

# Original Research

## Intercultural communication in multicultural education space

by Elena V. Voevoda

**Elena V. Voevoda** Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) [elenavoevoda@yandex.ru](mailto:elenavoevoda@yandex.ru)

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*Educational migration and academic mobility have turned national universities into multi-ethnic and multi-lingual educational institutions. With international students coming from abroad and a growing number of students from the various regions of Russia, intercultural communication has become a feature of academic practices for both students and teaching staff. The paper addresses culturally determined specifics of academic communication in the multicultural education space of Russian universities. The purpose of the paper is to present the results of research carried out with the aim of defining the types of cultural indices applying classifications suggested by Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars and Richard Lewis, and analyse the influence of cultural and ethnic specifics on intercultural communication in the university. Implementation of research on the basis of four Russian universities included surveying and interviewing students as well as analysing the results obtained and case analysis. The key findings made it possible to classify and give a detailed description of the cultures of the post-soviet states as well as several regional cultures of Russia with regard to behavioural patterns. The paper further discusses reasons for communicative failures in the classroom, including linguistic barriers, and ways of preventing and overcoming them. The paper argues that awareness of ethnic and cultural specifics helps to break barriers in intercultural communication in the university and streamline the teaching process.*

**KEYWORDS:** *intercultural communication, behavioural pattern, survey, interview, communication failure, misunderstanding, cultural barrier*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

World migration processes, including internal migration, serve as one of the specific features of the 21st century necessitating revision of priorities in university communication practices. These days, speaking about migration, we often tend to forget about academic mobility of both students

and faculty at the home and international level, although it is yet another form of migration – educational, or academic migration (Weaver, 2014). It is important to stress that it is culture as a system of concepts, values and behavioural patterns that defines the vector and boundaries of behaviour of an individual in a certain environment (Dahl,

2016; Hall, 1989). Although it is common practice to help international students adapt to the new education space (Keles, 2013; Coward & Miller, 2010), preparing home-based students for facing the cultures represented by their peers from the various regions of the country and the neighbouring states is rather an exception than a rule.

Speaking about the problem of exploring regional cultures and putting to use the results obtained, Kashima et al. (2004, p. 816) rightfully point out that *'although differences in self-conception across cultures have been well researched, regional differences within a culture have escaped attention'*. They further go on to say that the existing *'research tradition has not paid sufficient attention to regional variation within a country. That is, there may be regional differences in self-conceptions, which could confound the research on culture and self'* (Kashima et al., 2004, p. 817). Hence, *'in a world that is still fraught with cultural prejudice it is crucial to help students to see themselves and others in a manner that will break down barriers that have been at the core of such prejudice through history'* (Beaven & Borghetti, 2015, p. 5).

Traditionally, universities aimed to prepare students for intercultural communication abroad in view of further effective professional communication (Bücker & Korzilius, 2015), while today, when Russia numbers hundreds of multi-ethnic and multicultural companies and organisations both in the private and state sectors, it is necessary to train the personnel for communication within the organisations proper (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012; Sani, 2015).

Schools and universities make no exception. The Russian Federation can boast a diversity of ethnic cultures – from minor communities in remote towns and villages (Tver Karelