture of origin and the host culture is seen as an important factor, the greater distance, the more difficult adjustment is.

University-based academic and social support services have been highlighted as key for academic success and retention of IS. Friendship and social networks along with establishing relationship with peers in clubs, other campuses and recreational sports will increase the rate of social adjustment. (Ebinger, 2011)

The role of university support seems to be a very important one (Cho and Yu, 2015) increasing IS well-being, positive effects being registered in relationship with high scores for life satisfaction and low levels of psychological stress.

University teachers declared, in a study conducted by Roberston *et al.* (2000) that language proficiency is the main important challenge, followed by cultural differences, educational system differences and types of instruction.

On the other hand, faculty administrators considered that the most important challenges of IS are financial problems, acculturation and the underestimated effort to invest in academic tasks. (Redden, 2014)

The international student – a global citizen

International student mobility is regarded as a key component of the student learning experience. A highly educated person needs to develop and permanently improve their knowledge base, skills and attitudes necessary to integrate properly into the global society. That is why schools, colleges and universities develop specialized curricula especially designed to educate students for global citizenship.

The mobility of students that are travelling abroad for study, practical stages or scholarships and the desire of young people to work in different part of the world must prepare each individual to integrate easily in multicultural groups, to speak many languages and to act like a citizen of the world. For some of international students, with no experience in living abroad, campus life can be a challenge. That is why student associations and institutional programs should focus on the modality of how the integration of students from different nationalities could be harmonized and adapted to each culture.

Many authors consider that education, specifically the study of social sciences, should contribute to students for a global world. This has come to play

an important role in citizenship education (Szelényi and Rhoads, 2007). But, as Hunter (2011) identified, even if colleges and universities offer programs to help students become open to global cultures and citizenship, graduates are not prepared to enter the global workforce (Hunter, 2011)

The benefits of international mobility for intercultural understanding are obvious for the development of the global citizen. That is why higher education institutions have implemented new curricula in order to develop global citizenship and to embrace diversity and solidarity.

Research

The following study was conducted among international university students in Romania. The purpose of the study was to identify their lifestyle in the host country, how comfortable they are feeling when living, speaking and studying in another country, what the main problems related to migration are, what their opinion is about the local population, colleagues, teachers and academic staff. Some items investigated their experience related to cultural integration and what negative experiences they had.

In order to investigate all these aspects, a questionnaire, especially constructed for this research, was distributed online. Data about socio-demographic, family-related, routine, health-related problems were gathered. Also, self-rated items investigated their opinion about the level of comfort in the new university city. Also, a scale measuring the acculturative stress of international students was included some items that targeted the causes of daily stress. The students were informed about the confidentiality of data and that the results would be used for scientific dissemination. Informed consent was obtained before their voluntary participation. The descriptive, correlation and comparative analysis is presented in the next subchapters.

Socio-demographic data

A number of 424 international students responded to the questionnaire. Most of the students were female (57.5%) and enrolled in the first (25.5%), second (32.3%), or third (21.7%) year of study. Their mean age was 22.37 years (± 3.58 years, min. = 18 years, max. 40 years).

The students were enrolled in various Romanian Universities: Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Iasi (46.2%), Ion Ionescu de la Brad University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine from Iasi (6.4%), Iuliu Haţieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Cluj-Napoca (34.7%), University of Oradea (11.8%), University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Târgu Mureş (0.7%) and University of Craiova (0.2%).

Most of the students spoke fluently one (34.9%) or two (34.9%) other languages except their native one. Most of them did not have other acquaintances

studying in Romania (41%) or had just a friend (30.9%). Most of the students (89.9%) did not have Romanian origins.

The students came from families with more than one child (91.5% of them had at least one sibling) and with a high degree of education (67.9% of their mothers and 72.6% of their fathers had a university degree).

Regarding their marital status, 71.5% of them declared that they were single and 50.5% of them reported that they had lived in at least one other country (except their country of origin) before coming to Romania.

More than half (60.6%) of the students lived by themselves. Most of them reported that they did not have a chronic disease (91.3%), did not smoke (66.5%), did not drink alcohol (43.6%) or consume drugs (92.7%). Details are presented in Table 1.

Also, more than half of them did not receive medical care in Romania (58%).

Table 1. *Socio-demographic data*

Variable	Levels	N	%
Gender	Female	244	57.5
	Male	172	40.6
	I prefer not to say	8	1.9
Relationship status	Single	303	71.5
	In a relationship	110	25.9
	Married	11	2.6
University	Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy	196	46.2
	Iuliu Hațieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy	147	34.7
	University of Oradea	50	11.8
	University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Târgu Mureș	3	.7
	Ion Ionescu de la Brad University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	27	6.4
	University of Craiova	1	.2
Year of study	1	108	25.5
	2	137	32.3
	3	92	21.7
	4	32	7.5
	5	33	7.8
	6	22	5.2
How many languages do you speak (except your native language)	1	148	34.9
	2	148	34.9
	3	92	21.7
	4	30	7.1
	5	6	1.4

International Students Studying in Romania

Variable	Levels	N	%
Other acquaintances studying in Romania	No	174	41.0
	Sibling	44	10.4
	Cousin	18	4.2
	Friend	131	30.9
	Family and friends	57	13.4
Other acquaintances studying at the same university	No	175	41.3
	Sibling	41	9.7
	Cousin	11	2.6
	Friend	165	38.9
	Family and friends	32	7.5
Do you have Romanian origins?	No	381	89.9
	Mother is Romanian	14	3.3
	Father is Romanian	4	.9
	Both parents are Romanian	21	5.0
	A grandparent is Romanian	4	.9
Did your parents study in Romania	No	378	89.2
	Yes	46	10.8
Total number of siblings	0	36	8.5
	1	149	35.1
	2	111	26.2
	3-5	110	25.9
	6-10	16	3.4
	10-12	2	0.4
Mother's education level	Primary	14	3.3
	Secondary	19	4.5
	Highschool	103	24.3
	University	288	67.9
Father's education level	Primary	7	1.7
	Secondary	28	6.6
	Highschool	81	19.1
	University	308	72.6
Enrollment in other universities	No	217	51.2
	Yes, in Romania	16	3.8
	Yes, in other country	164	38.7
	Yes, in the native country	27	6.4
H many countries have you lived for more than 1 year (except your native country)	0	146	34.4
	1	214	50.5
	2	44	10.4
	3-5	19	4.6
How many months per year do you spend with your family?	0	6	1.4
	1-3	98	22.9
	4-6	178	41.9
	7-12	15	3.5

Variable	Levels	N	%
Accommodation	Living by myself	257	60.6
	Sharing	167	39.4
Do you have a chronic disease?	No	387	91.3
	Yes	37	8.7
Do you smoke	No	282	66.5
	Rarely	63	14.9
	Yes	79	18.6
Do you consume alcohol	No	185	43.6
	Rarely	147	34.7
	Yes	92	21.7
Do you consume drugs	No	393	92.7
	Rarely	26	6.1
	Yes	5	1.2
Have you received medical care in Romania	No	246	58.0
	Yes	178	42.0

Regarding nationality, the distribution of their answers is presented in the table below:

Table 2. *Nationality*

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Albanian	1	.2	Moldavian	3	.7
Algerian	1	.2	Moroccan	11	2.6
American (USA)	4	.9	Nepalese	1	.2
Austrian	1	.2	Nigerian	2	.5
Belgian	4	.9	Norwegian	2	.5
British	10	2.4	Pakistani	2	.5
Bulgarian	1	.2	Palestinian	5	1.2
Canadian	3	.7	Polish	2	.5
Finnish	7	1.7	Portuguese	1	.2
French	93	21.9	Romanian	11	2.6
German	43	10.1	Russian	2	.5
Greek	49	11.6	Saudi Arabian	2	.5
Hungarian	3	.7	Singaporean	1	.2
Indian	3	.7	Syrian	5	1.2
Iranian	4	.9	Spanish	1	.2
Iraqi	3	.7	Sudanese	1	.2
Irish	3	.7	Swedish	6	1.4
Israeli	91	21.5	Swiss	9	2.1
Italian	12	2.8	Taiwanese	9	2.1
Jordanian	2	.5	Tunisian	4	.9
Lebanese	2	.5	Turkish	1	.2
Luxembourg	1	.2	Zimbabwean	1	.2
Mexican	1	.2			

Students come from different countries to achieve their medical studies in Romania. The distribution of all respondents is presented in the next table.

Table 3. Country of origin

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Albania	1	.2	Nepal	1	.2
Algeria	2	.5	Netherlands	1	.2
Austria	1	.2	Nigeria	2	.5
Belgium	3	.7	Norway	2	.5
Canada	3	.7	Pakistan	2	.5
Columbia	1	.2	Palestine	1	.2
England	3	.7	Poland	2	.5
Finland	5	1.2	Portugal	2	.5
France	83	19.6	Qatar	1	.2
Germany	42	9.9	Romania	10	2.4
Greece	52	12.3	Russia	1	.2
Guadeloupe	3	.7	Singapore	1	.2
Hungary	2	.5	Somalia	1	.2
India	3	.7	South Africa	1	.2
Iraq	8	1.9	Spain	1	.2
Iran	5	1.2	Sudan	1	.2
Ireland	2	.5	Sweden	2	.5
Israel	93	21.9	Switzerland	7	1.7
Italy	13	3.1	Syria	7	1.7
Japan	1	.2	Taiwan	9	2.1
Jordan	2	.5	Tunisia	5	1.2
Kurdistan	1	.2	Turkey	2	.5
Kuwait	2	.5	UK	3	.7
Lebanon	2	.5	United Arab Emirates	2	.5
Liban	1	.2			
Luxembourg	1	.2	USA	3	.7
Moldova	3	.7	Zimbabwe	2	.5
Morocco	14	3.3			

We were also interested in native languages of international students. The distribution of answers is presented in the next table.

Table 4. Native Language

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Albanian	1	.2	English	13	3.1
Arabic	113	26.7	English / Bulgarian	1	.2
Arabic / French	4	.9	English / French	1	.2
Arabic / Hebrew	7	1.7	English / Igbo	2	.5

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
English / Mandarin	1	.2	Norwegian / Punjabi	1	.2
English / Shona	1	.2	Pashto	1	.2
Farsi	1	.2	Persian	3	.7
Finnish	3	.7	Polish	2	.5
French / Arabic	1	.2	Portuguese	2	.5
French	101	23.8	Romanian	15	3.5
German	41	9.7	Russian	1	.2
Greek	49	11.6	Russian / Tunisian	1	.2
Hebrew	10	2.4	Shona	1	.2
Hindi	1	.2	Spanish	3	.7
Hindi / Telugu	1	.2	Swedish	2	.5
Hungarian	3	.7	Telugu	1	.2
Italian	12	2.8	Tunisian	1	.2
Japanese / English	1	.2	Turkish	1	.2
Kurdish	5	1.2	Turkish / German	1	.2
Mandarin	8	1.9	Urdu	5	1.2
Nepali	1	.2			
Norwegian	1	.2			

The universities in Romania are characterized by a diversity of religions. International students come from different countries. The distribution of students according to their religion is presented in the next table.

Table 5. *Religion*

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Adventist	1	.2	Islam	157	37.0
Agnostic	3	.7	Jewish	4	.9
Antitheism	1	.2	Lutheran	1	.2
Atheist	85	20.0	Mormon	1	.2
Buddhist	2	.5	Prefer not to say	1	.2
Catholic	47	11.1	Protestant	10	2.4
Christian	44	10.4	Seventh Day Adventist	2	.5
Christian orthodox	53	12.5	Spiritual	2	.5
Evangelic	4	.9	Taiwanese local region	1	.2
Hindu	5	1.2			

Adaptation to the host country

Most students consider they are comfortable (36.6%) or very comfortable (46.9%) with the English language. However, regarding the Romanian language, most of them consider they are not at all comfortable (22.6%) or mostly

uncomfortable (41%). Most of the students consider that English is not a barrier when communicating with colleagues (81.8%).

63.4% of the respondents consider that they were not discriminated against. However, some of them were discriminated against by local people (23.6%), by teachers (10.6%) or by colleagues (2.4%).

37% of the students consider they are comfortable with the climate, while 26.4% consider they are very comfortable. 55.7% of them are comfortable or very comfortable with the local transportation. Regarding the local food, 22.0% feel uncomfortable, and 46% feel comfortable or very comfortable. 75% of the students feel safe on the streets. Most of the students are feeling neutral or, at worst, with the cost of living (accommodation, living expenses, university taxes). Most of the students report neutral, good or very good relationships with their colleagues, university administration and teachers. Although 94.5% of the students made new friends in Romania, they mostly keep distant relationships with their teachers. Only 17.5% of the students asked for individual meetings with the teachers to discuss academic issues and 12.5% of them to discuss personal problems.

Table 6. *Adaptation to the host country*

Variable	Levels	N	%
How comfortable are you with the English language?	Not at all comfortable	0	0.0
	Mostly not comfortable	10	2.4
	Neutral	60	14.2
	Mostly comfortable	155	36.6
	Very comfortable	199	46.9
How comfortable are you with the Romanian language?	Not at all comfortable	96	22.6
	Mostly not comfortable	174	41.0
	Neutral	96	22.6
	Mostly comfortable	33	7.8
	Very comfortable	25	5.9
How comfortable are you with the climate in Romania?	Not at all comfortable	9	2.1
	Mostly not comfortable	30	7.1
	Neutral	116	27.4
	Mostly comfortable	157	37.0
	Very comfortable	112	26.4
How comfortable are you with local transportation in Romania?	Not at all comfortable	26	6.1
	Mostly not comfortable	60	14.2
	Neutral	102	24.1
	Mostly comfortable	136	32.1
	Very comfortable	100	23.6

Variable	Levels	N	%
How comfortable are you with Romanian food?	Not at all comfortable	51	12.0
	Mostly not comfortable	80	18.9
	Neutral	98	23.1
	Mostly comfortable	115	27.1
	Very comfortable	80	18.9
How comfortable are you with Romanian customs and habits?	Not at all comfortable	20	4.7
	Mostly not comfortable	39	9.2
	Neutral	138	32.5
	Mostly comfortable	131	30.9
	Very comfortable	96	22.6
How comfortable are you when it comes to everyday communication with Romanians?	Not at all comfortable	30	7.1
	Mostly not comfortable	79	18.6
	Neutral	137	32.3
	Mostly comfortable	112	26.4
	Very comfortable	66	15.6
How safe do you feel on the streets in Romania?	Not at all safe	8	1.9
	Mostly not safe	22	5.2
	Neutral	76	17.9
	Mostly safe	150	35.4
	Very safe	168	39.6
Have you ever been assaulted in Romania?	No	350	82.5
	Yes	74	17.5
How satisfied are you with the accommodation fees in Romania?	Very dissatisfied	26	6.1
	Dissatisfied	70	16.5
	Neutral	139	32.8
	Satisfied	114	26.9
	Very satisfied	75	17.7
How satisfied are you with the monthly living expenses in Romania?	Very dissatisfied	13	3.1
	Dissatisfied	42	9.9
	Neutral	144	34.0
	Satisfied	140	33.0
	Very satisfied	85	20.0
How satisfied are you with the university taxes in Romania?	Very dissatisfied	23	5.4
	Dissatisfied	87	20.5
	Neutral	219	51.7
	Satisfied	78	18.4
	Very satisfied	17	4.0
How satisfied are you with the relationship with your colleagues?	Very dissatisfied	7	1.7
	Dissatisfied	23	5.4
	Neutral	87	20.5
	Satisfied	180	42.5
	Very satisfied	127	30.0

International Students Studying in Romania

Variable	Levels	N	%
How satisfied are you with the relationship with the faculty administration?	Very dissatisfied	50	11.8
	Dissatisfied	63	14.9
	Neutral	157	37.0
	Satisfied	112	26.4
	Very satisfied	42	9.9
How satisfied are you with the relationship with the teaching staff?	Very dissatisfied	17	4.0
	Dissatisfied	49	11.6
	Neutral	124	29.2
	Satisfied	157	37.0
	Very satisfied	77	18.2
Do you feel that the English language is a barrier in communicating with your colleagues?	No	347	81.8
	Yes	77	18.2
How satisfied are you with the academic lectures?	Very dissatisfied	20	4.7
	Dissatisfied	60	14.2
	Neutral	154	36.3
	Satisfied	133	31.4
	Very satisfied	57	13.4
How satisfied are you with the practical sessions?	Very dissatisfied	25	5.9
	Dissatisfied	56	13.2
	Neutral	113	26.7
	Satisfied	157	37.0
	Very satisfied	73	17.2
How satisfied are you with your academic results?	Very dissatisfied	12	2.8
	Dissatisfied	26	6.1
	Neutral	128	30.2
	Satisfied	183	43.2
	Very satisfied	75	17.7
Have you ever felt discriminated against?	No	269	63.4
	Yes, by local people	100	23.6
	Yes, by colleagues	10	2.4
	Yes, by teachers	45	10.6
Have you made new friends in Romania?	No	23	5.4
	Yes	401	94.6
Have you asked for an individual meeting with one of your teachers to discuss an academic issue?	No	350	82.5
	Yes	74	17.5
Have you asked for an individual meeting with one of your teachers to discuss a personal problem?	No	371	87.5
	Yes	53	12.5

Variable	Levels	N	%
Do you feel more comfortable socializing at school with people from your country than from other countries?	No	135	31.8
	Sometimes	174	41.0
	Yes	115	27.1
How comfortable are you practicing your religion in Romania?	Not at all comfortable	23	5.4
	Mostly not comfortable	18	4.2
	Neutral	128	30.2
	Mostly comfortable	90	21.2
	Very comfortable	165	38.9
How comfortable are you practicing your hobbies in Romania?	Not at all comfortable	18	4.2
	Mostly not comfortable	49	11.6
	Neutral	107	25.2
	Mostly comfortable	122	28.8
	Very comfortable	128	30.2
How easy is it to find your favorite foods in Romania?	Not at all easy	50	11.8
	Mostly not easy	76	17.9
	Neutral	105	24.8
	Easy	107	25.2
	Very easy	86	20.3
Do you like spending time out with friends in your spare time?	No, I do not like going out	12	2.8
	No, I prefer to chat/message friends in my spare time	10	2.4
	Yes, sometimes I go out with colleagues or friends	159	37.5
	Yes, I like going out with colleagues or friends in my spare time	243	57.3

Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu & Asrabad, 1998)

This scale contains 36 items and measures multiple dimensions of acculturative stress, as perceived by international students. The respondents used a 5-points Likert-type scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree". The dimensions of the scale are: perceived discrimination (8 items), homesickness (4 items), perceived hate/rejection (5 items), fear (4 items), stress due to change/culture shock (3 items), guilt (2 items). Also, there are 10 nonspecific items that do not belong to any dimension. To compute a total score for each dimension, the items included in that dimension must be summed up. Higher scores indicate a higher degree of stress. Also, a total score can be computed by adding up all 36 items.

Table 7. *Descriptive statistics for the ASSIS scale*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived Discrimination	8.00	40.00	17.83	5.97
Homesickness	4.00	20.00	11.53	3.32
Perceived Hate	5.00	25.00	10.45	3.88
Fear	4.00	20.00	7.50	3.01
Stress due to change	3.00	13.00	7.07	2.29
Guilt	2.00	9.00	4.30	1.73
ASSIS total	36.00	157.00	80.32	21.83

The items show good internal consistency in this sample: perceived discrimination (α = .870), homesickness (α = .739), perceived hate (α = .826), fear (α = .814). For stress due to change/culture shock and guilt, due to the reduced number of items, we did not compute the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. For the entire scale, α = .945.

Table 8. *ASSIS scale*

Variables	Level	N	%
1. Feeling homesick bothers me.	Strongly Disagree	36	8.5
	Disagree	87	20.5
	Not Shure	174	41.0
	Agree	101	23.8
	Strongly Agree	26	6.1
2. I feel uncomfortable adjusting to new foods and/or to new eating habits.	Strongly Disagree	89	21.0
	Disagree	152	35.8
	Not Shure	110	25.9
	Agree	51	12.0
	Strongly Agree	22	5.2
3. I am treated differently in social situations.	Strongly Disagree	59	13.9
	Disagree	131	30.9
	Not Shure	151	35.6
	Agree	71	16.7
	Strongly Agree	12	2.8
4. I feel rejected when people are sarcastic toward my cultural values.	Strongly Disagree	110	25.9
	Disagree	135	31.8
	Not Shure	108	25.5
	Agree	59	13.9
	Strongly Agree	12	2.8
5. I feel nervous when communicating in English.	Strongly Disagree	201	47.4
	Disagree	118	27.8
	Not Shure	59	13.9
	Agree	37	8.7
	Strongly Agree	9	2.1

Variables	Level	N	%
6. I feel sad living in unfamiliar surroundings here.	Strongly Disagree	117	27.6
	Disagree	155	36.6
	Not Shure	97	22.9
	Agree	45	10.6
	Strongly Agree	10	2.4
7. I fear for my personal safety because of my different cultural background.	Strongly Disagree	181	42.7
	Disagree	139	32.8
	Not Shure	70	16.5
	Agree	28	6.6
	Strongly Agree	6	1.4
8. I feel intimidated to participate in social activities.	Strongly Disagree	112	26.4
	Disagree	161	38.0
	Not Shure	96	22.6
	Agree	51	12.0
	Strongly Agree	4	.9
9. Others are biased/prejudiced towards me.	Strongly Disagree	119	28.1
	Disagree	162	38.2
	Not Shure	93	21.9
	Agree	42	9.9
	Strongly Agree	8	1.9
10. I feel guilty leaving my family and friends behind.	Strongly Disagree	111	26.2
	Disagree	147	34.7
	Not Shure	86	20.3
	Agree	62	14.6
	Strongly Agree	18	4.2
11. Many opportunities are denied to me.	Strongly Disagree	90	21.2
	Disagree	171	40.3
	Not Shure	110	25.9
	Agree	44	10.4
	Strongly Agree	9	2.1
12. I feel angry that my people are considered inferior here.	Strongly Disagree	128	30.2
	Disagree	139	32.8
	Not Shure	79	18.6
	Agree	61	14.4
	Strongly Agree	17	4.0
13. I feel overwhelmed that multiple pressures are placed upon me after my migration to this society.	Strongly Disagree	87	20.5
	Disagree	143	33.7
	Not Shure	110	25.9
	Agree	73	17.2
	Strongly Agree	11	2.6

Variables	Level	N	%
14. I feel that I receive unequal treatment.	Strongly Disagree	102	24.1
	Disagree	146	34.4
	Not Shure	101	23.8
	Agree	61	14.4
	Strongly Agree	14	3.3
16. People from some ethnicities show hatred toward me non-verbally.	Strongly Disagree	124	29.2
	Disagree	187	44.1
	Not Shure	73	17.2
	Agree	33	7.8
	Strongly Agree	7	1.7
16. It hurts when people don't understand my cultural values.	Strongly Disagree	76	17.9
	Disagree	115	27.1
	Not Shure	130	30.7
	Agree	91	21.5
	Strongly Agree	12	2.8
17. I am denied what I deserve	Strongly Disagree	112	26.4
	Disagree	165	38.9
	Not Shure	105	24.8
	Agree	36	8.5
	Strongly Agree	6	1.4
18. I have to frequently relocate for fear of others.	Strongly Disagree	171	40.3
	Disagree	165	38.9
	Not Shure	73	17.2
	Agree	13	3.1
	Strongly Agree	2	.5
19. I feel low because of my cultural background.	Strongly Disagree	234	55.2
	Disagree	125	29.5
	Not Shure	46	10.8
	Agree	16	3.8
	Strongly Agree	3	.7
20. I feel rejected when others don't appreciate my cultural values.	Strongly Disagree	151	35.6
	Disagree	118	27.8
	Not Shure	94	22.2
	Agree	58	13.7
	Strongly Agree	3	.7
21. I miss my country and people of my national origin.	Strongly Disagree	29	6.8
	Disagree	51	12.0
	Not Shure	125	29.5
	Agree	139	32.8
	Strongly Agree	80	18.9

Variables	Level	N	%
22. I feel uncomfortable adjusting to new cultural values.	Strongly Disagree	120	28.3
	Disagree	170	40.1
	Not Shure	91	21.5
	Agree	38	9.0
	Strongly Agree	5	1.2
23. I feel that my people are discriminated against.	Strongly Disagree	116	27.4
	Disagree	147	34.7
	Not Shure	108	25.5
	Agree	45	10.6
	Strongly Agree	8	1.9
24. People from some other ethnic groups show hatred toward me through their actions.	Strongly Disagree	139	32.8
	Disagree	176	41.5
	Not Shure	68	16.0
	Agree	35	8.3
	Strongly Agree	6	1.4
25. I feel that my status in society is low due to my cultural background.	Strongly Disagree	183	43.2
	Disagree	150	35.4
	Not Shure	57	13.4
	Agree	31	7.3
	Strongly Agree	3	.7
26. I am treated differently because of my race.	Strongly Disagree	156	36.8
	Disagree	139	32.8
	Not Shure	68	16.0
	Agree	45	10.6
	Strongly Agree	16	3.8
27. I feel insecure here.	Strongly Disagree	181	42.7
	Disagree	147	34.7
	Not Shure	65	15.3
	Agree	24	5.7
	Strongly Agree	7	1.7
28. I don't feel a sense of belonging (community) here.	Strongly Disagree	101	23.8
	Disagree	132	31.1
	Not Shure	118	27.8
	Agree	55	13.0
	Strongly Agree	18	4.2
29. I am treated differently because of my skin color.	Strongly Disagree	230	54.2
	Disagree	115	27.1
	Not Shure	51	12.0
	Agree	18	4.2
	Strongly Agree	10	2.4

Variables	Level	N	%
30. I feel sad when I consider my people's problems.	Strongly Disagree	114	26.9
	Disagree	126	29.7
	Not Shure	122	28.8
	Agree	51	12.0
	Strongly Agree	11	2.6
31.I generally keep a low profile due to fear from other ethnic groups.	Strongly Disagree	187	44.1
	Disagree	143	33.7
	Not Shure	68	16.0
	Agree	20	4.7
	Strongly Agree	6	1.4
32. I feel that some people don't associate with me because of my ethnicity.	Strongly Disagree	169	39.9
	Disagree	148	34.9
	Not Shure	74	17.5
	Agree	30	7.1
	Strongly Agree	3	.7
33. People from some other ethnic groups show hatred toward me verbally.	Strongly Disagree	199	46.9
	Disagree	143	33.7
	Not Shure	52	12.3
	Agree	27	6.4
	Strongly Agree	3	.7
34. I feel guilty that I live a different lifestyle here.	Strongly Disagree	173	40.8
	Disagree	140	33.0
	Not Shure	76	17.9
	Agree	33	7.8
	Strongly Agree	2	.5
35. I feel sad leaving my relatives behind.	Strongly Disagree	77	18.2
	Disagree	85	20.0
	Not Shure	120	28.3
	Agree	103	24.3
	Strongly Agree	39	9.2
36. I worry about my future because I have not been able to decide whether to stay here or to go back.	Strongly Disagree	134	31.6
	Disagree	118	27.8
	Not Shure	84	19.8
	Agree	68	16.0
	Strongly Agree	20	4.7

Academic issues

42% of the international students consider that their teachers present information in a clear way, 44.3% of them consider that their teachers show respect to international students, and 40.1% of them consider that teachers try to adjust to the cultural diversity in their classes. However, only 34.7% of the international students said that their teachers encourage academic collaboration,

and 36.6% of them remained neutral on this assessment. Only 36.3% of the students agree or strongly agree that teachers know how to manage ethnic, religious or racial conflicts during the discussions. Still, 52.4% of them consider that their teachers respect racial, ethnic and religious diversity.

28.8% of the international students consider they have been humiliated by their teachers. 24.5% of them had conflicts with their teachers. 55.2% of students believe that their teachers evaluate the students objectively. 81.8% of the international students would recommend Romania as a place to study.

31.4% of the students were not dedicated as to what to do after graduation, 35.6% wanted to return to their home country, 30.9% wanted to go to another country, and 2.1% preferred to stay in Romania.

Table 9. Academic Issues

Variable	Level	N	%
Most of my teachers present the information clearly.	Strongly disagree	20	4.7
	Disagree	81	19.1
	Neutral	117	27.6
	Agree	178	42.0
	Strongly agree	28	6.6
Most of my teachers show respect to all international students in my class	Strongly disagree	15	3.5
	Disagree	46	10.8
	Neutral	84	19.8
	Agree	188	44.3
	Strongly agree	91	21.5
Most of my teachers try to adjust to the cultural diversity of my class.	Strongly disagree	8	1.9
	Disagree	53	12.5
	Neutral	134	31.6
	Agree	170	40.1
	Strongly agree	59	13.9
Most of my teachers encourage academic collaboration among the international students	Strongly disagree	13	3.1
	Disagree	52	12.3
	Neutral	155	36.6
	Agree	147	34.7
	Strongly agree	57	13.4
Most of my teachers know how to manage ethnic, religious or racial conflicts emerging during class discussions.	Strongly disagree	14	3.3
	Disagree	45	10.6
	Neutral	211	49.8
	Agree	115	27.1
	Strongly agree	39	9.2
Most of my teachers respond positively when international students look for academic or personal help.	Strongly disagree	13	3.1
	Disagree	42	9.9
	Neutral	119	28.1
	Agree	181	42.7
	Strongly agree	69	16.3

Variable	Level	N	%
I consider that the level of English of students is a barrier in order to develop a good relationship between the Romanian teachers and international students.	Strongly disagree	36	8.5
	Disagree	115	27.1
	Neutral	123	29.0
	Agree	112	26.4
	Strongly agree	38	9.0
I consider that the level of English of the teachers is a barrier in developing good relationship between the Romanian teachers and international students.	Strongly disagree	42	9.9
	Disagree	108	25.5
	Neutral	120	28.3
	Agree	101	23.8
	Strongly agree	53	12.5
Most of my teachers show respect for the racial, ethnic and religious diversity of my class.	Strongly disagree	12	2.8
	Disagree	17	4.0
	Neutral	89	21.0
	Agree	222	52.4
	Strongly agree	84	19.8
Teachers adapt their methods to consider the diversity of my class.	Strongly disagree	15	3.5
	Disagree	53	12.5
	Neutral	191	45.0
	Agree	131	30.9
	Strongly agree	34	8.0
Teachers provide academic support to their students in case of poor results.	Strongly disagree	61	14.4
	Disagree	114	26.9
	Neutral	156	36.8
	Agree	69	16.3
	Strongly agree	24	5.7
Have you ever been humiliated by one of your teachers?	No	302	71.2
	Yes	122	28.8
Have you had conflicts with teachers in class?	No	320	75.5
	Yes	104	24.5
Do you think teachers evaluate their students objectively?	No	190	44.8
	Yes	234	55.2
Would you recommend Romania to others as a place to study?	No	77	18.2
	Yes	347	81.8
What would you like to do after graduation?	Not decided	133	31.4
	Return to my native country	151	35.6
	Go to another country	131	30.9
	Stay in Romania	9	2.1

Statistical analysis

In order to analyze this data, we employed several statistical methods: *correlations, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVAs and chi square tests.*

The analysis reveals some important results which are detailed according to the tests used.

The correlational analyses revealed one significant correlation between age and some items measuring the students' adaptation to the host country: We identified that the older the students are, the less they are satisfied by the relationships with their colleagues (r = -.134, p = .006)

The correlational analyses revealed some significant correlation between the parents' level of education and the dimensions of the ASSIS scale:

- The more educated the mothers were, the lower the scores of the children were for the following dimensions: perceived hate (r = -.14, p = .004), fear (r = -.11, p = .015), stress due to culture shock (r = -.11, p = .014), perceived discrimination (r = -.10, p = .031) and on the total ASSIS score (r = -.14, p = .003).
- The more educated the fathers were, the lower the scores of the children were for the following dimensions: fear (r = -.09, p = .043), stress due to culture shock (r = -.10, p = .034), perceived discrimination (r = -.10, p = .036), guilt (r = -.11, p = .023) and on the total ASSIS score (r = -.13, p = .007).

The correlational analyses revealed several significant correlations between the ASSIS scale and the items regarding the students' adaptation to the host country:

- The more the students feel acculturative stress, the less they are comfortable with English (r = -.19, p < .001) and Romanian (r = -.12, p = .01).
- The more stress they feel, the less they are comfortable with the local transportation (r = -.31, p < .001), local food (r = -.35, p < .001), local habits (r = -.39, p < .001), everyday communication (r = -.33, p < .001), climate (r = -.38, p < .001) and feel less safe on the streets (r = -.45, p < .001).
- Students higher in acculturative stress also report lower satisfaction with accommodation fees (r = -.25, p < .001), monthly living expenses (r = -.35, p < .001) and university taxes (r = -.15, p = .001). Also, when the acculturative stress is high, students report lower scores in satisfaction regarding the relationships with their colleagues (r = -.25, p < .001), faculty administration (r = -.28, p < .001) and teachers (r = -.42, p < .001).
- The more stress they feel, the less they are satisfied with the academic lectures (r = -.35, p < .001), practical sessions (r = -.30, p < .001) and academic results (r = -.34, p < .001).
- The more stressed students also report lower comfort regarding practicing their religion in Romania (r = -.29, p < .001), practicing hobbies (r = -.36, p < .001) and finding their favorite food (r = -.31, p < .001).

The correlational analyses revealed several correlations between the ASSIS scale and the items regarding the students' academic issues.

- Higher acculturative stress was related to lower satisfaction regarding the teaching process. The students with higher stress say their teachers as less respectful to international students (r = -.42, p < .001), less interested in adjusting to cultural diversity (r = -.40, p < .001), less interested in encouraging academic collaboration (r = -.34, p < .001) and less knowledgeable in managing diverse classrooms (r = -.36, p < .001).
- The more stressed students considered that the level of English practiced by the students (r = .18, p < .001) and by the teachers (r = .24, p < .001) represent more important barriers in developing good relationships between teachers and international students.
- Higher stress is associated with lower perceptions of the teacher showing respect to cultural, ethnic and racial diversity (r = -.41, p < .001), lower perceived ability for the teacher to adapt to diversity (r = -.33, p < .001) and less provision of academic support in case of poor results (r = -.27, p < .001).

We found one difference based on whether the students live by themselves or not:

- International students that live by themselves (M = 2.43) are more comfortable with the Romanian language compared with those who share their accommodation (M = 2.17) (t = 2.43, p = .01).

We found several differences based on whether the students' parents studied in Romania or not:

- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 3.43) are more comfortable with the Romanian language (t = − 7.75, p < .001) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 2.19).
- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 4.06) are more comfortable with the Romanian climate (t = − 2.05, p = .041) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 3.75).
- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 3.95) are more comfortable with the Romanian food (t = − 4.20, p < .001) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 3.31).
- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 3.82) are more comfortable with everyday communication with Romanians (t = − 3.70, p < .001) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 3.17).
- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 4.19) are more comfortable with practicing their religion in Romania (t = − 2.23, p = .026) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 3.79).
- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 4.17) consider that it is easier to find their favorite foods in Romania (t = − 5.35, p < .001) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 3.13).

- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 3.39) consider that the level of English spoken by the teachers is more of a barrier in developing good relationships between teachers and international students (t = − 2.11, p < .030) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 2.99).
- The students whose parents studied in Romania (M = 3.02) consider less that teachers adapt their methods according to the diversity in their class (t = − 2.28, p = .026) compared to those whose parents did not study in the country (M = 3.30).

We found several differences based on the University the students were enrolled in for the following variables:

- Comfort with the Romanian language (F = 9.26, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 2.12) have significantly lower scores than from Iuliu Haţieganu University (2.57) and the University of Oradea (M = 2.82). Also, students from Ion Ionescu de la Brad University (M = 1.66) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University and the University of Oradea.
- Comfort with Romanian food (F = 7.48, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 2.89) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University ((M = 3.57) and the University of Oradea (M = 3.48).
- Comfort with Romanian customs (F = 4.77, p =.001) The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.34) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.76).
- Comfort with everyday communication (F = 6.65, p < .001) The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.11) have significantly lower scores than those from the University of Oradea (M = 3.72).
- Safety felt on the stress (F = 11.47, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.74) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 4.40).
- Satisfaction with accommodation (F = 4.41, p = .002). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.11) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.46) and the University of Oradea (M = 3.70).
- Satisfaction with monthly living expenses (F = 6.65, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.30) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.76), the University of Oradea (M = 3.80), and Ion Ionescu de la Brad University (M = 3.92).
- Satisfaction with relationships with colleagues (F = 4.82, p = .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa (M = 3.82) University have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 4.18). Students from

the University of Oradea (M = 3.68) have significantly lower scores compared to those from Iuliu Haţieganu University.

- Satisfaction with relationship with teachers (F = 11.72, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.21) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.88) and the University of Oradea (M = 3.72).
- Satisfaction with academic lectures (F = 10.67, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.06) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.68).
- Satisfaction with practical sessions (F = 7.81, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.23) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.82).
- Satisfaction with academic results (F = 5.28, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.47) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.89).
- Ease to find favorite food (F = 5.44, p = .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.04) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.51).
- ASSIS Homesickness (F = 5.04, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 12.21) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 10.68).
- ASSIS Perceived Hate (F = 7.41, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 11.39) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 9.47).
- ASSIS Fear (F = 8.15, p <.001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 8.27) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 6.62).
- ASSIS Stress based on culture shock (F = 7.56, p < .001). the students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 7.61) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 6.42).
- ASSIS Perceived Discrimination (F = 8.94, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 19.37) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 16.07).
- ASSIS Guilt (F = 4.59, p = .001) The students from the University of Oradea ((M = 5.04) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 4.12) and Ion Ionescu de la Brad University (M = 3.85).
- ASSIS total (F = 10.43, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 86.22) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 73.32).

- Teachers present information clearly (F = 8.59, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.03) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.59).
- Teachers show respect to international students (F = 5.51, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.49) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.97).
- Teachers adjust to cultural diversity (F = 6.79, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.36) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.73). The students from the University of Oradea (M = 3.22) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University.
- Teachers encourage academic collaboration (F = 6.69, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.23) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.71).
- Teachers respond positively to international students' call for help (F = 9.20, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.32) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 3.83) and Ion Ionescu de la Brad University (M = 2.96).
- The students' level of English is a barrier for good relationships (F = 13.38, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.31) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 2.60) and Ion Ionescu de la Brad University (M = 2.52).
- The teachers' level of English is a barrier to good relationships (F = 14.49, p < .001). The students from Gr. T. Popa University (M = 3.38) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 2.53). The students from the University of Oradea (M = 3.20) have significantly higher scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University.
- Teachers show respect for racial, ethnic and religious diversity (F = 4.46, p = .002). The students from the University of Oradea (M = 3.44) have significantly lower scores than those from Iuliu Haţieganu University (M = 4.02).

We found several significant differences based on the students' religion for the following variables:

- Comfort with the Romanian language (F = 3.63, p = .006): The Christian Orthodox students (M = 2.71) have higher scores compared to the atheist students (M = 2.02).
- Comfort with the Romanian food (F = 14.10, p < .001). The Islamic students (M = 2.63) have lower scores compared to the orthodox (M = 3.73), catholic (M = 3.61), protestant (M = 3.84) and atheist students (M = 3.39).

- Comfort with the monthly living expenses (F = 4.32, p = .002). The Islamic students (M = 3.29) have lower scores compared to the catholic (M = 3.80) students.
- English as a barrier in communication with colleagues (F = 4.16, p = .003). The Islamic (M = 1.27) students have higher scores compared to the atheist (M = 1.09) students.
- Comfort with practicing religion (F = 4.21, p = .002). The Islamic students (M = 3.84) have lower scores compared to the orthodox (M = 4.25) students.
- Ease in finding one's favourite food in Romania (F = 7.55, p < .001). The Islamic students (M = 2.98) have lower scores compared to the orthodox (M = 3.86) and the protestant students (M = 3.94).
- Teacher presenting information clearly (F = 2.64, p = .034). The Islamic students (M = 3.13) have lower scores compared to the catholic students (M = 3.66).
- Teacher adjusting to cultural diversity (F = 3.39, p = .010). The Islamic students (M = 3.34) have lower scores compared to the catholic students (M = 3.87).
- ASSIS Homesickness (F = 4.19, p = .002). The Islamic students (M = 12.33) have higher scores compared to the atheist students (M = 10.78).
- ASSIS Perceived Hate (F = 4.17, p = .003). The Islamic students (M = 11.21) have higher scores compared to the orthodox (M = 9.49) and the atheist students (M = 9.71).
- ASSIS Fear (F = 3.95, p = .004). The Islamic students (M = 8.03) have higher scores compared to the catholic students (M = 6.63).
- ASSIS Stress due to culture shock (F = 6.57, p < .001). The Islamic students (M = 7.84) have higher scores compared to the catholic (M = 6.72), orthodox (M = 6.73) and atheist students (M = 6.50).
- ASSIS Perceived discrimination (F = 5.56, p < .001). The Islamic students (19.20) have higher scores compared to the catholic (M = 16.13) and orthodox students (M = 15.64).
- ASSIS Total (F = 5.64, p < .001). The Islamic students (M = 86.15) have higher scores compared to the catholic (M = 74.97), orthodox (M = 74.96) and atheist students (76.02).

We found several differences based on the academic year for the following variables:

- Satisfaction with the relationship with the teaching staff (F = 2.76, p = .018). The students from the second year (M = 3.72) are significantly more satisfied than those from the fourth year (M = 3.00).
- ASSIS Homesickness (F = 3.64, p = .003). The students from the first year (M = 12.25) have significantly higher scores compared to those from the second year (10.94).

- ASSIS Guilt (F = 3.56, p = 0.004). The students from the first (M = 4.13) and second year (M = 4.13) have significantly lower scores than those from the sixth year (M = 5.59).
- Teachers show respect for all international students (F = 3.28, p = 0.006). The students from the first year (M = 3.88) have significantly higher scores compared to those from the sixth year (M = 3.14).
- Teachers adjust to cultural diversity (F = 5.24, p < .001). The students from the sixth year (M = 2.73) have significantly lower scores compared to those from years one (M = 3.69), two (M = 3.64), three (M = 3.39) and five (M = 3.55).
- Teachers encourage academic collaboration (F = 3.90, p = .002). The students from the first year (M = 3.62) have significantly higher scores than those from the fourth (M = 3.03) and sixth years (M = 2.95).
- Teachers show respect to racial, ethnic and religious diversity (F = 5.90, p < .001). The students from the first year (M = 4.02) show significantly greater scores than those from the sixth year (M = 3.00).
- Teachers adapt their methods based on diversity (F = 5.23, p < .001). The students from the first year (M = 3.37) have significantly higher scores than those from the fourth (M = 2.84) and sixth years (M = 2.68).

    We found significant differences based on the participants' sex in the following variables:

- Safety in Romania (F = 7.22, p = .001). Females (M = 3.97) significantly feel less safe compared to males (M = 4.22). Those who preferred not to specify their sex (M =3.12) feel significantly less safe compared to males.
- Satisfaction with the relationships with their colleagues (F = 6.32, p = .002). Females (M = 4.06) feel more satisfied compared to males (M = 3.80).
- ASSIS Fear (F = 8.24, p < .001). Those who preferred not to specify their sex (M = 11.62) have significantly higher scores compared to males (M = 7.56) and females (M = 7.31).
- ASSIS Perceived Discrimination (F = 4.93, p = .008) Those who preferred not to specify their sex (M = 23.00) have significantly higher scores compared to females (M = 17.26).
- ASSIS Stress due to culture shock (F = 3.60, p = .028). Those who preferred not to specify their sex (M = 9.12) have significantly higher scores compared to males (M = 7.12) and females (M = 6.95).
- ASSIS total (F = 3.45, p = .032). Those who preferred not to specify their sex (M = 99.25) have significantly higher scores compared to females (M = 79.20).
- Teachers adjust to cultural diversity (F = 6.21, p = .002). Those who preferred not to specify their sex (M = 2.38) have significantly lower scores compared to females (M = 3.56).

- Teachers adapt their methods based on diversity (F = 4.67, p = .010). Those who preferred not to specify their sex (M = 2.38) have significantly lower scores compared to females (M = 3.25).

We found significant differences based on whether the students had family and friends in a Romanian University in the following variables:

- Comfort with the Romanian language (F = 5.70, p < .001). Those who had no one in a Romanian university (M = 2.08) had significantly lower scores compared to those who had both friends and family here (M = 2.66).
- Comfort with everyday communication (F = 4.05, p = .003). Those who had no one in a Romanian university (M = 3.07) had significantly lower scores compared to those who had both friends and family here (M = 3.70).

We found significant differences based on whether the students had family and friends in the same Romanian University. We found that, in what concerns ASSIS Homesickness (F = 2.89, p = .022), those who had no one in a Romanian university (M = 11.40), as well as those who had a friend (M = 11.36), had significantly lower scores compared to those who had siblings here (M = 13.07).

Significant differences were identified based on whether the students had other University experiences in the following variables:

- Comfort with Romanian language (F = 3.03, p = .029). Those who studied in Romania (M = 3.12) feel more comfortable than those who did not study anywhere else (M = 2.31), those who studied in another country (M = 2.22) or in their country of origin (M = 2.29) .
- Comfort with everyday communication (F = 3.46, p = .016). Those who studied in Romania (M = 4.12) feel more comfortable than those who did not study anywhere else (M = 3.20), those who studied in another country (M = 3.11) or in their country of origin (M = 3.24).
- The students' level of English is a barrier for good relationships (F = 6.30, p < .001). Those who studied in Romania (M = 3.94) feel more comfortable than those who did not study anywhere else (M = 3.10), those who studied in another country (M = 2.85) or in their country of origin (M = 2.81).
- The teachers' level of English is a barrier to good relationships (F = 6.10, p < .001). Those who studied in Romania (M = 3.75) feel more comfortable than those who did not study anywhere else (M = 3.19), those who studied in another country (M = 2.78) or in their country of origin (M = 2.80).

We found that in Gr. T. Popa University (38.3%), more students reported being humiliated by their teachers ($\chi2$ = 18.40, p = .001compared to the other universities (< 26%).

Several differences were identified based on the academic year for the following variables:

- Asking for an individual meeting with the teacher for academic problems ($\chi2$ = 21.44, p = .001). The students from years one (10.2%), two (15.3%), or

three (14.1 3%) are less willing to ask for meetings compared to those from years four (32.3%), five (39.4%) or six (22.7%).

- Asking for an individual meeting with the teacher for personal problems ($\chi2$ = 11.57, p = .04). The students from years one (5.6%), two (12.4%) or three (12%) are less willing to ask for meetings, compared to those from years four (16.1%), five (24.2%) or six (22.7%).
- Being humiliated by a teacher ($\chi2$ = 27.50, p < .001). The students from years one (21.3%), two (23.4%) or three (25%) report fewer incidents compared to those from years four (48.8%), five (42.4%) or six (63.3%).
- Having conflicts with teachers ($\chi2$ = 27.50, p < .001). The students from years one (13%), two (21.1%) or three (27.2%) report fewer incidents compared to those from years four (48.8%), five (30.3%) or six (45.5%).
- Objective evaluation ($\chi2$ = 11.40, p = .04). The students from years one (63.9%), two (59.9%) or three (48.9%) consider than their teachers evaluate more objectively than those from years four (45.2%), five (39.4%) or six (45.5%).

Also, significant statistical differences based on the students' sex were identified:

- Being discriminated ($\chi2$ = 15.32, p = .002). Although both men and women were mostly not discriminated against, the source of discrimination is different. For women, they were discriminated against by the local people (20.9%), by their teachers (13.1%) and by colleagues (4.1%). For men, they were discriminated against by the local people (26.2%) and by their teachers (5.2%) but not by their colleagues.
- Asking for an individual meeting with the teacher for academic problems ($\chi2$ = 7.24, p = .007). 13.1% of women and 23.3% of men asked for a meeting to discuss academic problems.

Open-ended questions

Q1 – Please name three strong points that you appreciate about your Romanian teachers.

Some of the respondents offered less than three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 664 units of text are grouped into 6 categories. The results can be seen in Table 10. The most frequent category is "teacher's behavior", followed by "teacher's knowledge", "teaching process", "language proficiency", "organizing activity" and "teacher's image".

Table 10. *Please name three strong points that you appreciate in your*
Romanian teachers.

Category	Frequency	Example
Teacher's behaviour	445	"They respect hard work, even if they don't like you", "If you show an interest, they are likely to help, some teachers develop good relationships with their students and comfort them, many teachers encourage questions from their students", "They try to do everything in order for us to learn and study, "Good in practice"
Teacher's knowledge	90	"Having studied in multiple countries, I am amazed at the level of knowledge and wisdom from a majority of all my teachers here in UMF", "Competent", "Their knowledge on the subject matter.", "Intelligence"
Teaching process	89	"They are passionate about teaching and are dedicated", "Most are very motivated and well educated. The most of them encourage questions.", "Mostly passionate about what they teach, open mindedness, readiness to answer questions", "Can deliver the information in a good way."
Language proficiency	24	"Their English language", "They try to speak English as well as they can", "Multilingual"
Organizing activity	14	"Many of them put a lot of effort, act in a fair manner, assign homework"
Teacher's image	2	"The way they present themselves", "Presentable looking"

Q2 – Please name three weak points that you do not like about your Romanian teachers.

Some respondents offered less than three answers. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 517 units of text are grouped into 10 categories.

The results can be seen in Table 11. The most frequent category is "teacher's behavior", followed by "language proficiency", "teaching process", "organizing activity", "cultural discrimination", "dishonest behavior", "institutional organization", "practical activity", "teacher's knowledge" and "teacher's image".

Table 11. *Please name three weak points that you do not like about your Romanian teachers.*

Category	Frequency	Example
Teacher's behavior	235	"Disorganized", "Treats us like children and not as equal colleagues" "They have big egos", "They are late" "Not always friendly"
Language proficiency	85	"Don't speak English"
Teaching process	77	"Many lectures are not interactive, instead they read slides from the board and speak very quickly" , "sometimes they start talking/teaching in Romanian to students during the lesson", "Not very clear", "Lack of usage of international educational material"
Organizing activity	51	"Time management", "Don't care enough about cheating"
Cultural discrimination	39	"We are always compared to the Romanian sections, we are not offered the same opportunities as the Romanian section" , "they prefer the Romanian students / they think French students are lazy / think we don't care"
Dishonest behavior	12	'Bribery", "Corruption", "Racism"
Institutional organization	9	"Bureaucracy!" "The time schedule of practical exams is poorly done so one has to wait ages.", "Uncertain about the university rules"
Practical activity	6	"Need better practical labs", "When seeing patients in the wards, the teachers a lot of the time leave us to attend to their Romanian students", "The practical lessons are the worst. 3 hours without a break is too much"
Teacher's knowledge	2	"Sometimes unqualified"
Teacher's image	1	"Outfit"

Q3 – Please name the hardest thing concerning your experience in Romania as a student.

Some respondents did not offer an answer. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 258 units of text are grouped into 11 categories. The results can be seen in Table 12. The most frequent category is "social relationship", followed by "language", "institutional organization", "cultural differences", "stress", "finances", "transportation", "weather", "professional doubt", "health" and "being aggressed".

Table 12. Please name the hardest thing concerning your experience
in Romania as a student.

Category	Frequency	Examples
Social relationships	58	"Far away from my family and my friends.", "Being alone in a foreign country."
Language	51	"Adjusting to a new country where most local people don't speak English, so there is no communication point.", "Learning to speak the language."
Institutional organization	48	"Wanting to learn but not having the resources to do so when in my home country the universities are better *e.g.* good simulators for practicing basic clinical skills."
Cultural differences	35	"To not be able to do some hobbies I had in my native country.", "It's a lot differences than things back home."
Stress	31	"Exam pressure.", "Dealing with stress and organizing time during exams."
Finances	21	"Finding apartments that are not extremely expensive."
Transportation	4	"Perhaps the transportation system."
Weather	4	"Weather.", "Cold."
Professional doubt	3	"Not sure I'm prepared to be a doctor."
Health	2	"I got sick but almost all of my teachers that year noticed it and offered their help if I needed any medical advice.", "My 2 surgeries"
Being aggressed	1	"Getting robbed, getting attacked."

Q4 – Please name the nicest thing concerning your experience in Romania as a student.

Some respondents did not offer an answer. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 258 units of text are grouped into 10 categories. The results can be seen in Table 13. The most frequent category is "make new relationships", followed by "native people", "travel and discovery", "quality of life", "professional advantages", "intercultural community", "independence", "teachers", "develop romantic relationships" and "personal development".

Table 13. *Please name the nicest thing concerning your experience in Romania as a student*

Category	Frequency	Example
Make new relationships	65	"Meeting my actual friends", "The nice people you meet in or outside of the faculty", "Meeting friends in this beautiful City", "Friends and having fun with them"
Native people	39	"People are really welcoming and willing to help you according to your needs", "Almost everyone speaks English", "Hospitality", "Nice and humble people", "Romanian people are friendly and nice to live with and share their city with us."
Travel and discovery	32	"It's difficult, I had so many amazing experiences here... But I would say the discovery of Romania, which was a very mysterious country to me before, and now it's my home.", "Being in a different culture from my original culture, let me experience more new things, it isn't even what I imagined. This makes my vision wider than others who haven't studied abroad."
Quality of life	30	"Low living expenses", "Good food", "Parties and clubs", "Fast internet", "Clean city and air", "The vibes of the environment, food,"
Professional advantages	27	"I'll be a doctor!", "Experience as a vet student", "Being able to participate in congresses", "the chance to take part in research", "The opportunity to become a doctor", "A lot to learn"
Intercultural community	24	"Getting to know people from all around the world", "Meet foreign students", "Meet people from all over the world that I would never meet normally", "Closeness between the international students. We all are new here in Romania and are desperately looking for friends. Once we have found them, we hold on to them and build strong and deep relationships. They are all we have in Romania. Our families and old friends are in our home country, we need a new support system of people going through the same experience."
Independence	23	"Being independent for the first time", "Freedom", "No parents" "Self-reliance"
Teachers	11	"Some teachers that are really lovely and help students" "The medical teachers (almost) always are super nice"
Romantic relationships	4	"Engagement", "I met my boyfriend"
Personal development	3	"It's a totally different perspective of now I see people and the world in comparison to how I used to", "New country, new culture, opened my mind to the differences among cultures and how rich they are! Each of them is very singular and beautiful. For many of us, the same language but different culture. That made me grow up."

Q5 – Please name 3 things that you have missed most during your time in Romania.

Some respondents did not offer an answer. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 658 units of text are grouped into 20 categories. The results can be seen in Table 14. The most frequent category is "family", followed by "food", "friends", "hobbies", "nature", "home", "pets", "school", "weather", "romantic partner", "travel", "society", "values", "car", "language", "culture", "safety", "diversity", "job" and "religion".

Table 14. *Please name 3 things that you have missed most during your time in Romania.*

Category	Frequency	Example
Family	190	"Family", "My relatives", "My sister"
Food	138	"Food", "Belgium chocolate", "French food", "Good Coffee"
Friends	126	"Close friends", "Friends"
Hobbies	34	"My PS4", "Swimming", "Using my bike", "Dance"
Nature	26	"The sea", "The mountains", "The beach"
Home	20	"My house", "My hometown", "My room"
Pets	20	"My cat", "My dog"
School	17	"My university", "a university that doesn't make you walk through half of the city to get to the next class"
Weather	16	"Snow", "Not so cold winters"
Romantic partner	11	"My girlfriend", "My boyfriend"
Travel	11	"Good train connections to other cities", "Summer vacation"
Society	10	"Native people", "Polite people", "the Greek Nightlife"
Values	10	"Openness of people and kindness of public workers", "respect" "equality"
Car	8	"Car", "Driving"
Language	8	"Being able to speak in my native language", "hearing Hebrew and reading it everywhere", "being able to communicate with everyone"
Culture	5	"Culture in my home country", "the environmental vibes of my country"
Safety	3	"Being safe", "to have safe and clean streets bicycling"
Diversity	2	"The cultural diversity of Paris"
Job	2	"My work"
Religion	1	"My religion"

Q6 – What was the main reason you chose Romania to study?

Some respondents did not offer an answer. Thus, fewer units of text could be extracted from their answers. The 169 units of text are grouped into 11 categories. The results can be seen in Table 15. The most frequent category is "quality of education", followed by "financial advantages", "recommendation from friends, family", "no alternative", "easy to enter", "language alternative", "multiculturalism", "nationality", "appreciate Romania", "shortcomings of the host country's education system" and "war in the host country".

Table 15. What was the main reason you chose Romania to study?

Category	Frequency	Example
Quality of education	35	"The high-quality, student-oriented level of education", "Because I know that I can be taught well here and that the technology is advanced", "To obtain a good degree because Romania is known for this,", "Iasi University is the best university to study dental medicine, and I want to be a really good dentist", "Recognized internationally"
Financial advantage	33	"Price of study", "The study fees are not as expensive as in the other countries", "Reasonable prices", "Affordability of studies and living costs."
Recommendation from friends, family	27	"The elitist and discriminatory educational system in my native country", "Romania offers a more humane medicine, with more practice to their students. They consider students as human, not as simple numbers. I like the fact they choose their students before the first year, and that there isn't a system like in France/Switzerland."
No alternative	20	"Was not accepted in France", "I could not find a place to study medicine in my home country", "I failed in France, it was my only option to become a vet", "It was my only choice left to be a doctor"
Easy to enter	19	"It was too hard in my host country ", "Enrollment method (file admission)", "It is easier to enter med school than in Germany,", "University requirements for admission are extremely difficult in my country"
Language alternative	12	"The only non-French speaking country that gives classes in French.", "To speak in English", "Studies are conducted in the English language.", "Quality of teaching in French."
Multiculturalism	9	"The English program and opportunity to meet people from all over the world and improve my English and my cultural level.", "To experience a new culture as I do in my studies", "Always wanted to study abroad. So, the opportunity to go to a

Category	Frequency	Example
		different country for studies arose as I couldn't anymore in mine, I didn't hesitate. French section. Dreams don't have any borders!"
Nationality	5	"My parents heritage", "I am half Romanian"
Appreciate Romania	4	"I like Romania so doing vet studies here is perfect for me", "Nice people, wonderful country where you meet foreign students from parts of the world."
Shortcomings of the host country's education system	4	"Difficult to study in my home country", "The elitist and discriminatory educational system in my native country", "Romania offers a more human medicine, with more practical work for their students. They consider students as human, not as simple numbers. I like the fact they choose their students before the first year, and that there isn't a system like in France/Switzerland."
War in the host country	1	"War in my country"

The profile of international students studying in Romania

In total, 424 international students participated in this study. They were enrolled in general medicine, dental medicine and veterinary medicine programs in six Universities from five Romanian cities. The participants were relatively equally distributed across genders, but there were more students from the first three years of study compared to the last three years. The students come from every continent (except Australia), but most of them were European or Asian.

The students are comfortable using English, but not very comfortable using Romanian. Most of them do not have problems with the climate, local transportation and habits. However, food and everyday communication represent more important problems for more international students. Most students feel safe on the streets, but women generally feel less safe than men. The international students feel satisfied with their relationships with their colleagues, teachers and the staff from the university and are neutral regarding their tuition. They are mostly satisfied with the academic results, although most of them did not ask a teacher for help when they encountered academic and personal problems.

The majority consider they were not discriminated against in Romania and feel good about practicing their religion and hobbies. They consider that local people discriminate more than their colleagues and teachers.

Most of these results were influenced by the University and city they live in. The students from Iuliu Hațieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Cluj-Napoca are more comfortable with the teaching standard and with their relationships, compared to all the other students.

Some students struggle with acculturative stress. However, the means for all the domains are lower than the theoretical means of the instruments. Thus, the levels of stress are relatively low. Still, higher acculturative stress is associated with difficulties in adapting in Romania as well as more issues. The parents' level of education is negatively associated with most dimensions of acculturative stress. Also, the students from Iuliu Haţieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy have lower scores than those from Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi.

Most students believe that their teachers organize their lessons well. They see their teachers as respectful towards their diversity. One-fourth of the students reported conflicts with their teachers. More than 80% of the students would recommend Romania as a place of study, but only 2% would remain in the country for work.

Many international students came to Romania because of the level of quality of education. Others took into account the lower tuition and some considered that this is their only chance left after being rejected in their home country. Many students received recommendations from family and friends. Many students appreciate their teachers' behavior and knowledge. They consider the teachers to be passionate, kind and interesting. They also appreciate their level of English. However, this is highly dependent on the teacher because most reported bad behavior, disinterest and self-sufficiency as important problems the teachers have. Thus, the international students seem to appreciate teachers on a few dimensions and make clear distinctions between those who to do their job well and those who do not. Moreover, they encountered racism and corruption from some of their teachers.

After coming to Romania, they had problems with social relationships, the language and the separation from their peers. Some of them consider that teachers pay more attention to the Romanian students. Still, they made new friends, appreciated the locals, the quality of life and were content to study in a multicultural environment. From home, they mostly miss their family, friends and food.

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ACADEMIC LIFE AND CHALLENGES
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS. COPING WITH STRESS
AND INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES

**TIM CARR, BEATRICE GABRIELA IOAN,
MAGDALENA IORGA**

Introduction

An internationally mobile student is an individual who has physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective of participating in educational activities in a destination country, where the destination country is different from his/her country of origin. (UNESCO, 2015) Their length of stay is more than one year (sometimes up to 6-7 for those studying medicine) as in case of credit-mobile students. Clear definitions clearly separate international mobile students (usually referring to tertiary or higher education), foreign students and credit-mobile students (like students from the ERASMUS mobility programme)

Data provided by UNESCO in 2019 shows that the number of international students has increased significantly in the last 2 decades. In 2000 it was about 2 million, and in 2017 it was over 5.3 million international students. The most attractive countries were the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany and the Russian Federation.

Statistical data also provided by UNESCO mentions that prominent sending countries of international students include the following countries: China, India, Germany, Republic of Korea, Nigeria, France, Saudi Arabia and several Central Asian countries. (UNESCO, 2019) Asian students represented in 2011 almost 53% of the foreign students enrolled in tertiary education worldwide followed by Europeans (23%), Africans (12%) and the rest of the world (about 12%). (OECD, 2013)

In the case of international students, the most important choice for a specific institution, seems to be the advice of the teacher/counselor, attractiveness of the ethnic/cultural diversity of campus, family's decision, the offer of financial assistance other than a job, low tuition, the college's good reputation, not being accepted by the first-choice college and the offer of work/assistantship at institution (Lee, 2008).

More and more universities across the world must face the challenges of helping international students adjust to the demands of the new environment. Although international students represent an important gain for the host

country (Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Wang, 2006), universities must take into account the fact that the adaptation process is very demanding and can trigger acculturative stress; this is a "stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation" (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

In 1960, Oberg described migration as producing a cultural shock which feels like a disease or condition, with both physical and psychological symptoms, such as fear of physical contact, anger or excessive hand washing. Over the years, migration has been described by focusing on its positive aspects. For example, Geeraert & Demoulin (2013) found that international students distress decreased after entering the new host-country.

Some other studies have shown that, in a small proportion, international students proved to see their new experience of studying abroad as an opportunity for personal growth, learning and to expand cultural awareness (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Montuori & Fahim, 2004)

The term cultural shock was replaced by acculturative stress; that refers to the impact of the culture change on the individual (Berry, 1997) and implies a process characterized by phases of stress and adjustment (Berry, 2005).

Conforming to Spradley & Phillips (1972), the acculturation experience should be a series of life change events where psychological factors, coping strategies or personality traits influence a lot the dynamics of acculturative stress.

The pursuit of an academic degree in another country represents an exciting and challenging experience for international students. Their study and overall experience can be influenced by several adjustment issues, such as culture shock, discrimination, financial problems, social isolation, English language skills, academic difficulties, unmet expectations, employment and psychological distress (Khawaja and Stallman, 2011; Sherry *et al.,* 2010; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Hotta and Ting-Toomey, 2013; Ramos *et al.,* 2016). These issues can cause feelings of uneasiness, insecurity and loss. (Yakunina *et al.,* 2013) They can lead to mental and physical health problems (Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004; Menon and Harter, 2012; Ryan & Twibell, 2000).

Unique challenges are faced by medical students and students who choose to study abroad. Acculturative stress and stress exposure of medical students were identified in previous studies, but to this date, no research has been undertaken looking into the combined impact of both acculturative and medical school stress on undergraduate and postgraduate students in Romania.

A cross sectional study comparing perceived academic stress and its impact on health from a holistic point of view among undergraduates, 319 medical and 297 non-medical female students from Saudi Arabia found that, whereas both medical students and non-medical students experienced significant stress, 9.9% more medical students reported academic stress (Al-Dabal, *et al.,* 2010). Among the causes of academic stress were: inadequate

teaching quality, unsatisfactory study environment and fear of failure. Since beginning their studies, the mental health of students was negatively affected, their concentration, memory and judgment (more reported among medical students. Mood disturbances, anxiety and depression were most reported among medical students. The study highlights the impact on interaction with family and friends, poor sleep, lack of self-health, insufficient time for recreation and other activities as well as not getting enough physical exercise. While this was reported at high levels among all the students, it was significantly higher among the medical students. Changes in habits during the exam periods were also reported such as: smoking, sedative and antidepressant drug use, tea and coffee consumption. A significant proportion of students declared that they had not received any stress education and management strategies at their university. The need for facilitation by the faculty was demonstrated by the results of this study. This study shows the evident stress of academic life and the challenges faced by each student, the impact of this on their physical, mental, social and emotional health being significant. As it is not a matter at the forefront of this discussion, the health of medical students is not rightly appreciated. By highlighting these issues, steps may be taken to improve the management of stress.

A study by Yeh & Inose, on 339 international students found the fluency of speaking in English and how much support the students received to be important determinants of acculturative stress among international students (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Their research indicates the ability to express oneself and understand in the language of the host country as trending either towards better adjustment to acculturative stress or aggravation of affects caused by acculturative stress. International students reported English fluency, social support satisfaction and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. Poyrazli *et al.* (2007) confirmed these findings and found that students who interacted mostly with non-American students and students from Asia experienced acculturative stress more significantly.

A cohort study of international Korean students living in Pittsburgh, USA found a significant correlation between acculturative stress and symptoms of mental health disturbance. They also discovered that social support played an important role in counterbalancing stress. Those who reported a great amount of social support were considerably less likely than their counterparts to have symptoms of acculturative stress. Interestingly, the counterbalancing phenomenon of support from one's surroundings was present where acculturation to the language of the host country was greater. (Lee *et al.,* 2008)

"Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iaşi has 4 faculties (Medicine, Dental Medicine, Pharmacy, Medical Bioengineering), in which many foreign students are enrolled. For example, in the academic year 2018-2019, 8868 students were enrolled in the undergraduate programs, of which 2580 were foreign students, coming from 53 countries. To these are added

students who study temporarily at this university, such as the in-coming Erasmus students, whose number increased from 5 in the academic year 2006-2007, to 35 in the academic year 2018-2019 (university website). The large number of foreign students studying at "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iaşi represents a challenge for this institution regarding their accommodation to both student life and socio-cultural environment, which is different from their countries of origin. Therefore, this present study is an important source of information, useful when it comes to devising future strategies for improving the actions aimed at the proper integration of foreign students.

The aim of the present study is to identify perceived difficulties of international students studying at "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iasi (UMF Iasi), Romania. The factors which cause stress among the international medical students, their coping strategies and possible strategies at the level of the university institution were investigated by means of a structured informal interview, comprised of a set of questions in response to which the participants were able to elaborate, allowing for further details to be gathered.

The aim of the following study was to investigate the factors causing stress among medical students and to develop strategic proposals to aid international medical students in order to manage their stress. A sample of students from the "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iasi, Romania was interviewed regarding what they missed from their home, the things causing them stress as medical students studying abroad and what can be done more by the university facility to help them cope with stress. The results highlighted the presence of acculturative stress: facing the challenges of living alone, away from their families and a familiar environment combined with the apprehension of how they would be received as well as coping with daily hostilities and hardships. The trend of habits being set in the formative period, medical school years can have a lifelong significant impact to the student or cause great harm. This in turn impacts the future medical team and how well their ability of taking care of their patients is very dependent on how well they can take care of themselves. Therefore, the prompt implementation of professionally researched institutional strategies would reciprocally benefit the population

Materials and Methods

Participants

A total of twelve participants were sampled from the second, third and fifth years of university study, at "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iasi, Romania. Each participant gave verbal consent to the interviewer. Each response was recorded and then transcribed. The responses were given anonymously, and each participant was free to answer without fear of repercussions.

Items

The research included two parts: socio-demographic gathering data about: age, gender, nationality, previous medical studies, number of siblings and the academic level of parents.

The second data sheet included four central items of questioning: the items targeted what the students missed from their home countries, what stresses they experience in their current studies, what can be done in the university to better aid students and a question drawing the contrast between their own country and the country of their present studies. Besides these central items, the interviewer asked supplementary questions in order to get a clearer perspective from different angles.

Questions asked were the following:

What do you miss about your country?

What stresses do you have here?

What can be done in the university to help students?

What is done differently in your country (to help students with stress)?

What were your challenges when coming to study at UMF Iasi for the first time?

How would you describe your lifestyle at home if you were studying medicine there?

Which things helped you to adjust and adapt to studying medicine abroad?

What were some of the challenges which are unique to medical students?

Results

The twelve participants were from EU countries: Germany, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Poland, United Kingdom as well as non-EU countries: The United States of America, Canada, India, Zimbabwe Israel.

The age range was 21 to 35 years with a mean age of 23.75. One third were male and two thirds were female. All the participants who had no previous university experience (50%) were female with an age range of 19 to 22 years and mean age of 21.2 years.

Meanwhile, of the other half, who had previous university experience, two thirds were male, with an age range of 22 to 36 years and an average age of 26.2 years. Of which, one third attended a previous medical school in Europe and 100% attended or are attending a university in Europe or the USA.

The things which students most reported missing from their home countries were (in descending order) family, food, language and communication (58.3%), environment (50%), culture (41.7%), home comforts, friends, organisation (33.3%) learning resources and driving (8.3%).

Family

55.8% of the participants who reported missing their family stated missing "family the most" from a 25-year-old male student from the USA with five siblings, "a nephew" (female, aged 21, Palestinian, seven siblings) who also stated: "I miss the care and attention of feeling my home, care and attention. I feel alone here." A 21-year-old female Greek student with one younger sibling, who at the time of giving the interview was studying parallel in a university in Greece, stated, "I miss my grandfather and sister." And "I am worried about my father every day, because I fear he will die." A Zimbabwean student told of the difficulty of being far away from home, saying, "I only go home once a year for the summer, so I feel homesick, especially in the summer when everybody else goes back home." A 22-year-old female student from India reported her first exposure challenges, "It was new. It was my first time in another country, being away from my family."

One third of the participants reported homesickness as an important stressor. "I feel far away from my parents and get homesick. There are not many people from my own country" (female, aged 22, German, four siblings).

Food

Those who reported missing food stated that certain national dishes were missed, such as "bagels, macaroni and cheese" (male, aged 25, USA). The accessibility of food until late hours in Greece, "the restaurants are open until 11-12 pm, so I can just say let's go for food whenever." (female, aged 21, Greek); the reduced variation of food in Romania "Not much variation in Romanian food" (female, aged 22, German). Another problem is the difficulty adjusting to Romanian food and also the challenges of Muslim students of finding Halal food: "As a Muslim, it's really hard to find Halal food" (help provided by students in senior years who had knowledge of where to find halal food is important).

Language barriers and communication difficulties

Language and communication reported being missed by 55.8% of the students was also reported as being an important stressor for a third of the participants and were shown to affect their academic results. A total of 16.7% of the participants described the language barrier as an important stressor. Understanding was reported to improve with time because for many students, and because English was not their first language, they experienced fear and apprehension to speak. "English is not my first language; I was afraid to speak. I didn't know how I would be treated." (female, aged 22, Indian, 5th year).

8.3% of the students described extracurricular activities at the university to be a cause of stress, namely, the lack of conferences for English speakers, "There is no campus and no activities. I believe for every event you must be fluent in Romanian *e.g.* congresses." (female, aged 21, Palestinian)

The challenges of communicating with people on the street when requesting help

Students also missed the sense of community, which speaking with others in your own language affords. "I can speak my own language in my own country." (female, aged 21, Zimbabwean, 3rd year) On the other hand, some spoke English well and even better than the language of the country of previous studies. "It is easier here. I'm already adjusted. From a language perspective, I speak English better than German." (female, aged 28, Jewish, 5th year, previous studies in Germany).

Environment and climate

A total of half of the students reported missing their home environment, "the surroundings" such as the "beaches and sea" (Male, aged 22, Italian). A contrast was drawn mentioning that native city is a "bigger city" or "modern city" (male, aged 26, Portuguese).

With regards to climate, the points of view are differing and opposite. One described his enjoyment of "experiencing all four climates here" (male, aged 35, British) in contrast to an opposite response. Thus, referring to the experience of transitioning from a warm climate to a European climate, a student described, "I didn't like the weather." "It is completely different from climate at home (…) It is much colder here." (female, aged 22, Indian). This student described adaptation and acclimatization to the weather in her surrogate country of studies.

Culture

Among the participants, 41.7% reported missing their home culture. An important stressor confronted by 16.7% of the students was cultural shock. The way in which Romanian students dress in contrast to their traditional dress of their own culture is seen differently by some students, depending on their country of origin: "The cultural differences, Romanian girls wear clothing and heavy makeup, always look like they're going to a big event, and I find it weird. They pay a lot of attention to appearance, and I find there is pressure to try and pay attention to one's looks more than is needed. (female, aged 22, German). "In India, I would talk to girls only." The girls dress in "nice full body dresses." (female, aged 22, Indian).

Discrimination and hostility were reported by more than ¼ of the students and are also related to acculturative stress.

Home Comforts

One third of the students reported missing home comforts. Those students described missing the environment provided by their family and home providing a sense of security, belonging and comfort. The students described the first exposure experience of living in another country and the difficulty of being away

from their family. "It was new. It was my first time in another country, being away from my family". (female, aged 22, Indian, 5th year)

To adapt, measures were used including bringing family members to help with the adjustment. "My parents lived with me for 2 months. I did not feel happy or sad." (female, aged 22, Indian, 5th year) " It is hard being alone and to manage everything: the cooking, cleaning, grocery bills and bank account. I don't know how to manage it all." (female, aged 19, German)

Students who had previously attended other universities abroad did not report missing home comforts, because they had overcome the first exposure phenomenon of living in another country as a medical student. "I came from another medical university in Germany when I was 23 years old. Because I was already adjusted, it was not hard from this perspective." (female, aged 28, Israeli, previous studies in Germany) "Having had a previous experience means it was not the first time. It was not the first shock of living alone." (male, aged 26, Portuguese, 5th year, previous medical school)

It is evident by the statistics that although all felt stressed to a degree, some missed their home comforts more than others due to the differences in stress management. It is nevertheless noticeable that the responsibilities taken by parents, the students upon commencing studies had to take on, learning to take care of themselves, financially responsibilities and administratively in a foreign country. The students found home comforts in the community of student and friends. "In our year of study, we are like one big family. We try to help each other. Even though we are not close can ask for help. We can freely ask, text or ask someone else. There is a cultural mix, which provides motivation to see more." (female, aged 22, Polish, 5th year)

Friends

One-third of the participants who reported missing friends, came up with the following responses: The students described difficulty in leaving behind old friends and making new friends. "There, I have friends ... Here, almost all friendships made are new." (male, aged 26, Portuguese, 5th year)

Stress-related factors

One-third of the respondents reported missing the relatively better organization of academic studies in their own countries. Meanwhile, one quarter reported the poor organization of the university as a stressor. A stark contrast was drawn by the students of various ethnic backgrounds and nationalities regarding the poor level of organization.

The unique nature of the medical school studies and the profession itself was a source of stress. "Psychologically, every job is important. In medicine, we study to help people with issues who are not feeling good. I want to help the best way I can. What if I make a mistake? I'm thinking about the future. Very

serious consequences are involved in decision making and actions. I need to try my best to avoid making mistakes. This is an important stressor. In other domains, there are not very serious negative outcomes. In medicine, there are much greater responsibilities. As a doctor, people come to you who require help, health wise, and are in a bad state. You must be able to deal with it." (male, aged 26, Portuguese, 5th year, previous medical studies)

Exams and tests were reported by 16.7% of students to cause stress. The students from medical schools have a lot of work. Apart from their theoretical knowledge, they must also prove their practical skills and pass practical, oral and written exams. Most of the students sustain the difficulty of studies. Some others pointed the differences between diverse medical study systems, from their own experience: "Regarding medical school exams, there is a lot to study, and I felt, especially in the first 2 years, that there was not enough time." (Male, aged 25, American, 3rd year, with previous university studies) "You cannot get into a practical evaluation until you pass all the class tests. You cannot get into the MSQ evaluation (multiple choice question evaluation) unless you pass the practical exams. In Canada you complete every exam, and they take the average." (female, aged 19, Canadian, 2nd year, no previous university studies) "Some years are more problematic because there is less time to study at home. Long learning days with a lot of moving around from morning to evening is exhausting, which makes you mentally physically tired. Then, it is not easy to get into studying. It is tough those first few hours to start studying. It varies from year to year. The first two years were the hardest, with most of the subjects and little time to study." (male, aged 26, Portuguese, 5th year, previous medical school)

The university schedule as a stressor was reported by 25% of the students because those practical sessions take place in different hospital clinics.

Financial stress was noticeably high, described by one quarter of the students.: "The feeling of pressure of needing to pass, expectations from those who fund you as well as tests and exams are normal. You learn to cope with everything, for stressful situations will be in the future." (male, aged 26, Portuguese, 5th year, previous medical school) "I'm afraid of failure and paying a lot of money. This is the only thing. Here, there are lower tuition fees compared to my country, but retakes cost a lot. I have personal motivation. I need to stay for my future. I received support from my family. Some doctors say it is nicer in the future." (female, aged 22, Indian, 5th year, no previous university experience)

Management of stress was found to improve over time, "In terms of managing work, schedule and learning, it is much better now. In the first year I had to adapt to a new university and new city. You learn time management skills regarding where your classes are and the timetable. Over time, it becomes easier to manage. With more experience comes improved study techniques and time management. In the first year you start from zero. The 4th, 5th and 6th years

become easier because your background knowledge advances. You are more able to correlate." "Over the years you adapt. The first time is very stressful. "(male, aged 26, Portuguese, 5th year, previous medical school)

Positive aspects

Interviews revealed some positive aspects:

Teaching and study environment: "We have good conditions, good teachers and go to the hospital. We can learn. We can see patients. Practice very important. I think that the amount of effort put in at home most important." (male, aged 26, Portuguese) The schedule was also found to allow enough time to study. When asked, "How has the university offered you support and what can be done better to support you?", A certain student replied, "The study environment is something I really like: you have the opportunity to learn. If you want to learn and are interested in asking questions, people will help you. They will teach you, and I really appreciate that." (male, aged 26, Portuguese) When asked concerning mentorship, if the student received this in their years of study, the response was, "I can't say I have one person specifically. In a way, all the teachers have an impact on you, to captivate you towards a certain subject or field. I really get what he/she is trying to teach me. I want to know more." (male, aged 26, Portuguese) "Here, they teach well." "I like it when our teachers motivate the students and encourage us. A lot of teachers do this. I would like it if every teacher motivated every student. We receive support from our teachers. Some teachers are not as motivating as others." (female, aged 22, Indian)

Growth and development: "I now have many friends. My understanding of the Romanian language has improved. I was able to adapt after a few months. I've improved in learning. My marks have improved. Also, I have found easy ways to learn." "The beginning was not easy. I learnt to cook from my mother on skype." (female, aged 22, Indian, 5th year, no previous university studies)

When asked to describe their experience at UMF Iasi, a student replied, "I would describe it as an exponential curve, very quickly increasing to the middle of the 3rd year with an exponential increase. My knowledge has improved as well as my understanding of small things in life here. Knowledge of the language, culture, locations in city, how to rent and see a doctor has become much easier as time passes (….) So many things. If had the option of trading in my three other degrees (…) I would pick this one. My experiences here have been so much richer. It is such nice place. From a weather perspective, here you have all four seasons. The courses and memories will last forever. In other universities, I made temporary friends there. Coming to study here is the best thing I've ever done. I've become more mature as a person, student and physician." (male, aged 35, British, 5th year, previous degrees)

Extracurricular activities: "There are events and workshops. The university shows support by hosting conferences. At times I like to go out. To be separated

from university social life. I think it is more important to have a good study environment rather than social activates. Not as important as social activates." (male, aged 26, Portuguese)

Preparation: When asked if the student feels better equipped as compared to other universities, one student replied: "Yes, as you get older you become more mature, different. Such as living in another city, learning a new language, paying your own rent, own bills and shopping at the supermarket. All of that prepares you for life after at the workplace. If I lived at home with parents I would not experience other responsibilities. Practice: "It would help a lot." I don't know much about my own country." (male, aged 26, Portuguese).

Experience and adaptation: When asked how their experience in the present (5th year) compares to the past academic years, a student replied: "In terms of managing work, schedule and learning, it is much better now. In the first year, it was all about adapting to a new university, a new city. You learn well how to get to the university and your classes. You can lose a lot of time from learning. Afterwards you know how to arrive to a lesson in time. It becomes easier to manage. With more experience comes improved study techniques and time management. In the first year you start to learn from zero. The 4th, 5th and 6th years become easier because your background knowledge advances. You are more able to correlate." (male, aged 26, Portuguese) Students studying abroad became more aware of direct exposure to other cultures, particularly in a multicultural university. "You learn things when you're out of your country. You learn a lot about countries, meet a lot of friends, learn different cultures and gain general knowledge." (female, aged 22, Indian)

Perceived contrast with other countries

Germany – "In German universities, the teachers do not know their students, the students are anonymous and are provided with a number so there is no bias. Paperwork is a lot easier; you just need a signature from the students. Everything is online, easy and accessible. The students have discount cards for shopping, cinemas and transport. There is no discrimination for foreign or non-foreign students. Many resources are provided *e.g.* white board pens for the teachers. There are many meetings for the students so they can get to know each other besides at parties. There areany clubs and societies, *e.g.* sports. There is a big cafeteria with a lot of food choices as well as a large library with books in many languages. The lectures are not mandatory in Germany, however, in Romania we have been threatened by the teachers to attend, otherwise they will make it hard for us to pass the practical exam. In Romania, the teachers bully the students sometimes. There is not so much in Germany in terms of directly helping the students deal with stress. There is a university psychologist the students can go to." (Female, aged 22, German) "The structure here is different, as compared to Germany. In Germany, there is basically a free structure. There

is free travel for students and student discounts. There are higher living costs there. However, fees are more expensive, so there is not that much difference. Parents help. The students are given a certain sum to look after per year. Unfair payment for absences are extremely high, and for exams. Not this way in Germany." (female, aged 28, Israeli, previous medical studies)

USA – "In the USA, the teachers give you a month's notice before the exams, and there are never two exams on the same day." The administration schedules everything at universities in America. All classes are mandatory to attend, so classes are not cancelled for not having enough students. Teachers have office hours for students to ask for help on the syllabus. There is a time when you can go to see each teacher. (male, aged 25, American)

Italy – "In Italy there are not tests every week; this is less stressful. But also, in Italy the teachers do not care about you. You are just given a number. Most examinations are aural. If you do not know one question, you can speak about something else related to the subject. The university has a cafeteria and many societies. To help students with stress, nothing special is done, but I know of a counselling service, but it's not so considered in Italy. There are some support groups but not so developed like in America. The concept of support is present but not so firm. Usually, students just try their best to not become crazy." (male, aged 22, Italian)

Israel – "In Israel the university is in a small city. There are bus stops nearby, a campus, cafeteria, cark parking spaces and you don't have to fight every day for a space to park your car. It is quiet. There is a gate that only allows students to enter. There are many social events *e.g.* opening of the school year. There are many events that happen inside the university. Here there are just nightclubs for students. In Israel there is salsa dancing, and you can watch movies on big screen, all inside the university. There is no name interaction between the teacher and student. It is easier to communicate because of the shared language. Admission in my country is much more difficult with IQ questions and problem solving." (female, aged 21, Palestinian)

Greece – "In Greece you can progress every year without passing anything, but this is pretty bad as you don't learn. I like that in Romania we learn everything during the year by being tested throughout the year. Greece has better professors interested in their job; there better books provided by the Greek state for free. Students are of a high level because of the entrance exams. There is more laboratory work. Our lab work is inadequate; they have experiments and can work on something." (female, aged 21, Greek)

Canada – "Nobody cheats in Canada. The professors are easy to access, and they stay on the campus. They have visiting hours and are always happy to help. Here I feel the professors are in a rush; they finish their lesson early and then run. At the beginning of semester, the students in Canada are provided with a list of books they need; every student has the same book. In Romania if you

ask a teacher about a book, they tell you to use anything that has the material. In Canada there is an online university account, and every grade is updated regularly including class tests." (female, aged 19, Canadian)

Zimbabwe – "The level of strictness in academics. The university is stricter, so they produce few doctors but with a lot of knowledge. There is negative marking in exams, so it is harder over there to pass. In Romania the administration office is only open at certain hours; in other universities the secretary is more available." (female, aged 21, Zimbabwean)

When asked, where the student would go to for help, the replies received were: For help in learning the locations of the classes, "I had friends tell me. It was not difficult to find places. After a month or two I was already used to the routine. You just need someone to give you a little push." (male, aged 26, Portuguese) to help in the transition into new surroundings and new university lifestyle, "For me, I knew a friend. My tendency is to ask my friend. I never had problems adapting." (male, aged 26, Portuguese) "I would talk to my mother, friends and family. They would tell me, everything will be fine. Let's face up to what is happening. Just go on. Don't plan. Everything happens for a reason. Different schedules. You know more things when interacting with others." (female, aged 22, Indian)

Regarding emotional support, the data showed that students are more likely to go to known friends. "talk to friends." (female, aged 22, Indian) "I would call a friend. It is very expensive to see a psychologist. Counsellors are available for students in Germany." (female, aged 28, Israeli).

Possible institutional strategies

The interviews highlighted some possible strategies that could be applied in order to improve the academic life of international students and help their integration.

Counsellors – students mentioned the need for more psychological support during their academic years. "My sister studies dentistry in Bristol University. There, there is a high suicide rate. There, mental health is taken seriously, and measures are taken for support. They started to anonymize the results to pass/fail in order to minimize competition and decrease pressure on the students. I would say that the tutor must be well-qualified." (male, aged 35, British, 5th year, previous degrees)

Pairing system – "Have a tutoring program *e.g.* help from older students but in a club." (female, aged 19, Canadian). When asked, "are you aware of a pairing program? Was this available for you in your first year?" The reply was, "Not to my knowledge. It is a good idea." (male, aged 26, Portuguese, 5th year)

Education and teaching – "To employ professors that are in love with their job, not just because they have to teach us." "A system not based on memorisation

but on a deep understanding of the topics and applying that knowledge." (female, aged 21, Greek); "...have teaching hospitals the university is associated with. We are not very well taught e.g., it is not clean, the teachers do not teach well, and they are busy. There is not enough room on the wards as there are many students, and it is crowded for the students and patients and staff. Because teachers are overloaded with many different sections, they do not give the same amount of attention to all the groups, so we should have more teachers." (female, aged 21, Zimbabwean)

Language – "Romanian language courses should be provided at a high level, not for myself, because I know Romanian very well, but for others. Here, students can get by with just the bare minimum knowledge of Romanian." (male, aged 35, British, 5th year, previous degrees)

Enrolment and communication – a majority of the students are satisfied with the enrolment process, but were dissatisfied regarding student-administration-staff communication and student-teacher relationships, mentioning that a more open teacher-student relationship would have been more efficient for student development "Be more open to the students' suggestions." "I would like to receive more attention from the teachers." (female, aged 22, German)

Exams and schedule – "To improve the schedule, we can choose when to schedule tests so there are not too many in the same week." (male, aged 22, Italian)

Extracurricular events and learning environment – most students pointed out that extracurricular event would improve their life as students and create cohesion among from different years of studies and different cultures. Students also pointed out that international days would allow to students, coming from the same country or culture, to promote themselves to the local community "Have events for the international community." (female, aged 21, Zimbabwean)

Excellence scholarship – students mentioned that scholarships are important help for students, especially for those coming from poor countries. Financial support will diminish the level of stress and will increase daily living life." This would greatly aid in the financial burden of students from poor economic backgrounds. When asked how their experience has been altogether and how it can be improved, a student responded, "So far I'm fine with the teaching; it's good and I'm improving. The labs are good, and I interact with the with patients. The only thing would be opportunities for scholarships." (female, aged 22, Indian)

Discussion

This present study adds more information about the daily life, stressors and coping strategies used by international students enrolled in medical studies conducted by some members of the present research team. Previous results proved that, regarding international students studying medical specialties in

Romania, their reasons for choosing this country were: comfortable climate, affordable academic tuition, tolerance for different religions, low daily living expenses and academic prestige. Also, our previous studies identified that international students mentioned being uncomfortable with the language of the host-country and missing their family. (Iorga *et al.,* 2020; Socolov *et al.,* 2017)

Because for many students, studying abroad was not their first option, dissatisfaction resulted from their expectations and anticipation of what their medical school experience would be. Because the knowledge of the culture was not at the base of their experience, certain things, which are considered normal in their surrogate country, Romania was unusual to them and did not meet their expectations. This had a detrimental effect on their overall experience of medical school, with the thought of what they could have accomplished if they had studied in their own country. Some of the reasons why students choose to study abroad may be: in search of a better level of education, financial reasons, such as the comparatively lower tuition fees, the desire to work in that country or region and having family or relatives there. It is certainly an important decision and one not made lightly.

The students who choose to study in a foreign country and in a foreign language are usually determined or desperate. Depending on how they experience their first years, it will determine the rhythm and trajectory of their academic experience. Those having chosen to study abroad as a final option are more likely to be dissatisfied with their choice as compared to those who had it among their top choices. In the sample of the participants, half of the students had previous university experience, meaning they had gone through the route of a postgraduate degree or had, with a complete or incomplete degree; therefore, they chose to begin studying medicine abroad. One third of them studied before at a medical school in Europe. This category of students was found to have a more positive outlook on their present university experience. However, because of their comparative experience at other medical schools, they experienced university stressors including the schedule and frequency of tests as compared to the other countries as well as the social interaction available.

As was described by Lee *et al.*, in the counterbalancing of social support on acculturative stress, extra-academic life is particularly important in how a student manages stress. It was found in this study that the participants depended mostly on the support of family and friends. Because their family were far away, many of the things that their families would have done for them, they had to learn these themselves. This had the positive effect of training them to confront life's challenges. At the same time, they did not receive as much support as necessary for harmonious development in learning and maintenance of good health. The detrimental impacts of stress may be seen as replicated in the study Al-Dabal (2010). This is an important concern, because stress, as a subjective

phenomenon is, however, real and quantifiable. Its effects are not always visible immediately but manifest in the poor holistic health of the person.

Students, teachers and personal stuff are all responsible for academic process. An intercultural approach of the curriculum is needed when the institution addresses the schedule for multicultural and multilingual groups. The permanent increasing number of international students and the diversity of their cultures has become a challenge for teachers and tutors all over the world. Most of the university's teachers face unfamiliar student characteristics and needs, so permanent demands force them to constantly re-adjust to the multicultural groups that they teach. So "current teaching practice is needed in order to start with the way in which teachers see their students as learners. By adopting approaches that are culturally inclusive and operating within a framework where the needs of teachers and students can be addressed and included is paramount". (Ryan & Carroll 2007)

Our study shows that language barriers, socio-cultural aspect, missing family and friends and food are among some of the main stressful factors. Our results are congruent with other studies. The language barrier represents one of the major challenges faced by international students (Brown, 2008; Taušová *et al.,* 2019), and language proficiency can impact academic achievement (Trenkic and Warmington, 2019). Lee (1997). in an earlier work, five major areas that international students found problematic were identified: listening ability, cultural background differences, oral communication skills, vocabulary and writing. Furthermore, Zhang and Mi (2009) found that, although listening and speaking represent difficult areas, these are overcome in a 2-year period. Also, reading does not seem to be problematic, but writing seems to be, even after a 2-year period.

Other studies showed that international students report being unhappy with the prospects of making friendships. They want to have more local friends Zhang and Brunton (2007), and they struggle with loneliness and/or isolation Sawir *et al.* (2008).

At "Grigore T. Popa" University there is a Counselling and Professional Orientation Center, which offers psychological counselling and individual counselling as well as professional orientation services to the students of the university in order to support them when it comes time to integrate into student life and overcome the obstacles encountered during their studies. At the same time, this center organizes conferences and workshops on topics of interest for the students, such as depression, stress, etc. Although the psychologists working in this center try to be as present as possible in the life of the students and to respond to their needs, this study suggests the need to amplify the support and counselling activities.

Our research proves it therefore stands to reason that the greatest impact comes from strategies implemented during academic life, for in these years, the habits are formed which later shape the life of the doctor.

Also, these results show the need for intercultural competence of teachers. In the context of internationalization, the intercultural competence (ICC) of university teachers represents an important acquisition designed to provide effective educational processes. Zelenková & Hanesová (2019) describe an efficient training method aimed at increasing the ICC in teachers at a Slovak university. The training was aimed at improving three aspects: general communicative competence in English, pedagogical-didactic competence and the intercultural competence of teachers.

Strengths and limitations of the study: In this research, a qualitative methodology was applied, which allowed for the collection of in-depth data. On the other hand, the results obtained are applicable only to the participants included in this study and cannot be generalized to the entire population

Conclusions

This study highlights the tendency of medical students to seek help from their family or friends. This important support is crucial but not the only source. Help should also be provided by the institution training them, as a responsibility on their part. These trends reflect the condition of the medical profession today. Whereas it is true that with experience, adaption improves, what this study highlights are the existence of acculturative stress, its impact compounded with academic stress and the necessity of more involvement of the institution in the management of stress. As medicine is not how it was several decades ago, job satisfaction is declining with the rise of work expectations, the workload and the increase of litigation against doctors. This puts them in fear of practice and also warrants a new approach into the management of stress for future doctors in the coming era into which they are entering.

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' LIFESTYLE

DANA-TEODORA ANTON-PĂDURARU

Introduction

According to UNESCO, international students (IS) are those people who go abroad for educational purposes and are accepted as students outside their country of origin (Tunc *et al.*, 2021). In recent years, the number of IS has increased. For example, in 2011 there were 4.3 million IS, and the US was the preferred destination for study, due to future opportunities (Alakaam *et al.*, 2015). According to the Council of Higher Education, if in 1970 there were about 800,000 international students, it is estimated that in 2022 there will be about 8 million (Tunc *et al.*, 2021).

International students (IS) want to have closer interactions with the local students, this interaction having social, psychological and academic benefits. But often, the local students are not interested in initiating contact with the international ones. There are intercultural differences between students' behaviour that may have an impact on the international team of that year of study. There are few studies on the integration of international students into the community and spending a good part of their time at home can be a source of stress for them (Ward, 2001).

Factors that can cause IS stress are (Jiang *et al.*, 2020):
- language difficulties,
- educational factors,
- socio-cultural differences,
- discrimination manifested through verbal insults, hostility, physical aggression,
- financial problems,
- transportation and accommodation difficulties,
- differences between students from developing countries and those from developed countries, who receive government aid.

Stress affects most students in their transition from high school to college, affecting their well-being and causing them to gain weight. Stress can also have effects on their eating habits, which can cause both overeating and undernutrition (Telfer, 2020). When they make the transition from high school to college, IS are at risk of developing unhealthy eating behaviours, characterized by inadequate nutrient intake, irregular meals, giving up breakfast, low

consumption of fruits and vegetables but high consumption of French fries (Yun *et al.*, 2018).

Changing lifestyle

When they migrate to another country to study, students must adjust their way of living. According to the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, lifestyle is "the particular way that a person or group lives and the values and ideas supported by that person or group" (Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary).

Demographic characteristics can have an impact on the adaptation process and the lifestyle (Alshafi and Shin, 2017). Unlike older people, young students adapt more quickly and easily to their new culture, including the new food culture (Lange-Smith &Van Scyoc, 2017).

As international students, many of them suffer emotionally and from cultural shock, as they try to adapt to the socio-cultural differences between their country of origin and the country in which they study, which can lead to confusion and chaos. Due to language barriers, they may have difficulty in socializing and establishing friendships with new colleagues. In fact, many IS consider the language in which they have to communicate to be the biggest challenge. Language problems can cause difficulties in expression but also a lack of understanding of the taught knowledge. Cultural differences can also affect the well-being of IS with the occurrence of social isolation, feelings of loneliness, disorientation and depression. Financial problems (high tuition, high costs for accommodation) can be another cause of stress and anxiety in some IS (Őzoğlu *et al.*, 2015).

Various studies mention that IS feel lonely in their new country. For example, 37% of students included in the study by Morris *et al.* (2020) felt lonely, although they liked to live and study in Australia, and 47% found it difficult to make new friends. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the price of renting houses increased. Due to this economic stress, some of the IS lived in fear of being homeless, unable to pay their school fees or even unable to eat properly, all of which affected their school performance.

One of the most important problems of IS is acculturation. Acculturation is the dual process of psychological and cultural change that occurs as a result of contact between multiple cultural groups or individuals (Jiang *et al.*, 2020, Lange-Smith, 2017). Dietary acculturation represents the adoption of food habits and choices specific to the new community in which the person is studying (Alakaam and Willyard, 2020, Bukhari, 2018). Through this process IS try to adopt new food options, often cheaper and easier to find (Bukhari, 2018). Acculturation involves, not only the adoption of eating habits of the host country, but also the use of traditional foods in new ways. Acculturation should

not only be seen as a negative process but can also have positive effects, such as replacing hydrogenated oils with less saturated fats (Still, 2010). The length of stay in that country correlates with the degree of "dietary acculturation", the longer the duration, the more students will adopt local eating habits (Lange-Smith and Van Scyoc, 2017).

Changing diet

Consumption of a healthy, varied diet, balanced with the main nutritional principles is essential, having an important role in the prevention of certain diseases. The transition to a new culture, including food culture, can have negative effects on health (Edwards *et al.*, 2010).

Student life is associated with unhealthy eating habits. The content and quality of the diet can change significantly from the first year of study which can lead to weight gain and increased risk of developing some diseases (hypertension, coronary heart disease, diabetes). A diet rich in fats and carbohydrates, with a low intake of protein, vitamins and minerals leads to an imbalance in essential nutritional principles, with an impact on both health and academic performance (Hovhannisyan, 2009 *et al.*, Hovhannisyan, 2015). The comparative analysis of the diet of students living with their parents and those who do not live with their parents showed that the former did not change their eating habits, consuming more fruits, vegetables, fish, eggs, cereals and meat. Students who did not live with their parents consumed fewer fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts but consumed more fast food, semi-prepared foods, carbonated and alcoholic beverages (Bernardo *et al.*, 2017).

Perez-Cueto cited by Danquah *et al.* (2010) specified that 85% of IS have dietary changes due to temporary migration (Danquah *et al.*, 2010). Prior to moving to the country where they were to study, most IS, on all continents, consumed certain categories of food, such as fruits and vegetables, dairy, rice, tea, coffee, red meat and chicken, fish and sugar. Moving to another country has led to a change in the amount of certain foods consumed, either in terms of a decrease in the consumption of fruits, vegetables, fish and red meat or in terms of an increase in the consumption of fast food, snacks or products high in sugar (Noyongoyo, 2011).

The diet of international students is characterized by a number of undesirable aspects, such as: giving up some meals, frequent consumption of snacks as well as insufficient consumption of fruits and vegetables. Due to frequenting cafeterias or access to vending machines, many IS consumed increased amounts of semi-prepared foods, juices, desserts and meat and fewer vegetables (Lange-Smith and Van Scyoc, 2017, Yun *et al.*, 2018). Even the eating habits of international students at medical universities can change from the first year of study, with an increase in the consumption of sweets and fats and a

reduction in the consumption of milk, meat, vegetables and fruits (Hovhannisyan *et al.*, 2009, Hovhannisyan, 2015).

The change in the food pattern also affects the number of meals consumed daily, with students consuming only 1.5 hot meals/day compared to 3 meals/day consumed during the period spent in the country of origin and dinner being served 2-3 hours later (Edwards *et al.*, 2010). Similar results were obtained by Papadaki *et al.* who observed a reduction in the number of meals cooked, from 12.7/week to 4.17/week (Papadaki *et al.*, 2007).

Over the time spent at the university outside their homes, students develop unhealthy eating habits, not taking responsibility for food preparation (Papadaki *et al.*, 2007).

The IS diet can be influenced by a lot of factors factors (Alakaam *et al.*, 2015, Alakaam and Willyard, 2020, Bukhari, 2018, Chukwu, 2016, Hovhannisyan, 2015, Noyongoyo, 2011), such as:

- access to food,
- food preferences (they usually prefer traditional, good quality and varied food),
- method of preparation, taste and appearance of food,
- religious orientation (lack of ethnic Arabic, Japanese, Chinese restaurants limits access to these types of food),
- the concept of nutrition in the country where they study,
- time available,
- stress,
- place of origin,
- environment on the university campus,
- access to medical services

Difficulties in finding traditional or familiar foods make IS vulnerable to food insecurity. Other factors that contribute to food insecurity are:

- lack of time for cooking food,
- lack of food preparation conditions in the new home,
- limited number of traditional food stores,
- quality of local foods that do not correspond to the student's expectations (Bukhari, 2018, Stewin, 2013).

The IS di*et al*so depends on the time spent in the new country. Pan *et al.* cited by Danquah *et al.* suggested that changes in eating behaviour may occur even in the case of a short stay in a foreign country (Danquah *et al.*, 2010). But unlike students who spend less than 5 years in the new country and who try to maintain their eating habits, those who spend more than 5 years assimilate a new diet, trying to look for food and recipes that they find in the new location (Noyongoyo, 2011). Those who try to maintain a traditional diet do so as a way of preserving identity (Stewin, 2013).

The barriers to maintaining eating habits are represented by:
- high costs (for example, traditional foods are more expensive than fast food),
- limited food availability (long distance to traditional food stores which are in most cases located in large cities),
- low quality of regular food,
- low quality of food available,
- lack of time and knowledge needed to prepare food,
- neophobia (Alakaam *et al.*, 2015, Al-Fahran *et al.*, 2018, Noyongoyo, 2011, Papadaki et Scott, 2002, Pilli, 2021).

In a study of Greek students studying in Glasgow, Kremmyda *et al.* observed a reduction in the consumption of fruits and vegetables, meat and cheese and an increase in the consumption of snack foods after leaving home, as Greek students have difficulties following the Mediterranean diet (Kremmyda *et al.*, 2008). Papadaki *et al.* (2007) conducted a study among Greek students between the ages of 20 and 24 at an agricultural university in Athens. The authors found that students who left home had a lower intake of fresh fruit, vegetables, fish oil, seafood and olive oil as well as higher consumption of sugar, wine and fast food.

Various studies followed the diet of the IS studying in the US. In their study on the eating habits of Arab students in the USA, Al-Farhan *et al.* (2018) noticed a change in their eating pattern with more frequent consumption of a western diet than a traditional one. 65% of IS reported a change in eating behaviour, with an increase in fat and sugar consumption and restaurant attendance. A significant percentage showed changes in weight: 45% of the girls and 39% of the boys showed weight gain, and 24%, to 35% weight loss, respectively. The students who reported weight gain ate more meals a day, had larger portions or ate more unhealthy food at the restaurant and had less physical activity due to a busy schedule or bad weather in some parts of the country. 25% of them consumed food supplements. In addition to weight gain, IS also showed an increase in the levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, blood pressure and mental problems (Alaakam *et al.*, 2015).

Marital status seemed to be an important factor. Married students consumed higher amounts of fruits and vegetables, and foods containing starch and fat, compared to unmarried ones. Married women tried to maintain a traditional diet, diversify their food choices and cook more at home (Al Farhan *et al.*, 2018).

Alakaam *et al.* (2015, 2020) noticed, in different research, that students studying in the USA felt it was easier to adopt the American diet than to keep to their traditional diet. Most of those who continued their traditional diet did not live on campus but rented apartments, with conditions to prepare their own food. Instead, those who did not have time to cook or did not know how to cook,

preferred to eat easily accessible foods, frozen or semi-prepared foods, carbonated beverages, bread, dairy products, cereal and coffee. The consequences of the new food choices were weight gain, the consumption of larger portions, the consumption of snacks and the consumption of a larger number of meals. Students who consumed vegetarian or halal diets had more limited access to them on campus. Muslim students reported losing weight due to not eating enough food because the available food contained pork. Dietary changes can lead to diseases, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease, ulcers, acne and fatigue.

Rabeeah *et al.* (2021) in a study including 74 IS relocated to the United States, found that 37% of them had gained more than 10% of their initial weight, and 32% had lost more than 10% of their initial weight, all these changes occurring within a short period.

Lee (2017) included in a study of 511 students aged 18-35 concluded that they consume more processed foods, fast food or sugar-containing foods, more water and beverages, more raw vegetables, meat and dairy products and fewer traditional foods and cooked vegetables. IS also spent more money on food procurement, some of which referred to the high cost and low quality of traditional imported food, as well as a lack of healthy food in campus stores. On the other hand, the low consumption of traditional foods allows them to try different dishes from international cuisine without having to travel to the area.

In a study of 225 European and Asian students, Edwards *et al.* (2010) observed that both categories showed changes in eating habits, some even presented neophobia towards some foods (Edwards *et al.*, 2010). A comparative study between European and Asian students on neophobia showed that Asians were less willing to try new foods. Consumption of a Western diet by the Asian students involves the consumption of foods with different tastes and ingredients. Exposure of immigrant Chinese students to dairy and animal foods can lead to an aversion to these products. Regarding time spent in the new country, it was observed that neophobia increases after 3 months, and most dietary changes occur in the first 3 months (Lee, 2017).

Consumption of unfamiliar foods requires time to study the nutritional content but also involves a certain risk of discomfort or disliking the food (Stewin, 2013).

A study conducted on IS in Armenia in the first year of the study showed increased consumption of sweets (above the recommendations of the Healthy Eating Pyramid) and low meat consumption, probably due to higher costs, except for the consumption of burgers (Hovhannisyan, 2015).

International students had to deal with local food and their preferred meals. Gilbert and Khokan's study cited by Edwards *et al.* noted that in general, students combine foods from their traditional diet with less healthy foods (Edwards *et al.*, 2010).

Although breakfast is an important meal, many students give it up, the main reason being a lack of time. Often, giving up breakfast leads to overeating for the rest of the day, increasing the risk of being overweight and becoming obese. Some students, especially girls, give up lunch that contains essential nutrients, preferring to eat sandwiches; others consume more meals represented by fast food (Danquah *et al.*, 2010, Edwards *et al.*, 2010).

Most IS who studied in the US and were included in the study by Alakaam *et al.* (2020) reported weight gain due to eating larger portions, unplanned meals and eating snacks. Others refused to eat fruits and vegetables, believing they were not fresh, were genetically modified or contained pesticides. Others consumed food supplements (multivitamins, protein powder, vitamin D, probiotics, calcium, iron, omega 3) without having them prescribed by physicians.

Consumption of drugs, alcohol and tobacco

Alcohol is consumed all over the world, but different cultures regard its consumption in a different manner. While in China alcohol plays an important role in communication and business, other cultures recommend moderate alcohol consumption or even abstinence. Acculturation also involves changing habits regarding alcohol (Htet *et al.*, 2020). When it comes to alcohol consumption, a study by Vivancos *et al.* conducted in 2009, on 827 students out of which 123 were IS, showed that IS consumed less alcohol compared to the British.

The risk for chronic diseases

In a study by Ijaz ul Haq *et al.* it was observed that the prevalence of obesity in IS was higher, compared to the prevalence in Chinese students. In a study by Du Chen *et al.* the students had a higher percentage of fat mass and a lower quality of sleep, as well as more frequent emotional and eating disorders (Du Chen *et al.*, 2021, Ijaz ul Haq *et al.*, 2018).

Physical activity

Physical activity plays an important role in maintaining health and well-being. University educational programs should facilitate students' participation in physical activities, helping IS to make the transition to a new culture, develop intercultural exchanges between students, develop new social opportunities and, finally, improve their health (Li and Zizzi, 2017, Yan and Cardinal, 2013).

But there are several barriers when it comes to participating in physical activities, such as:
- cultural barriers,
- language,

- feeling of isolation,
- increased costs,
- a lack of time,
- religious motives (Collins and Chinouval, 2017, Li and Zizi, 2017).

Physical activity depends on factors, such as sex, the presence of chronic diseases and the faculty they attend (Tunc *et al.*, 2021). 36% of the IS participants in the study of Al-Farhan *et al.* did not engage in physical activity, and only 5% of the international students performed daily physical activity (Al-Fahran *et al.*, 2018). Female international students are less physically active compared to male students (Collins and Chinouval, 2017). The study by Yoh *et al.* performed on 521 students showed that they performed only 3.4 hours/week of physical activity, girls less than boys. They also observed that the students from Asia and Africa were less active compared to those from other continents (Yoh *et al.*, 2008).

Sleep-related problems

Sleep disorders are often encountered in students, more often in IS, who must adapt to their new situation generated by moving to a foreign country (Tan and Greenwood, 2022). The stress to which IS are subjected for various reasons also influences their sleep. In most cases, IS have sleep deprivation with consequences on their academic performance (Shonia *et al.*, 2020). In the study of Ijaz ul Haq *et al.* (2018) the sleep duration of Chinese students was longer (over 6 hours) compared to IS, the shorter sleep duration being associated with a higher percentage of fat mass and a higher value of the index of body mass.

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the lifestyle of international students

Sars COV-2 infection (COVID 19) has also had an impact on students' lifestyles, which is the same for the general population. Isolation at home and social distancing have led to changes in daily behaviours and habits, such as eating, physical activity and sleep (Ruiz-Zaldibar *et al.*, 2021).

Lack of face-to-face activities can affect students' health, especially since students are considered a vulnerable population in terms of mental health and health risk behaviours. The transition from traditional methods of teaching in the amphitheatre to online teaching involved adapting to this method. In a study by Ruiz-Zaldibar *et al.* (2021) conducted on a group of 488 students in Spain, it was observed that the girls were more affected in terms of social and family relationships, presenting characteristic symptoms of depression, while the boys performed less physical activity. Some of the students lost their jobs. Sleep disorders were frequently encountered in students who previously preferred nightlife, excessive use of the Internet or mobile phones.

Conclusions

Unhealthy eating habits developed during youth will continue into adulthood. Assessing health perception and IS behaviour is important for public health services to make decisions and establish health policies for the future. Public health interventions are needed to promote a healthy lifestyle among students, to change healthy eating habits and to increase access to healthy food in the university environment. It is necessary to implement nutrition education programs at the university level to improve the perception of health, lifestyle and nutritional choices of IS and prevent the negative effects of a Western diet. Organizing cooking classes or cooking workshops for international students could be a way to improve or maintain a quality diet during their study years in another country. It is necessary to send key messages that promote healthy eating habits in order to prevent chronic diseases in adulthood.

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STRESS AMONG INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL STUDENTS. A SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

S I N A N   A L W A N

Introduction

Stress is a widely used term within the scientific and wider communities, but its definition varies widely depending on which field uses it. The word stress originates from physics, but from a broad scientific point of view, stress is anything that activates the biological stress system. As such, stress is considered a reactive response to a stressor (Hill *et al.*, 2015).

Stress is not a new concept, but something theorists and philosophers have long tried to address. Ancient Greek mythology gives the perfect illustration of this via, Sisyphus, the deceitful king who was condemned to eternally push an immense boulder up a hill, only for it to roll down every time he neared the top (Monroe *et al.*, 2016). However, it was the endocrinologist, Hans Seyle, who first coined the term stress in 1935. Seyle published over 1700 articles and 39 books on the matter and become known as "the father of modern stress". He defined stress as "a syndrome produced by diverse nocuous agents" occurring in laboratory rats. The response to prolonged or excessive stress was named "general adaptation syndrome" (Selye, 1936). Selye researched how different provocations affect physiology, and concluded that stress is "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand"(Selye, 1956). Walter Cannon named this response pattern as the more commonly known "flight or fight response" (Cannon, 1932).

Selye's view influenced subsequent research to consider stress as a single construct, with little attention paid to the varying effects of different stressors. The effects of stress are essential to many models of human health and disease. Evidence suggests stress is involved in the development, maintenance or exacerbation of several mental and physical health conditions (Slavich, 2016). Nevertheless, little agreement exists on what aspects and types of stress matter most in relation to human health and disease.

Stress is a process that requires interaction between the individual and environmental factors, historical and current events, allostatic states, and psychological and physiological reactivity (Epel *et al.*, 2018). The morbidity associated with mental health conditions currently exceeds that of many other diseases (2016, Whiteford *et al.*, 2013).

Biologically, stress is perceived via the SNS, HPA-axis, vagus nerve and meningeal lymphatic vessels, which allow the transmission of signals from the external environment into the biological environment to help determine human health and behaviour. This clinically manifests as poor general physical health, increased pain, disability, decreased quality of life and a higher risk of mortality (Slavich, 2020).

Psychologically, stress can be considered advantageous or disadvantageous. When stress is present in its acute form, and an acceptable response is mounted against the stressor, in part due to the body's heightened response to the stressor, this is termed eustress and considered advantageous due to its protective nature. However, when it comes to distress, if the (positive or negative) stressor is too large to be dealt with or causes a large degree of upheaval or is uncontrollable or un-escapable, we consider this disadvantageous, and this is known as distress. Distress can result in cumulative psychiatric disorders, depression, anxiety and increased family conflict.

Chronic stress has biological and psychological effects which manifest in long term health problems. These include (but are not limited to): mental health problems, eating disorders, skin and hair problems, cardiovascular disease, sexual dysfunction, and gastrointestinal disease. The manifestations of stress, in part, may result in further stress, compounding the problem (Van den Bergh *et al.*, 2008; Wright *et al.*, 2007; Tyrka *et al.*, 2007).

Factors that increase the risk for stress

Stressors are any physical or psychological challenges that are perceived to threaten the stability of the internal environment of the organism (Björntorp, 2001).

Stressors include psychological challenges, life changes, daily hassles, physical demands, and environmental demands. The amount of stress a person feels is determined by 4 characteristics:
1. The intensity of the stressor,
2. The length of exposure to the stressor,
3. The evaluation of the stressor as a threat,
4. The person's coping ability

According to (Lacey and Lacey, 1958), various situations can elicit different patterns of stress responses, and responses can be individual with different responses to the same stressor. The production of a pattern of stress responses due to a variety of stressors is known as "response stereotypy"

Levine (1957) considers that genetics play a role in determining our individual responses to stress, this was demonstrated in neonatal rats, with long term effects in cognitive emotional responses.

The Duration of Stressors

A defining feature of a stressor in the causation of stress is the duration. Stressors can be defined by their timescales as acute or chronic stressors, daily events, and life events (McEwen, 1998).

Acute stressors are intense short-term events that can be tested under laboratory conditions or are naturally occurring events. Some individuals over-respond to acute stressors which increases their allostatic load to cause disease over time (McEwen, 1998).

Daily events can also act as stressors, and many factors influence an individual's daily reactivity. Studies demonstrate that the anticipation of a potential stressor leads to negative effects, and that there is increased cortisol levels before and during the event (McEwen, 1998). (Wetherell *et al.*, 2015). Deep thought also prolongs reactivity and results in greater cortisol levels to an acute stressor (Zoccola and Dickerson, 2015; Puterman *et al.*, 2010).

Life events are episodic time limited episodes, which can include accidents, dismissal from employment, and divorce. Life events can also include things which seem largely positive, such as work promotions or marriage but place increased demand and stress on the individual. Life events occur at a certain time and have a specific onset. Whilst they can be brief, there may be long term effects due to the nature of the event and the consequences, resulting in the initiation of chronic stressors.

Traumatic events are severe incidents which threaten the physical or psychological safety of the individual or those close to them. This can include violence, death of family/friends, suffering from abuse and natural disasters. Individuals who suffer from traumatic events have been reported to suffer from reduced self-reported health, greater healthcare usage, increased disability, arthritis as well as increased incidence of acute and chronic illness (Gawronski *et al.*, 2014; Keyes *et al.*, 2013, Krause *et al.*, 2004; Rosengren *et al.*, 2004).

Chronic stressors are "enduring problems, conflicts and threats that many people face in their daily lives" (Pearlin, 1989). Frequent stressors can deplete a person's resources quicker (Hobfoll, 2001). When a daily stressor originates from an ongoing situation, this may become a form of chronic stress (Koffer *et al.*, 2016). People experiencing chronic stressors report a greater number of daily stressors and greater perceived stress at any given time. Furthermore, those suffering from chronic stress have an increased risk for experiencing greater and more severe daily hassles, life events and report increased stress levels at any given moment (Epel *et al.*, 2018).

Adverse childhood experiences

Looking from the perspective of an individual's life, we can consider cumulative stressors, as well as single stressors having a severe impact on

individuals. This is especially useful when discussing lower socioeconomic status starting from childhood. Lower socioeconomic groups suffer from social disadvantages which predisposes to cumulative disadvantages; this can be best visualized a single event, unplanned teen pregnancy, which results in reduced opportunities over time, and predisposes the individual to other events, like financial hardships or abandoning their education (Elder Jr, 1998).

Social status is especially important in mid to older life, when people undertake multiple social roles (including work and parenting), before age related diseases and disabilities take their toll. In general, increased work and social roles predict better physical and mental health. Retirement can be a positive or negative event on a person's health depending on whether the retirement is voluntary or forced, as well as what the person considers retirement to mean (Nordenmark, 2004; Moen, 1996).

The impact a stressor can have on someone's life may be time sensitive. For example, a person who is forced to retire during old age might experience less stress when compared to an individual forced to retire at a much earlier age. Midlife is a time when people experience high career and social demands, so the loss of a spouse, natural disasters or caregiving for special needs children can have a greater impact on a middle aged person than those of an older age (Bonanno and Kaltman, 1999).

Whilst stressors have been studied in a variety of different ways, it is most likely that when acute and chronic stressors interact, the pathway from stress to poorer health propagates (Catalino *et al.*, 2017; Felder *et al.*, 2018).

Active vs Passive Stressors

Regarding acute stressors, whether they are *active,* or *passive* is an important factor. An *active stressor* is defined as situations that require a response. Active stressors can include spontaneous speeches, job interviews, public speaking, examinations, and work/relationship discussions. *Passive stressors* are situations that are experienced without the need for a response. This can be exemplified when a person waits for examination results or must have dental treatment. For active stressors, generating metabolic energy in response to the stressor is functional. However, in passive stressors, the metabolic energy does not serve a functional purpose and could be more damaging to a person's health (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1996; Lawler *et al.*, 1976; Obrist, 2012).

Coping mechanisms

A specific stressor may not evoke the same response in different people. It has been demonstrated that people who try to change their problems or engage with their emotions may have better psychological and physical health

outcomes than those who avoid their problems or emotions (Stanton *et al.*, 2000, Stanton *et al.*, 1994; Nes *et al.*, 2008).

Another model of stress proposes that stressful events cause worry, but the degree to which we worry, (defined as repetitive negative thoughts) has been linked to poor physiological regulation and a higher risk of cardiovascular disease (Kubzansky *et al.*, 1997; Pieper *et al.*, 2007; Segerstrom *et al.*, 1999). Conscientiousness also has the ability to moderate how stress causes changes in our health, with low conscientiousness individuals responding more negatively to stressful encounters compared to high conscientious individuals (O'Connor *et al.*, 2009; Penley *et al.*, 2002).

Chronic stressors

There is a direct relationship that exists among chronic stress, disease, and mortality. The length of time a stressor is present, and its effects are felt, is a major determinant in the stressor's association with disease. It should also be noted that whilst the chronic stressor is being experienced, additional stressors (such as daily hassles and acute life events) are also being experienced. This increases the likelihood that a person will become overwhelmed due to not having enough resources to cope with any additional demands.

Interpersonal stressors are an important type of chronic stressor, which have been shown to be harmful for one's health, due to the fundamental importance for humans to form and maintain close social relationships (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, Gilbert, 2016, Slavich *et al.*, 2010). Interpersonal stressors are important predictors for emotional distress, systemic inflammation, poor health, and survival. Social stressors, which includes rejection, have a strong association with the development of depression and inflammation in the future (Brown *et al.*, 1995; House *et al.*, 1988, Kendler *et al.*, 2003; Miller *et al.*, 2009; Sheets and Craighead, 2014).

Another source of chronic stress is financial strain, with financial resources being a known predictor of health. A lower socioeconomic class during childhood and adulthood have been shown to predict worse health, increased chronic health problems in old age and increased mortality (Luo and Waite, 2005, Galobardes *et al.*, 2004, Nandi *et al.*, 2014). Independent of an individual's education or income, financial strain is still associated with earlier disability and increased mortality (Matthews *et al.*, 2005, Szanton *et al.*, 2008).

The factors that increase the risk for stress are the following ones (O'Connor *et al.*, 2021):

- Demographic: male, widowed, divorced, single, increased age, white.
- Psychosocial: lack of social support, unemployment, drop in socioeconomic status, firearm access.
- Psychiatric: psychiatric diagnosis, comorbidity.

- Physical illness: malignant neoplasms, HIV/AIDS, peptic ulcer disease, haemodialysis, systemic lupus erythematosus, pain syndromes, functional impairment, diseases of the nervous system.
- Psychological dimensions: hopelessness, psychic pain/anxiety, agitation, psychological turmoil, decreased self-esteem, fragile narcissism, and perfectionism.
- Behavioural dimensions: impulsivity, aggression, sever anxiety, panic attacks, agitation, intoxication, prior suicide attempt.
- Cognitive dimensions: thought constriction, polarized thinking, rigidity.
- Trauma: sexual/physical abuse, neglect, parental loss, traumatic events.
- Genetic and Familial: family history of suicide, mental illness, or abuse.

The consequences of stress

Stress is associated with a variety of short – and long-term effects on the body, ranging from alterations to homeostasis to life threatening effects including death. Stress can act as a trigger or aggravating factor in many diseases. Stress can affect various systems in the body which include:

1. The brain
2. Memory
3. Cognition and learning
4. The immune system
5. The cardiovascular system
6. The gastrointestinal tract
7. The endocrine system

Stress and Brain function

The effects of stress have been explored for over 50 years (Thierry *et al.*, 1968); during this time, studies have demonstrated that stress effects the human nervous system and can cause structural changes within the brain (Lupien *et al.*, 2009). Chronic stress can lead to atrophy and a reduction in brain mass, which in turn brings about a difference in how a person responds to stress (Sarahian *et al.*, 2014; Lupien *et al.*, 2009). The degree to which the brain undergoes atrophy is linked to the intensity and amount of stress a person is subjected to (Lupien *et al.*, 2009). The effects of stress on the brain's structure led to long term effects on the nervous system which includes memory disorders, cognitive disorders, and mood disorders (Seeman *et al.*, 1997; Lupien and Lepage, 2001; Bremner, 1999).

Stress and Memory

Memory is one of the most important aspects of the CNS and is classified as either short or long term. Short term function is reliant on the function of the frontal and parietal lobes, whilst long term memory is reliant on larger areas of the brain (Wood *et al.*, 2000). The total function of memory, as well as the conversion of short-term memory to long term memory is dependent on the hippocampus, the area which contains the largest density of glucocorticoid receptors and is also involved in the highest level of response to stress.

It has been demonstrated that the hippocampus contains glucocorticoid and mineralocorticoid receptors and that the amygdala is highly important in assessing the emotional experiences of memory (Veldhuis *et al.*, 1982; Benno *et al.*, 2009). Stress has been shown to cause functional and structural changes within the hippocampus (McEwen, 1999). The structural changes caused by stress include atrophy and neurogenesis disorders. Chronic stress can cause an increase in plasma cortisol, causing a reduction in dendritic branches, the number of neurons, structural changes in the synaptic terminals and decreased neurogenesis in hippocampal tissue (Sapolsky *et al.*, 1990; Tanapat *et al.*, 1998). Glucocorticoids can produce such changes by affecting the cellular metabolism of neurons or increasing the sensitivity of the hippocampus to stimulatory amino acids and increasing extracellular glutamate levels (Sapolsky and Pulsinelli, 1985).

Stress, Cognition and Learning

Stress, depending on its origin, intensity and duration, effects cognition, which is (similarly to memory) formed in the hippocampus, amygdala and temporal lobe (McEwen & Sapolsky, 1995).

Stress activates the autonomic nervous system, central neurotransmitter and neuropeptide system, and the HPA-axis which has direct effects on the neuronal circuits necessary for data processing. Stress induces the release of lipophilic glucocorticoids which are able to cross the blood brain barrier and exert long term effects on both processing and cognition (Sandi, 2013).

Stress and the Immune System

Research has looked extensively at the relationship between stress and the immune system. It is well known that increased stress causes a decline in immune function, resulting in frequent illness (Khansari *et al.*, 1990). As long ago as 200 AC, Aelius Galenus, stated that melancholic women were more likely to suffer from cancer than their less melancholic counterparts (Reiche *et al.*, 2004). In the 1920's it was discovered that the activity of phagocytes was reduced in patients suffering from tuberculosis when emotional stress was induced (Ishigami, 1918). More recently, studies have supported these findings,

demonstrating that stress mediators pass through the blood brain barrier and exert their effects on the immune system.

Various receptors for a host of hormones that are involved in immune function are affected by stress, this includes: ACTH, CRH, vasoactive intestinal peptide, substance P, growth hormone, prolactin, and steroids (Reiche *et al.*, 2004; De la Fuente *et al.*, 1996; Gala and Medicine, 1991; Mantyh, 1991).

Stress and the Cardiovascular System

Stress, both in its acute and chronic forms, has been associated with a deleterious effect on the function of the cardiovascular system (Rozanski *et al.*, 1999; Kario *et al.*, 2003). Stress can cause an activation of the sympathetic nervous system, which causes an increase in the heart rate, strength of contraction, vasodilation of the arteries (of skeletal muscles), venoconstriction and arterial contraction in the spleen and kidneys (Herd, 1991). In other circumstances, stress may cause the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, which results in stimulation of the limbic system and a decrease or even stopping of the heart, decreased contractility, reduced cardiac impulse conduction, peripheral vasodilation and a drop in blood pressure (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). In addition to the effect stress has on the autonomic nervous system, stress can modulate endothelial cell function, resulting in increased platelet aggregation which increases the risk of thrombosis and ischemia (Rozanski *et al.*, 1999).

Stress and the Gastrointestinal Tract

Stress has been shown to effect the function of the GI tract, which includes affecting the absorption process, intestinal permeability, mucus and stomach secretion, functioning of the ion channels and GI inflammation(Collins and Physiology, 2001; Fatemeh *et al.*, 2011).

Many inflammatory GI diseases, including Crohn's disease and ulcerative diseases, are closely associated with stress (Hommes *et al.*, 2002). It has been proposed that stress during childhood may lead to these diseases in adulthood (Schwartz and Schwartz, 1983). Stress also affects the movement of the GI tract by preventing the stomach from emptying and accelerating colonic motility by affecting the myenteric plexus (Mönnikes *et al.*, 2001).

Stress and the Endocrine System

A mutual relationship exists between the endocrine system and stress. Stress affects the activity of the endocrine system and the endocrine system has many effects as a response to stress (Charmandari *et al.*, 2005; Ulrich-Lai and Herman, 2009). As previously discussed, minimal amounts of stress can activate the HPA-axis which is involved in different hormone secreting systems. Stress

can activate or change the activity of the hypothalamus, pituitary, adrenal glands, adrenergic system, pancreas, thyroid, and the gonads (Tilbrook *et al.*, 2000; Lupien and McEwen, 1997; Sapolsky, 2002).

Stress among students

Students are an investment in the future of a society, and their mental health and wellbeing are not only important but represent an important factor in a larger society's wellbeing. Psychological problems amongst the student population have been estimated to vary from between 2-50% at any given time. This means at any given time, if we take 10 random students, one student would have emotional conflicts which merit professional help (Farnsworth, 1970). Stress, anxiety and depression are common issues which plague the student population, with 25% of students reporting symptoms of depression (Beck and Young, 1978).

In the last few decades, the percentage of university students reporting the experience of psychological distress, anxiety and depression has increased greatly (Burris *et al.*, 2009; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2013; Roberts and Danoff-Burg, 2010). A survey conducted in 2015 found that 30 percent of students reported feeling stressed, and 21 percent reported sleeping difficulties, which negatively impacted on their academic performance. Additionally, university students regularly engage in unhealthy behaviours which predisposes them to serious health problems in later life (Heller and Sarmiento, 2016; Hopper and Moninger, 2017; Tran *et al.*, 2017; Scott-Sheldon *et al.*, 2008).

The problems and stressors students experience are complex and more intense than the problems experienced by those in the past. These include greater academic demands, adaptation to a new environment, changes in family relations, social life changes, exposure to new people, ideas and temptations. Other stressors include time pressures, fear of failure, struggling to establish an identity, pressure of academic excellence and tough competition (Kumaraswamy and el, 2013).

Stress Among Medical Students

Medical education is an inherently stressful and demanding path, regardless of where one decides to study it. However, among countries exists different course structures, coupled with different cultures and traditions which may lead to differences in the frequency and severity of experienced stress. Whilst an optimal level of stress can enhance learning, excess stress levels can lead to health problems which may link to the enhanced perception of stress that medical students experience (Hoe *et al.*, 2012; Abdulghani *et al.*, 2011). An example includes the USA where students are required to undertake a pre-medicine undergraduate degree before studying medicine. This does not exist in

Europe, and students as young as 18 can apply to study medicine. These factors, in addition to others like culture and tradition may contribute or minimize the exposure and perception of stress that students experience (Dyrbye *et al.*, 2014; Adam *et al.*, 2015; Mikolajczyk *et al.*, 2008).

United States of America

The literature shows evidence that stress and anxiety is high in US medical schools, with multi-institutional studies estimating that at least half of all medical students may be affected by burnout during their medical education (Dyrbye and Shanafelt, 2016; Dyrbye *et al.*, 2006b; Schwenk *et al.*, 2010).

American medical students start medical school with a lower prevalence of burnout and depression and a higher quality of life than similarly aged university graduates who pursue other careers (Brazeau *et al.*, 2014). However, once in medical school, students experience a greater amount of burnout and depressive symptoms and report a lower quality of life than their peers who chose to pursue other fields (Dyrbye *et al.*, 2014).

Nine US-based studies on stress found the incidence of stress and burnout, including pre-clinical medical students from 1998 until 2015, to be between 45 to 71% (Dahlin and Runeson, 2007; Dyrbye *et al.*, 2011; Dyrbye *et al.*, 2007; Dyrbye *et al.*, 2009, Dyrbye *et al.*, 2006a; Dyrbye *et al.*, 2008; Guthrie *et al.*, 1998, Kjeldstadli *et al.*, 2006; Peisah *et al.*, 2009).

United Kingdom

Doctors in the U.K have higher rates of mental disorders than the general population, including higher suicide rates. 20% of doctors report using substances to help them cope, and 7% of medics will have a substance misuse problem during their lifetime (Fowlie and alcoholism, 1999; Hawton *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, it is essential to look after the mental health of future health care professionals by promoting good health practices starting in medical school to facilitate the transition into an inherently stressful career (Bogg *et al.*, 2001; Hardy *et al.*, 1997; Rout, 1999).

Dental students in the U.K have reported that up to 72% suffer from stress with medical students and doctors reporting levels as high as 39%. Excessive alcohol consumption ranged from 47% as a second-year dental student to 25% as a final year student and 41% as a qualified dentist. Medicine showed a steady increase in excessive alcohol consumption with 33% of second year students, 43% of final year students and 54% of qualified doctors drinking excessively. Illicit drug use ranged from 47% as second year students, 54% as final year students, and 51% as dentists; medical students show similar illicit drug use. Up to 67% of dental students and 47% of medical students appeared to suffer from pathological

anxiety with stress in medical students ranging from 32% in final year students to 39% as PRHOs (Newbury-Birch *et al.*, 2002).

Romania

Research in Romanian medical schools demonstrate that first year medical students exhibit the highest levels of depression, whilst students who are graduating experience the most perceived stress (Iorga *et al.*, 2018). In one study, conducted in the University of Medicine in Bucharest, it was shown that over 15% of the students met the criteria for burnout. Emotional exhaustion was seen in 17% and depersonalization in 28% of the students; a lack of personal accomplishment was felt in 11% of the students. Clinical alexithymia (which is difficulty identifying one's feelings or distinguishing them from bodily sensations as well as difficulty communicating one's emotions to others) was seen in 6% of the students. Clinical alexithymia seems to positively correlate with the perception of subjective distress. (Sifneos and psychosomatics, 1973; Taylor *et al.*, 1999)

The percentage of perceived stress experienced by Romanian medical students was 26% (16% of males and 31% of females). Females appear to suffer from emotional exhaustion and lack of personal accomplishment, as well as alexithymia and perceived stress more than their male counterparts (Popa-Velea *et al.*, 2017).

Eastern *vs* Western Europe

Studies have demonstrated that depressive symptoms in medical students are more prevalent in Eastern European countries when compared to Western European countries. In Germany 26.7% of males and 22.8% of female medical student's report suffering from depressive symptoms. In Denmark, 24.9% of male and 12.1% of female students suffer from depressive symptoms.

In Bulgaria, depressive symptoms are seen in 42.9% of males and 33.8% of females, and in Poland 45.5% of males and 27.3% of females report depressive symptoms. This difference between Eastern and Western Europe persists 15 years after political changes took place and even when the results are adjusted considering the differences in income, the differences still cannot be explained (Mikolajczyk *et al.*, 2008).

In summary, stress and anxiety appear to affect medical students disproportionately when compared to other university students who study non-medical courses or the general population. It is clear, whilst discrepancies are present between different medical schools and different countries, this is a global problem that needs to be addressed. Stress and anxiety can lead to depression and burnout whilst the individual is a student or once they have become a physician. Stress and anxiety may also lead to substance abuse, illicit drug use and other maladaptive coping strategies.

Stress among international medical students

In the academic year 2014-2015, international students comprised 19% of the UK student population and generated £10.8 billion of export earnings. The benefits international students bring is not limited to their host country but their own countries once they return home. (Alharbi and Smith, 2018) The following section aims to highlight the sources of stress for international medical students, individual differences, and mental health.

Acculturative Stress

When students decide to study abroad and must leave their home country, this presents a variety of challenges, with the most obvious being the need to adjust to a new environment. This is known as acculturative stress. Acculturative stress can be felt as perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, change, guilt, and other non-specific feelings. Studies have found factors that reduce acculturative stress which include geographic origin, host language fluency, social support networks and social connectedness (Chavajay and Skowronek, 2008).

Language Proficiency

A potential barrier and source of stress for international students is their language proficiency within the host country. Low levels of language proficiency directly influence their academic achievement and make the understanding of lectures and the success in oral and written examinations more difficult, therefore increasing their levels of stress. High levels of social support and seeking help from the university make this adjustment easier (Alharbi and Smith, 2018).

Perceived Discrimination

International students also encounter feelings of rejection by people in their host country which is a source of stress. Such discrimination often occurs in public places or at the university within the host country. Research shows a direct correlation between prejudice and stress. This has a direct impact on wellbeing and self-esteem of students which then impacts the adjustment process (Nilsson *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, international students are less prepared to deal with incidents of prejudice or racism, and so they may not be psychologically ready for such an experience. Learning how to manage and cope with racism/prejudice is an important adjustment required for international students whilst studying at university (Chen, 1999).

Loneliness

The feeling of loneliness international students experience may be due to poor adjustment, low language proficiency or perceived discrimination. Another

reason is they no longer have close contact with their family and friends. Three kinds of loneliness are experienced by international students: personal loneliness due to reduced family contact, social loneliness and cultural loneliness due to the relative absence of their cultural and/or linguistic environment (Sawir *et al.*, 2008).

Academic Stress

Stress is a common feeling felt by students worldwide regardless of if they choose to study at home or abroad. However, international students encounter greater academic hurdles due to the difference in the learning styles and teaching methodologies of their home and host country (Chavajay and Skowronek, 2008; Irizarry and Marlowe, 2010).

Clinical work for international medical students is also described as more stressful due to language difficulties which can lead to mistakes, as well as a lack of familiarity with the beliefs, culture and values of the host country's healthcare system (Mikkonen *et al.*, 2016).

International students usually have high grades in their home country and replicating their academic excellence in a host country may lead to stress and depression if these expectations are not met (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2008).

Individual differences

International students experience of stressors may result in differing levels of stress and their reactions may differ due to individual differences, these include:

Age: Studies have shown that mature students report lower levels of stress and depression when compared to younger students. However, the research related to gender and its association with acculturative stress is limited, and the results are inconsistent (Poyrazli *et al.*, 2002). On one side, researchers argue younger students are less mature and competent at dealing with acculturative encounters and consequently are more prone to stress and depression. On the flip side, other researchers argue that younger students are better equipped to function and adjust in a new environment due to their flexibility and openness to learn about new languages, cultures, and lifestyles. It should also be mentioned that researchers have shown previous travel experience helps to protect against acculturative stress (Akhtar and Kröner-Herwig, 2015).

Gender: International female students suffer from depression and anxiety far more than their male counterparts. It should be noted that female students response to stressors differs from male students with females consuming fewer alcoholic beverages or cigarettes (Russell *et al.*, 2008). However, male graduates report greater feelings of loneliness than their female counterparts (Poyrazli *et al.*, 2010). Female international students that had academic concerns scored higher on the Perceived Stress Scale than males, suggesting that female students suffered from academic related stress far more than males (Bang, 2009).

Ethnicity: Research has shown that European international students suffer from acculturative stress much less than other ethnic groups (Constantine *et al.*, 2004). This may be because European students overall are ethnically white, and as such subjected to less discrimination than other ethnicities with a darker complexion. European students may also be more likely to be accepted as they have fewer problems in their fluency of the English language. An empirical study found that language difficulties are faced more by African, Asian, and Latin ethnicities, and this may contribute to their adjustment difficulties. Another study demonstrated that African and Asian groups perceive discrimination when studying abroad, whilst their European counterparts do not (Sodowsky *et al.*, 1992). Similarly, another study demonstrated that being a European student who studies abroad predicts a lower level of perceived discrimination when compared to other ethnicities (Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007). Furthermore, it was demonstrated that international students who do not socialise are at a higher risk of experiencing acculturative stress (Poyrazli *et al.*, 2004).

Coping Strategies

The way in which we react to stressors is known as a coping stratagy, and whilst there may be many strategies we can use, their success depends on the type of stressors and the individual experiencing them (Tseng and Newton, 2002).

The reaction to academic stress of international students differs from home students, with international students reporting greater cognitive reactions (e.g., strategies to reduce stress) compared to home students who exhibit behavioural reactions (e.g., smoking, consuming alcohol). Additionally, female international students experience more emotional reactions (*e.g.* trembling, stuttering, headaches, weight loss/gain) and behavioural reactions (crying, self-abuse) than male students (Misra and Castillo, 2004, Wechsler *et al.*, 1995).

International students often use avoidance, repression and other passive coping strategies (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008). Other research has shown religion and spirituality can be used as a coping mechanism when dealing with acculturation and perceived stress (Gardner *et al.*, 2014).

Social Support

Social support can help alleviate stress during a transition to a new culture. Research demonstrates that international students report lower levels of social support than their domestic rivals. Additionally, students who are single also report lower levels of social support than their married counterparts. Moreover, male students benefit from relationships with university faculty members, whilst female students benefit more from relationships with other students and a flexible curriculum (Mallinckrodt and Leong, 1992, Hechanova-Alampay *et al.*, 2002).

Personality Traits

A student's personality traits can greatly affect their response to a stressful event. Students with perfectionism traits and being hard on themselves report higher levels of acculturative stress, depression and satisfaction with their grades (Hamamura and Laird, 2014). International students with neuroticism experience higher amounts of stress and acculturative stress, whilst students who are more open to their new environment experience higher levels of wellbeing and lower amounts of stress (Hirai *et al.*, 2015).

Length of Stay

Surprisingly, the time spent in a foreign country is unrelated to the stress students experience throughout their stay in a host country. One study even suggests longer stays in the host country correlate to lower psychological adjustment (Wilton and Constantine, 2003).

Supporting International Students

Universities should make it a priority to help international students adjust to their new surroundings and provide adequate social support. Whilst this recommendation applies to both domestic and international students, it is the international students who may need greater support due to the variety of stressors they encounter when moving to their host country. Universities can provide academic orientation, improve student counselling and strengthen language support (Zhai, 2002). Additionally, universities need to be aware of help seeking behaviours, which may vary between individuals and cultures. An example of this includes a study which demonstrated that international students preferred to confide in friends and family as opposed to seeking help from university counselling services (Baloglu, 2000). University councillors should be made aware of how individuals and various cultures view the expression of feelings and emotions and how they are typically shared (Komiya and Eells, 2001).

Study on international medical students – a single university center

Current research is limited when exploring the stressors which impact on the health and wellbeing of international medical students. The research currently available becomes even more limited if Chinese students, who make up the largest population of international students, are not considered. In Romania, Chinese students make up a minority of the international students, and as such, exploring the causes of stress in international medical students may

lead to insights that can be applied to international medical students of other ethnicities.

Whilst the average opinion considers young adults immune from stress, anxiety and depression; a growing literature of evidence suggests that students experience an increased prevalence of poor health and psychological disorders when compared to their peers who choose to not pursue further education (Hussain *et al.*, 2013).

The many demands of a medical education and training may adversely affect a student's physical and mental health. As has been reported many times over, medical students often suffer from depression, anxiety and stress. It has been demonstrated that previously healthy students develop stress and depression after they begin their medical studies (Henning *et al.*, 1998, Roberts *et al.*, 2001, Dyrbye *et al.*, 2007, Yusoff *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, post graduate training and job opportunities can be additional factors which trigger psychological illness. This may be observed by the statistic that physicians have a higher suicide rate when compared to the general population. (Schernhammer and Colditz, 2004)

This present study focusses on the measurement of factors prevalent in the development of stress, anxiety, and depression in medical school students. The data was collected via the form of an online anonymous questionnaire, voluntarily from 161 International medical students in "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, in Iasi, Romania. The study was conducted between November 2020 and January 2021 and included students in all years of study (years 1-6).

The questionnaire contains items that cover various aspects that include sociodemographic data, health related items, social and academic related items, lifestyle items, fear of COVID-19 scale and DASS-21 (Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale), and the PSQI (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index).

All analysis were performed using the *IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) version 27. Where appropriate, descriptive analysis aimed to identify the means and standard deviations (M ± st. dev.).

The statistical analysis of data revealed interesting results:

- most of the international students originate from Israel (51.55%),
- international students practice the Islamic faith (57.76%, n=93) and Christian faith (25.47%, n=41),
- most of the students had a healthy weight (64%, n=103), whilst 12.4% (n=20) were underweight, and 23.6% (n=38) were overweight/obese,
- most students do not have a parent who practices medicine (78.26%, n=126),
- a minority of (10.56%, n=17) the students' parents are divorced,
- most of the students (75.16%, n=121) did not study abroad prior to commencing their medical studies in Romania,

- a minority of the students (18%, n=29) have other siblings studying in the same medical school,
- a larger number of the students (34.78%, n=56) have relatives studying at the same university,
- the average amount of time spent studying (per week) was 10 hours, 46 minutes (± 5 hours),
- over half of the students reported that their fathers (55.28%, n=89) and their mothers (59.01%, n=95) are educated at a university level,
- most students did not suffer from a chronic disease (86.96%, n=140; a minority of the students suffer from a chronic disease 13.04% (n=21),
- most of the students have not suffered from a psychiatric illness (86.34%, n=139). a minority of the students suffer from a psychiatric disease (4.35%, n=7),
- less than half of the students have parents who suffer from a chronic disease (30.43%, n=49),
- a small proportion of the students have parents who suffer from a psychiatric illness (4.97%, n=8),
- the average amount of time the international students spend with their families per year is 14 weeks (±11 weeks),
- the student respondents reported they had an average of 5.65 (±7.91) close friends at the medical school,
- most of the students achieved the maximum number of credits (60) for their previous academic year (71%, n=115),
- a third (33.54%, n=54) of the students reported high/very high energy levels, similarly another third of the students reported low/very low energy levels over the past month (33.54%, n=54),
- in contrast, only a small minority of the students reported low/very low energy levels normally (4.97%, n=8); whilst the majority of the students reported that their energy levels are normally high/very high (65.22%, n=105),
- most of the students reported experiencing back pain within the past month (80%, n=129),
- most of the students have experienced headaches within the last month (78.88%, n=127).
- over half the students have had digestive problems within the past 30 days (60.25%, n=97),
- under half of the students have experienced a change of appetite within the past month (45.34%, n=73),
- most of the students are satisfied or very satisfied with their accommodation (72.67%, n= 117),

- most of the students are satisfied/very satisfied with their academic results (56.52%, n=91),
- a minority of the students are unsatisfied/very unsatisfied with their exam performance (6.21%, n=10),
- most of the students are satisfied or very satisfied with the relationship with their colleagues (61% n=98),
- a third of the students smoke cigarettes (31.68%, n=51),
- a small minority of the students use recreational drugs (13.66%, n=22),
- under half of the students regularly take part in sports (40.99%, n=66),
- a minority of the students consider their lifestyle to be sedentary or very sedentary (9.94%, n=16),
- a minority of the students consider their diets unhealthy/very unhealthy 15.52% (n=25).
- over half of the students consider their academic results to be above average or excellent (60.25%, n=97),
- the sleep quality of the students is poor when compared to students from other medical schools (PSQI score: 7.72 ± 3.82),
- over a third of the students suffer from depression (37%, n=60),
- over a half of the students suffer from anxiety (52%, n=83),
- almost a fifth of the students suffer from stress (19%, n=30),
- a minority of the students demonstrate a high level of fear from coronavirus (10.6%, n=17),

Conclusions

The results indicate a high prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression in international medical students at "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, in Iasi, Romania. As discussed previously in this chapter this may be due to a multitude of factors. However, it is most likely due to the cumulative effects of both acute and chronic stressors that medical students are subjected to throughout their six years of study. Additionally, international medical students are often far away from home and spend much less time with their families. Notable results from this study are that over a half of the respondent's suffer from anxiety, and over a third suffer from mild depression.

To safeguard the mental health of medical students, and future physicians, changes are required at all medical schools, and guidance should be made available to international medical students throughout their studies. These changes should be continued and adapted throughout a doctor's professional career with adequate surveillance required to prevent the consequences associated with depression, anxiety and stress as well as to ensure the wellbeing of physicians and patients alike.

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THE UNESCO STORY, THE CIRCLE METHOD – CREATING BRIDGES AMONG PEOPLE

IRINA GHEORGHIU, CARMEN ANTONITA

This chapter focuses on the Story Circle method and the feedback obtained from training adult educators to use the Story Circle method in their work as a way of developing their intercultural communication competencies (ICC). To this end, insights into the Story Circle approach, relying on storytelling and sharing, are presented as well as the way it was applied to a group of professors from the University of Medicine in Iasi, Romania. The research methodology for collecting and analyzing the data is followed by their results and discussion. Our conclusion highlights some positive effects of using or taking part in the Story Circle experience.

Introduction

Immigration, refugee crises, Brexit, demographic changes, globalization and the internationalization of education and business have made the European Union and the whole world more diverse and complex. It is common perception that "we no longer live-in isolated territories" (Bekemans, L., 2016, 1); "we now live in one world" (Giddens 2002, 7). However, this planet is growing "both more global and more divided, more thoroughly connected and more intricately partitioned" (Geertz, 2000; BBC, 2018; Southwood, 2020) as other cultures touch our daily lives (Bekemans, L., 2016, 1).

These changes make intercultural communication competence a necessary skill in almost all sectors. The Intercultural communication competence (ICC) has become an invaluable asset in this world, where interactions with people from different cultures are common. Developing and enhancing the intercultural communication competence of adult educators have become a must and are one of the main foci of European projects.

This chapter also describes the Story Circle method used in the INCrEAsE European project and the feedback obtained from training adult educators to incorporate it in their work to develop their ICC. In what follows the Story Circle approach and the activities related to its implementation in our institutions are presented: first, the research methodology for collecting and analyzing the data, then the results and discussion. Our conclusion shows some of the implications concerning the use of this method.

The Story circle method

The UNESCO Story Circle method is a state-of-the-art method, relying on storytelling and story sharing and their benefits. In addition, its new refreshing approach aims to develop individuals' intercultural competencies by enabling participants to actually practice some intercultural skills (*e.g.* listening for understanding) through strong emotional connections and undergo a transformative experience unlike traditional intercultural training.

Storytelling and story sharing have always been a natural form of communication, an art and a reliable teaching and learning tool in education. There are even voices (Abrahamsen, 1998) holding the belief that storytelling and story sharing lie at the basis of teaching. It is extensively used with all ages, and its effectiveness as a teaching and learning tool has been demonstrated with very young as well as adult learners. Storytelling and sharing engages both the teller and listener in a synchronic activity enabling them to access or express, organize and retain information, make meaning out of it and get involved in reflection. This helps them relate acquired knowledge to new knowledge (Roney, 1996; Andrews *et al.,* 2009). It creates a reassuring atmosphere where one's ideas and values are appreciated. This builds trust and accountability to everybody involved in the storytelling process. Learning from one another and developing a genuine sense of self-worth results in a deep sense of belonging to a community. Storytelling and sharing enables participants to learn about themselves but also gives them insights into their peers' worlds (Wright *et al.,* 2013).

Storytelling and sharing engages participants at a high level, both cognitively and emotionally, which improves the learning experience as information associated with emotions can be easily retained, recalled and applied (Abrahamson, 1998).

The UNESCO Story Circle method was initiated by Darla Deardorff in 2020 before it had been successfully applied in several countries. It is focused on developing ICC and relies on the sharing of personal experiences within small groups of people (three to five) who are as diverse as possible but use the same language. Creating an atmosphere of respect, trust and safety is essential. The main rule governing this experience is that, while listening to the stories as they are shared by participants, no one is allowed to make comments, ask questions or interrupt. The experience becomes an exercise in *listening for understanding* instead of listening in order to reply or judge, which implies respect for the narrator and intense focus on getting meaning from the stories.

Listening for understanding requires the listener to concentrate on the speaker, avoiding distractors of any kind: the impulse to add similar a personal experience, make comments or jump to conclusion, etc. It is a complex process and participants need training and practice based on their intention to understand the speaker. Thus, they will understand their message and comprehend the information it contains, being able to recall its details. Focusing on and engaging

with the message will prevent the listeners from thinking about their response while listening. Their response focuses on the message and not on their own experience or opinions.

Listening for understanding helps people feel comfortable sharing information, build a feeling of trust within the circle and develop long lasting positive relationships. It helps one extend their knowledge, identify problems and access different perspectives.

The process fully engages participants, body and soul and offers excellent practice in empathy and self-regulation. Participants get invaluable lessons in how to refrain from interrupting or making comments, how to respect and accept other perspectives or how to manage and express their emotions and ideas.

The experience consists of two rounds of personal sharing/storytelling and flashbacks as well as a debriefing. Thus, the first round enables participants to get to know each other: the prompts they have to deal with are personal (*e.g.* our colleagues were invited to tell us their names and the story of their names). The second round relies on intercultural experiences (*e.g.* our colleagues shared a memorable experience they had with a person who was different from them in terms of age, gender, background, nationality, ideas, etc.). After participants have completed the second round, they engage in flashbacks, sharing the most memorable moments they heard in each story.

The debriefing at the end of the experience invites participants to step back and reflect on the entire process they have just experienced, exploring the lessons they learned and the next steps to take in developing their ICC. This stage can centre round challenging questions which stimulate discussion. It is essential in the development of ICC.

The Manual proposes an evaluation form to assess the outcomes of the experience and an action plan to be completed by participants with a view to further developing their ICC. After experiencing a Story Circle journey, participants will be more open-minded and respectful in their relationships with others. The activity raises their awareness of their prejudices and biases and of the need to open to and accept different perspectives. They will value cultural diversity and intercultural interactions and appreciate them as learning opportunities opening windows to knowledge. Furthermore, the experience raises their awareness of the role that ICC plays in their lives and therefore, they will allow themselves time to integrate its development into their daily schedule.

Applied research

The Story Circle method was applied to a group of teachers as part of the INCrEAsE project. The European project aims to enhance adult educators' intercultural communication competencies so that they can meet their multicultural and multilingual learners' needs (The Increase project, 2020).

Despite the growing needs and interests in intercultural communication, due to the multicultural European context, most professionals working in adult education have no training in this field. The group our institution (EuroED Foundation, Iasi) worked with consisted of six professors at the University of Medicine Iasi, Romania, who teach diverse disciplines (foreign language, psychology, IT, etc.) to a wide range of international students from various cultural backgrounds. The teachers knew each other, yet they had never spent time together in such emotional experiences. They were diverse in terms of their age, experience, gender and religion.

The activity unfolded online on the Zoom video conferencing software platform. As there were few participants, breakout rooms were not used. Participants used Romanian as a common language of communication. The session lasted 120 minutes.

The agenda was known to each of the participants:

10 min – Welcome and introductions

10 min – Introduction to Story Circles and guidelines

10 min – 'Getting to know each other' activity

45 min – Story Circles in small group + flashbacks

45 – Debriefing and conclusions

The participants were familiarized with the main guidelines of the method: "Every person has a personal experience that can be shared. We all can learn something from others. Listening for understanding can be transformational" (Deardorff, 2020, 71). The tutor highlighted the role that listening for understanding plays in communication and encouraged the participants to listen to speakers and refrain from making any comments. She also required them to keep to the allotted time as much as possible so that everybody got equal time in the group, and nobody dominated the activity. Participation was not obligatory, but everybody was willing and seemed to be motivated to share their story. The questions the teachers were supposed to focus on were presented on slides in a PowerPoint presentation.

At first, the teachers shared the story of their names, what their names meant and how they got them. They had two minutes in which to tell their story and no interruption was allowed. After that short introduction, the tutor moved on to the next stage and asked the teachers to share a story centred around a memorable experience they had with a person who was different from them (age, religion, gender, socio-economic, culture, nationality, etc.). They also had to tell what they learned about themselves, including the other people involved in that experience. The tutor modelled that stage by sharing his/her own story and then allowed the participants some time to reflect on and select their own experiences. Everybody was tuned in with the guidelines of the method and listened for understanding, paying attention to what the speaker said, their gestures, facial expressions, etc., without asking questions or making comments,

sharing the story – invited peers to focus on the story and see it from different angles. Once everybody finished their story, they shared their flashbacks and revealed what they had found memorable from listening to each story (in 15 seconds). The participants were invited to a debriefing where they discussed the main topics of the stories they heard, what surprised or challenged them and what they learned about themselves. Thus, the main topics were cultural differences, misunderstandings caused by not having enough information and knowledge about the people they were working with, wrong assumptions and generalizations they usually made when meeting strangers or prejudices they were not aware of. The activity raised their awareness about the role cultural differences play in misunderstandings that may damage relationships.

As for what they wanted to explore after the experience, they agreed to read about other peoples' history, geography, traditions, etc, which would bridge gaps between people. Listening to other individuals' cultural experiences would also be useful. Regarding what they gained from the activity, the participants stated that they would be able to forge better relationships with those who are different from them. They said that listening for understanding came first, followed by how to create interactions, and build relationships; this may differ from culture to culture. The participants thought they had become more culturally self-aware of their cultural background and its impact on their behaviour and communication.

As a follow up, the participants were invited to devise an action plan meant to develop their ICC along the following lines outlined by the manual: "Identify 2-3 intercultural elements that you would like to focus on for yourself: What will you do to further enhance, develop and practice these inter-cultural elements? How will you continue to engage specifically in a positive manner with those who are different from you? What else will you do to further intercultural competencies?" (Deardorff, 2020, 78).

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to the participants during an online meeting with the tutors after they completed the training course organized within the implementation of the project. The participants were open and cooperative in answering the questions or explaining the problems they faced. The items of the questionnaire were recommended in the instructions accompanying the Story Circle method.

The items of the questionnaire covered responses related to the participants' general attitudes towards the Story Circle method, their understanding of what listening for understanding means, how their own values, beliefs, and actions could affect others' experiences, how they viewed the world and what other

people were thinking or feeling. The completed questionnaires were analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis.

Results – Analysis of the questionnaire administered to the participants

The questionnaire was answered by all seven participants (the number of participants required by the application of the project). The participants were all university educators teaching foreign languages or medicine to mixed groups of Romanian and international students studying medicine in Iasi. The questionnaire was administered in the Google form format online. Each question had a score ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (the highest – very well).

For the first question, the participants appreciated that the experience had helped them to understand how important it is to pay attention to people's stories. They found out that each colleague had interesting stories to share, which everybody could learn from and pass on. Thus, they agreed that the experience made them respect other people more (Figure 1). The results show that 71.4% graded the question with 5 out of 5 and 28.6% with 4 scores.
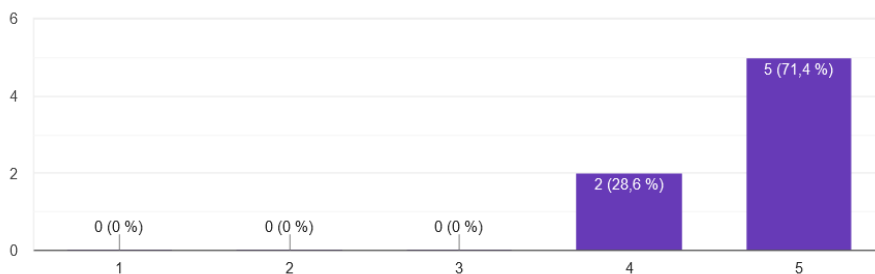
Figure 1

The next question got the same high score (5 scores out of 5 for 71.4% and 2 out of 4 for 28.6%). The participants stated that the experience helped them understand what the "listen for understanding skill means".

All of them held the belief that listening for understanding helped them to listen to the other participants' views and experiences and understand their situations and beliefs. They said they 'focused on the story they heard and managed to stay focused and discard any thoughts that accidentally came across their mind'.
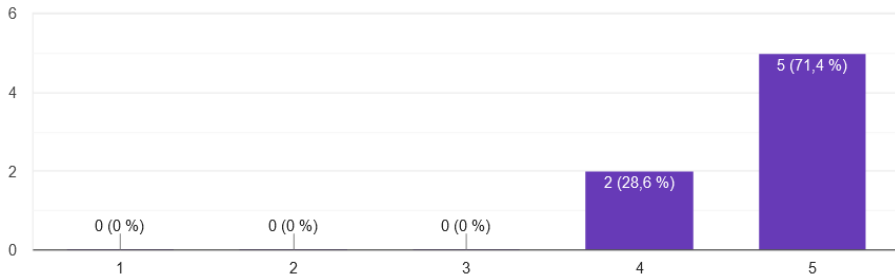
Figure 2

Question 3 made the participants reflect on the similarities and differences of people from diverse backgrounds (5 scores of 4 for 71.4% and 2 out of 5 for 28.6%). Most of the participants believed the experience channeled their thoughts more towards the similarities than the differences among people, probably because, although they were different in terms of age or experience, they all worked in the same field.
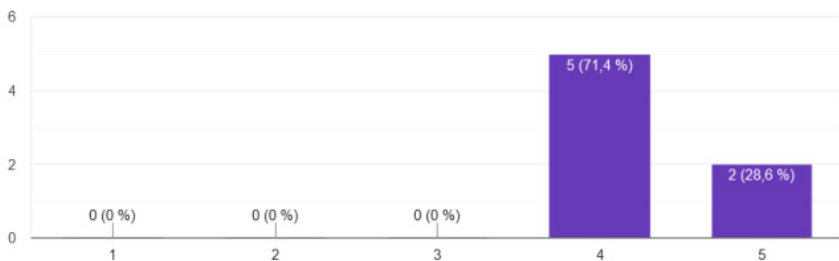

Figure 3

The participants were also of the opinion that the experience had helped them to understand how they viewed the world (1 score of 3 for 14.3%, 3 scores of 4 for 42.9% and 3 out of 5 for 42.9%). They realized that the reflection moments enriched their experience and the time they spent on processing what they had witnessed. This allowed them to go beyond the surface of the stories and discover meanings they had not been aware of.
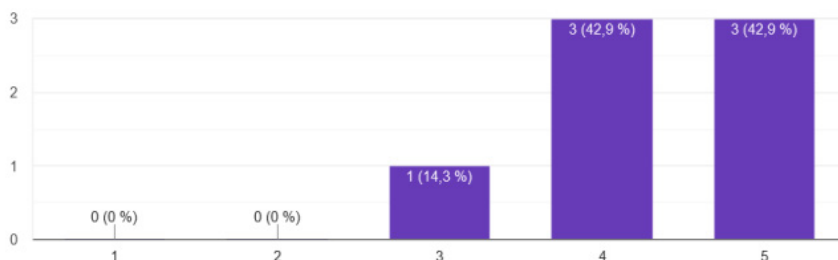
Figure 4

The participants also held the belief that the activity helped them to understand what other people were thinking or feeling (1 score of 3 for 14.3%, 2 out of 4 for 28.6% and 4 out of 5 for 57.1%), because while telling their stories, people also mentioned the way they thought or felt about the events. Some stated that the exposure to a variety of stories showed them the richness of our world of feelings and helped them understand their colleagues better.
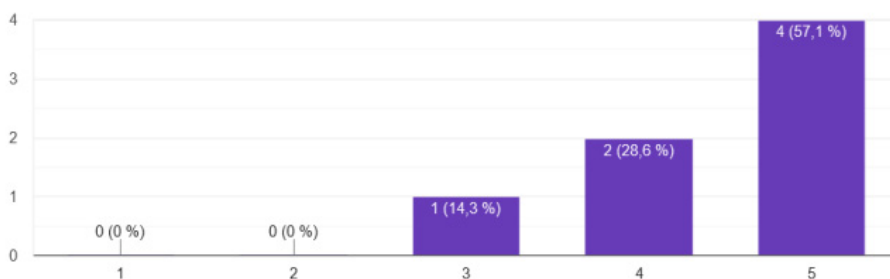

Figure 5

This activity helped the participants understand how their own values, beliefs and actions can affect other(s') experiences (3 scores of 4 for 42.9% and 4 out of 5 for 57.1%). By telling their story they opened up and allowed other people to listen to and consider their perspectives, which invited them to reflect on their own views. This is in tune with research which has shown that when we tell stories, parts of the listener's brain are activated so that those stories become part of the listener's own ideas and experiences. Telling stories, therefore, shapes a listeners' thinking and lifestyle. Moreover, the brains of the storyteller and the listener can harmonize, as both activities are spatially and temporally connected (Stephens *et al.,* 2010).
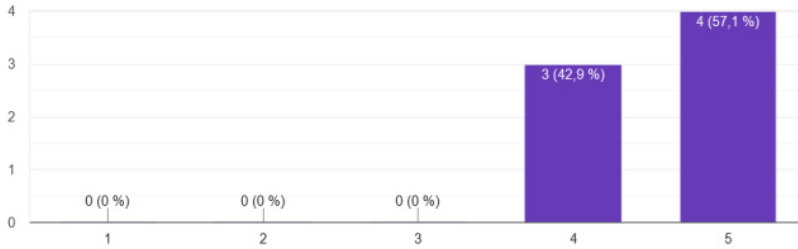
Figure 6

The activity helped them build relationships with people from different backgrounds. 71.4% rated this 4 out of 5 and 28.6% 2 out of 5. Furthermore, sharing stories and talking about what really mattered to them strengthened their connections with their colleagues.
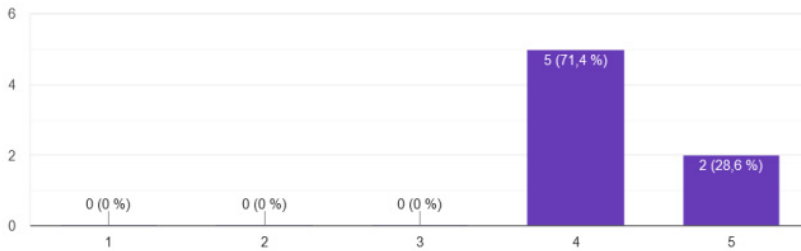

Figure 7

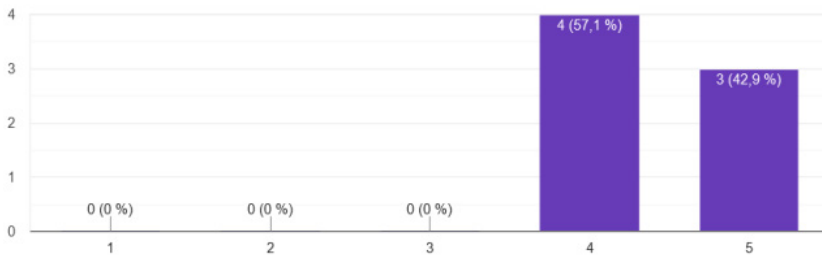Everybody agreed that the length of the activity was appropriate: 4 scores of 4 (57.1%) and 3 out of 5 (42.9%).

Figure 8

There were no doubts that the activity was well planned and organized (100%).
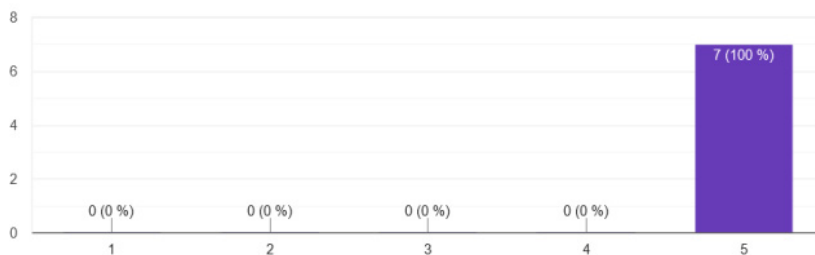
Figure 9

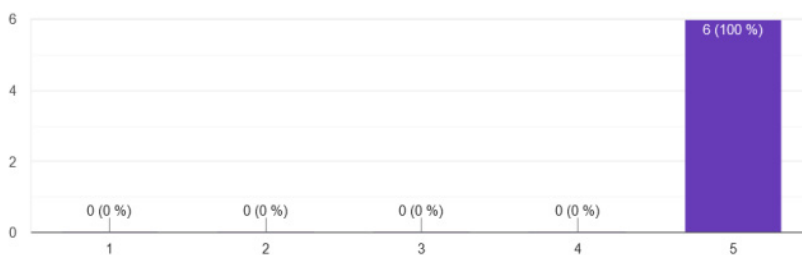The activity was also a good investment of their time.

Figure 10

They all stated that they intended to use the skills and knowledge acquired in this activity: 1 score of 4 (14.3%) and 6 scores of 5 (85.7%). As a result of this experience, they held that they would be more open and patient as well as speak and listen more attentively (Fig 11).
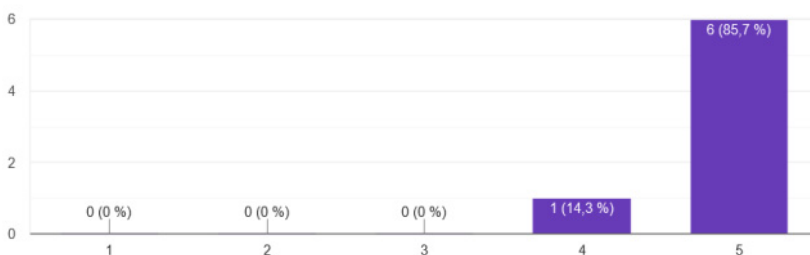

Figure 11

Asked if they plan torecommend this kind of activity to others, all the respondents (100%) agreed with the statement.
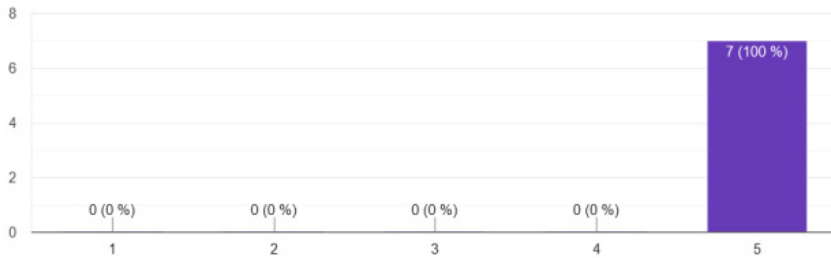
Figure 12

To sum up, the analysis of the questionnaires showed that the participants enjoyed their Story Circle experience and all the activities they went through. The teachers agreed that the Story Circle experience provided them with excellent practice in active listening and empathy, improving their ICC, which is so important in their field.

Research has shown significant benefits to storytelling (Deardorff, 2020; Moore, 2018, Soule, 2002, Thompson, 2018). The Story Circle experience also highlights benefits that the participant identified with during our discussions in the debriefing section:

a) The importance of story sharing

All the participants found the experience enriching, and they all agreed that they gained by listening to accounts of their colleagues' diverse memories. All the international stories they heard gave new insights into a better global understanding.

I now realize how important stories and the words we use are. Listening to stories has the power to touch people emotionally, which makes them reflect on their own values and beliefs. I felt that telling stories is like a journey you share with people, enabling them to feel, live and understand things from your perspective.

b) Creating bonds

Sharing one's stories with others creates bonds within the group as it invites everybody to reflect on the speaker's story and connect with them. Sharing stories and talking about what matters to them is an effective way to connect with their colleagues as well as the people around them.

Sharing stories is a way to bring people together. All my colleagues listened. I wasn't interrupted at all. Then they told me what impressed them most in my story. I felt a deep sense of connection of having been listened to and understood. Personally, it took some time and energy to share my story, but I realized I wasn't alone. I felt all my colleagues' support and that my story was worth sharing.

Sharing these stories gave us the chance to spend quality time together.

c) Feeling respected and valued

The experience enabled the participants to realize that they all have something which can influence others to share with their colleagues. They felt respected and valued and understood that their story matters.

I told them my story, and all my colleagues listened without any of the usual interruptions. Thus, I didn't lose the thread of my thoughts and could create a coherent story, even though the events happened years ago.

d) Clarifying perspectives

Sharing stories helped the participants learn new things about themselves. They all agreed that it can help to clarify what is important. They appreciated the reflection moments when they had to focus on their values and priorities.

I was able to complete my story and give meaning of it. It was clear to me why I selected it out of so many other experiences.

It helped me reaffirm my values.

My colleagues helped me understand my story by coming up with their own experiences and knowledge.

e) Reduce stress and tension

Sharing one's story in front of an audience may be an act of courage because it can be a daunting experience but finding that they had a voice which was listened to and respected helped them relax. This experience also helped them reaffirm their values, which induced a sense of peace and wellbeing.

I felt relaxed and happy. I realized that my colleagues learned something from my story, which gave them a new perspective on the topic. Sharing my experience made me a bit uncomfortable at first. However, once I saw my colleagues listen so attentively, I felt confident.

f) Helping people/healing effect – *This experience made me think that my experiences may help people. I felt good about being able to pass on my life lessons to others.*

Conclusions

Storytelling is central to our existence. Moreover, it is one of our most fundamental communication methods, including a natural exchange between the storyteller and the listener, creating bridges between them to understand and bond with each other. All the participants stated that they enjoyed the session, which was dynamic and interesting and could be applied to their context. They highly appreciated the method for stimulating human interaction and building relationships. They promised to further develop their intercultural competencies and include the "Story Circle" experience in their activities with their students.

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CREATING CULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS

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Introduction

Cultural competence brings together behaviours, attitudes and policies, which exist in a system or with professionals that allow them to function effectively and appropriately in intercultural contexts (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020). Cultural competence includes knowledge about diverse cultural groups, attitudes towards them and the skills needed to address them appropriately (Seeleman *et al.,* 2009).

Cultural competence, therefore, allows an individual to function properly in different cultural contexts (Frawley *et al.,* 2020), ensuring understanding and respect for cultural differences and similarities within and between groups (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020). The concept of cultural competence was developed by social workers and psychological counsellors in the early 1980s (Nadan, 2017; Frawley *et al.,* 2020) and later extended to other fields, such as medicine (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020), business, education and social sciences (Frawley *et al.,* 2020), worldwide.

Cultural competence refers to both an individual's own and others' understanding of the "values, beliefs and contexts through which knowledge is produced, shared and interpreted". Culturally competent individuals manage to evolve from an ethnocentric framework, through a process of critical reflection and cultural self-assessment. The essential elements to achieve cultural competence are, on the one hand, the recognition and respect of diversity and, on the other hand, effective intercultural communication. Cultural competence aims to create a multidimensional vision of the world, which ensures collaboration and functioning in multicultural, transcultural and intercultural spaces (Frawley *et al.,* 2020).

The challenges and complexities of multicultural environments have led to the definition of two other concepts, starting from the concept of cultural competence: *cultural humility* and *structural competence.*

The concept of *cultural humility* was introduced in 1998, initially in medicine and public health and later in other fields, such as nursing, community psychology and social assistance (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020). According to this concept, a person cannot achieve full competence in another person's culture; they need to be aware of cultural diversity through a process of self-

evaluation and self-criticism throughout their lives. Thus, cultural humility is a long-term approach to cultural diversity, in the sense of permanent adjustments needed to eliminate inequities between members of different cultures, promote cultural sensitivity and mitigate or eliminate bias (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016). Cultural humility also means that culture must not be limited to dimensions, such as race and ethnicity but must also include aspects related to the culture of medical or public health professionals, who must show "humility" in their dealings with patients, families and the communities they serve (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020).

Structural competence is the institutional approach to cultural competence, which captures institutional biases and the relevance of structural determinants of physician-patient interactions, such as the manner, place and timing of health care delivery, medical infrastructure and the definition of disease, health and culture (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016). A competent cultural system values diversity, has cultural self-assessment capacity, realizes the dynamics of interaction between different cultures and develops ways to adapt to diversity (Frawley *et al.,* 2020).

Cultural competence in the medical field

Healthcare professionals around the world are required to provide medical care to an increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse patients (Johnstone & Kanitsaki, 2006).

Providing health care to culturally diverse populations is a challenge due to the patients' diverse beliefs about health, values, behaviours and health needs as well as communication barriers that may impede the identification and effective addressing of patients' needs and expectations, (Hudelson *et al.,* 2016) which can become threats to their safety (Johnstone & Kanitsaki, 2006).

Cultural competence is currently considered a way to provide equitable medical services of adequate quality for patients belonging to culturally diverse groups (Betancourt & Green, 2010; Kaihlanen, *et al.,* 2019). In medical institutions, cultural competence involves understanding, on the one hand of the influence of social and cultural factors on patients' beliefs about health and behaviour and, on the other hand, how these factors are taken into account in the medical system to ensure an appropriate quality of health care (Betancourt *et al.,* 2016; Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

Effective communication between medical professionals and patients, as well as understanding, exploring and accepting the socio-cultural differences among the actors of medical activities are essential for the quality of medical care (Betancourt *et al.,* 2016; Negi & Singh, 2017; Kaihlane, *et al.,* 2019). Anxiety and uncertainty generated by the interaction with people from a different culture can negatively influence intercultural communication and can generate stereotypes (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001; Logan *et al.,* 2015; Kaihlanen, *et al.,*

2019). On the other hand, awareness of the socio-cultural components of a disease and reflection of medical professionals on their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to communicating with diverse populations, are essential elements in overcoming difficulties in intercultural communication (Li *et al.,* 2017; Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

The cultural competent approach to medicine has been around in the US since the 1980s, in response to the need for increased attention to the social and cultural context of patients (Kleinman 1980). This approach allows for: improving communication between patients and medical professionals, increasing patient's confidence and adherence to recommendations of professionals and properly addressing biases and prejudices that contribute to creating disparities in the medical system (Jenks, 2011).

It is now recognized that medical professionals need to comprehend the social determinants of health (*e.g.*, ethnicity, culture, gender, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status etc.), recognize disparities in the medical system, and at the same time have the adequate skills to approach and, ideally, remove them (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016). Equally, medical professionals need to understand how their own attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes affect their interaction with patients (Weissman *et al.,* 2005; Sherrill *et al.,* 2016).

The contribution of higher education to creating students' cultural competence

Intercultural communication and acceptance of diverse worldviews are skills that are often lacking among professionals in different fields. The inclusion of cultural competence in university curricula, in order to adequately address injustice, racism, exclusion, inequity and bias, is therefore of critical importance and a challenge for higher education institutions (Sherwood & Russell-Mundine, 2017; Frawley *et al.,* 2020).

The growing importance given to cultural competence in higher education is due to several aspects, such as awareness of the social benefits of cultural competence; the need for greater diversity at different levels; the likelihood that graduates will be members of diverse teams or culturally diverse communities; increasing diversity of student cohorts (Frawley *et al.,* 2020).

At present, certain knowledge is absent or marginalized in university curricula, such as that related to low-income people, women, people of colour or indigenous people. The consequence is that graduates do not acquire the necessary knowledge to understand structural injustices, including the diversity of knowledge systems and worldviews (Frawley *et al.,* 2020). Therefore, the creation of a culturally competent university environment and curriculum, in order to train culturally competent professionals, must be a strategic goal of any university (Frawley *et al.,* 2020).

A useful approach to create a culturally competent curriculum is a partnership between students and teachers; this will allow for the creation of a course that meets the needs of students, improves the student experience through the creation of a rapidly changing inclusive course, change teachers' and students' thinking towards the curriculum, put greater relevance of learning and assessment activities for students and the development of a culturally responsive climate (Bell *et al.*, 2013; Bunnell & Bernstein, 2014; Bell *et al.*, 2017; Peseta *et al.*, 2016; Brunson, 2018; Cook-Sather & Des-Ogugua, 2019; Frawley *et al.*, 2020).

The effective incorporation of cultural competence into university policies is essential for creating multi- and intercultural environments in which students and university teachers can understand how culture, different beliefs and value systems influence decision-making by professionals (Frawley *et al.*, 2020).

Cultural competence in medical higher education

Societies are rapidly becoming multicultural, which causes medical professionals to interact more and more frequently with patients who have diverse cultural values, suggesting the importance of cultural competence in their university education (Seeleman *et al.,* 2009). Medical students may face different ways of approaching patients, both in the context of international student exchanges and in their home countries (Mews *et al.*, 2018).

The US Institute of Medicine, in the publication *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*, showed that the biases, prejudices and stereotypes of medical professionals have led to low quality of care for racial and ethnic minorities; it is essential to educate professionals to know how different factors affect the quality of care, in order to increase the quality of medical services (Mews *et al.,* 2018). Based on this finding and to eliminate disparities in the medical system, in the US, medical students must prove a certain level of cultural competence upon graduation (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016). The American Medical Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges have developed statements supporting culturally competent education (Jenks, 2011). The Council of Europe and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, in turn, stress the need for training of professionals as part of the strategy to eliminate inequities in the medical field and ensure health care of appropriate quality for increasingly diverse patients (World Health Organization, 2010; Council of Europe, 2011; Hudelson *et al.,* 2016).

The cultural competence of healthcare professionals is fundamental to ensure that patients have equitable access to healthcare and the provision of healthcare appropriate to their needs. Nevertheless, many physicians do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to address the needs of diverse populations (Sorensen *et al.*, 2017), although they are aware of the need to provide culturally

competent care. For example, in a study of resident physicians, the participants acknowledged the importance of training in culturally competent care and that a lack of these skills could have a negative impact on the physician-patient relationship (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001; Sherrill *et al.* 2016).

In another study, 96% of the participants agreed on the importance of addressing cultural issues in patient care, but a quarter of the participants found that they were not prepared to address the health needs of migrants (Weissman *et al.*, 2005; Sherrill *et al.*, 2016).

Culturally competent education of professionals is essential when it comes to the appropriate approach to socio-cultural factors affecting health care (Paroz *et al.*, 2010), to improve the quality of health care and eliminate ethnic and racial inequities (Seeleman *et al.*, 2009) but also for health care in general, given the fact that intercultural interactions amplify some problems that already exist in the medical system and in the doctor-patient relationship (Seeleman *et al.*, 2009).

Medical schools must be the first agents of change in this endeavour, by adopting a culturally competent approach in institutional development, curriculum creation and the provision of medical education (Sorensen *et al.*, 2017). To this end, educational intervention and training programs have been created to provide knowledge and skills to students and professionals on cultural diversity and its appropriate approach in medical institutions (Betancourt *et al.*, 2016; Kaihlanen *et al.*, 2019).

Key elements for creating a culturally competent medical education curriculum

Creating a curriculum for culturally competent medical education involves, on the one hand, the provision of knowledge and, on the other hand, the formation of specific skills and attitudes that allow for future professionals to adequately address cultural diversity in their work.

The provision of knowledge aims at:
- knowledge of key concepts, such as 'culture' and 'ethnicity' and understanding of culture as a combination of lifelong ways of thinking and acting,
- knowledge of the influence of social and cultural factors on health, health behaviours and health care,
- knowledge necessary to identify aspects for patients, such as migration background, social framework and particular health care needs,
- knowledge of the epidemiologic specificities and manifestations of diseases as well as the effects of treatments in different ethnic groups,
- knowledge of social, cultural, linguistic, economic, political and structural factors affecting communication and healthcare,

- knowledge of patients' previous experiences and individual concepts of health, disease and treatment,
- improving language skills.

Creating skills and attitudes involves:
- the ability to convey information so that it can be understood by the patient and, if needed, work with an interpreter to facilitate communication,
- the awareness of one's own style of communication (verbal and non-verbal) as a first step to improve intercultural communication,
- the capacity to acknowledge and consider the socio-cultural factors that may influence patient care,
- recognizing the influence of culture on the individual behaviour and thinking,
- recognition of one's own attitudes, culture and medical culture, in particular how an individual's own norms, values, biases, prejudices and stereotypes can affect healthcare,
- critical reflection on different and common cultural aspects between the doctor and patient,
- respect and tolerance for diversity,
- creativity and flexibility identify solutions adapted to each context (Seeleman *et al.,* 2009; Burch, 2016; Hudelson *et al.,* 2016; Sorensen *et al.,* 2017; Mews *et al.,* 2018; Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

Cultural competence can be included in the curriculum at a unique time or integrated at different times, when it is relevant to student education (Sorensen *et al.,* 2017).

The core curriculum can be supplemented with courses that explore the subject in depth, addressed to students who are motivated and interested in this issue. An interdisciplinary approach is needed to create the curriculum, given that cultural competence implies broad interdisciplinary knowledge concerning medical ethics, culture, religion, law, economics etc. (Hudelson *et al.,* 2016).

The curriculum must also provide a way for students to examine the positive application of the proposed objectives (Sorensen *et al.,* 2017).

Ways and methods of teaching cultural skills

There is currently no consensus on the best way to teach cultural competence (Paroz *et al.,* 2016). Traditional education, related to cultural competence, aims to provide knowledge about common things or generalized behaviours of certain population groups. This approach involves the risk of creating stereotypes and ignoring individual differences that may exist among patients with common cultural backgrounds (Long, 2012).

Teaching strategies can combine conventional approaches with methods that target students' intercultural experiences encountered during their personal

lives, clinical practice or participation in international student exchanges (Mews *et al.*, 2018).

Teaching and assessment methods cover a wide range of alternatives and include: online courses, videos, reflective exercises, role-plays, community visits, self-directed learning and reflective writing (Hudelson *et al.*, 2016). The use of the *simulated patient-centred method* in clinical practice can be useful to increase students' self-reflection on cultural competence, to increase its impact in practice and to improve the medical care provided to each patient. Case scenarios, based on diverse socio-cultural aspects and directed to the development of different skills to allow learning the cultural approach that is acceptable for each patient, may also be useful (Paroz *et al.*, 2016).

Despite the diversity of teaching methods used and the introduction of innovative methods, there is currently no platform in Europe for the sharing of teaching methods and teaching materials among higher education institutions (Hudelson *et al.*, 2016), although the Council of Europe encourages exchanges of experience and good practice in this field among Member States (Council of Europe, 2006; Hudelson *et al.*, 2016).

The methods used to provide culturally competent medical education must also pay close attention to how knowledge and skills are assimilated and applied by students in their interactions with patients (Jenks, 2011).

Culturally competent teachers

Teachers in medical schools must be culturally competent in order to be able to educate culturally competent doctors. The training of culturally competent teachers is essential for curricular and institutional change, through the effective and sustainable integration of cultural competence (Mihalic *et al.*, 2007; Steinert *et al.*, 2007; Hudelson *et al.*, 2016). This can be achieved through specific, independent courses or through integrated courses in the curriculum, designed to train teachers' pedagogical skills (Sorensen *et al.*, 2017).

Support from the management of the higher education institution

The success of integrating cultural competence into the curriculum depends largely on support of the people who create the institutional development policies of the universities. Cultural competence must be part of the overall strategy of the higher education institution, for example in the form of policies that criminalize discrimination, harassment and abuse and promote a safe and inclusive academic environment. Also, the management of the institution is the one that can provide the financial resources necessary for the development of the cultural competence curriculum, access to appropriate teaching materials and, if necessary, the enlistment of external advisors (Sorensen *et al.*, 2017).

Challenges in teaching cultural competence in medical higher institutions

Currently, there are wide variants in the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of educational programs in cultural competence, which cause differences in quality and results (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016; Mews *et al.,* 2018).

Despite the existence of a rich literature on models and methods of teaching cultural competence, in practice there are difficulties related to the lack of clarity on the knowledge of the cultural competence to be taught and the optimal time to introduce it in the curriculum; lack of institutional support for teaching cultural competence; lack of a systematic and sustainable institutional approach; lack of training of the teaching staff for teaching cultural competence and lack of evaluation of the efficiency of the teaching process (Hudelson *et al.,* 2016; Mews *et al.,* 2018).

The abovementioned barriers can be identified in medical curricula in general. Nevertheless, the International Association for Medical Education issued several recommendations for integrating professionalism into the curriculum. These recommendations can be applied for creating an appropriate cultural competence curriculum: setting goals, integrating learning throughout the years, taking into consideration various learning models, ensuring an appropriate role modelling and student assessment (Hudelson *et al.,* 2016).

In some countries, such as the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands, educational objectives have been formulated that address cultural and ethnic diversity, but their implementation is problematic, especially due to a lack of experienced teaching staff in the field of cultural competence and difficulties in effectively integrating this knowledge in the university curriculum (Seeleman *et al.,* 2009).

In Germany, Switzerland and Austria there is a large number of initiatives and programs on the teaching of global cultural competence and health in medical education. At some universities these topics are addressed individually, but others are offered in an integrated format. At many universities the courses are optional and in rare situations, there is structured integration in the official curriculum. Also, there is no profile of teachers who teach cultural competence and global health, because there are no mandatory requirements on the content and/or structure of courses (Mews *et al.,* 2018).

In the US, the Association of American Medical Colleges developed the *Tool for Assessing Cultural Competence Training* (*TACCT*) to help medical schools create their cultural competence curriculum in line with national educational standards. This tool allows for the identification of missing elements in culturally competent education and the collection of information needed to revise the curriculum (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016).

The organization of medical studies is different depending on the county, and this influences when and how cultural competence is included in the

curriculum (Hudelson *et al.*, 2016). Subjects of cultural competence can be introduced at different times, in the form of compulsory or optional courses. Some topics can be covered in a single meeting, while others require one or more years of training (Hudelson *et al.*, 2016).

The time and resources allocated to teaching cultural competence vary as a result of different institutional strategies to ensure culturally competent education. For example, some higher education institutions have professionals from different social fields in their teaching staff, while others involve exclusively the medical teaching team to teach cultural competence (Hudelson *et al.*, 2016).

Within the European project *Culturally Competent in Medical Education-C2ME*, which brought together 11 European institutions of higher medical education and aimed to integrate the cultural competence in their curricula, it was found that there are a wide variety of terms used to discuss challenges and strategies when it comes to providing health care for culturally diverse groups, such as cross/inter/transcultural competence, diversity training, migrant-friendly hospitals and services etc. Some medical schools focus on migrant populations, while others address existing racial and ethnic minorities in their own countries (Hudelson *et al.*, 2016).

The same project showed that, despite this diversity, there are some commonalities among the participating institutions, consistent with the results of US studies:

- Education in cultural competence is frequently initiated by a small number of professionals, usually those who work with vulnerable migrant populations,
- Providing specific training to teachers who teach cultural competence is rarely a priority for the universities,
- Many times there is no formal recognition by teachers who teach cultural competence,
- The time allocated in the curriculum for subjects of cultural competence is limited,
- Cultural competence courses may be excluded from the curriculum to make way for other courses considered a priority,
- The teaching of cultural competence is done mainly in a single year of study, rather than integrated longitudinally in the curriculum,
- Topics of cultural competence are frequently split from other subjects and considered as an area of specialization, especially relevant for professionals taking care of the migrant populations,
- Students are rarely formally assessed concerning the learning objectives of cultural competence (Hudelson *et al.*, 2016).

Cultural competence in continuing medical education

The training in cultural competence is not limited to university studies but is also part of the educational programs for medical professionals as part of the residency and continuing medical education programs (Jenks, 2011).

According to the concept of cultural humility, cultural competence of medical professionals should be improved and sustained throughout their careers (Betancourt & Green, 2010), starting during university studies and continuing after graduation (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016). Continuing medical education programs in this field must be adapted to individual and institutional contexts and involve decision makers in medical institutions in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs (Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

These programs should address the effects of structural biases, including stigma and inequity in health care, at the physician-patient and organizational levels (Jernigan *et al.,* 2016) and be offered to professionals working at various levels of health care within medical institutions (Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

Continuing medical education is generally provided by medical institutions that use professionals in the medical field as instructors (Griscti & Jacono, 2006). It would be useful, however, to use multiple perspectives in culturally competent education, by involving professionals from different fields (Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

The teaching methods are, as in the case of university education, variable. Among them, the "educational partnership" method, in which members of ethnically diverse communities share their life experiences and is effective in increasing the understanding of cultural differences by professionals (Long, 2012). For example, understanding the challenges faced by migrants may be helpful to healthcare professionals in increasing their cultural sensitivity and providing culturally competent care (Chae *et al.,* 2018; Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

The organization of training of medical professionals must allow for adaptation to a busy work schedule, often in shifts, which makes it difficult to conduct face-to-face sessions (Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019). Under these conditions and to include as many participants as possible, educational methods, such as e-learning or other methods based on different types of technologies, can be applied (Scott *et al.,* 2017; Kaihlanen *et al.,* 2019).

Conclusions

Medical activity increasingly involves interaction with patients from different cultural backgrounds. To properly address them in order to provide quality medical care, medical professionals must receive a culturally competent education, starting from university and continuing throughout their careers. Although cultural competence is recognized as essential for the proper functioning of medical systems, undergraduate and postgraduate educational initiatives are

still insufficiently developed and implemented. Institutional efforts are needed to identify educational needs and develop as well as implement curricula to ensure culturally competent education appropriate to the current medical context.

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Regatului României, Iaşi, Casa Editorială Demiurg (2008), *N. Iorga, Medici şi medicină în trecutul românesc*, Iaşi, Casa Editorială Demiurg (2013) and *Replici tranşante în dialog cu Sanda-Maria Ardeleanu*, Iaşi, Casa Editorială Demiurg (2014).

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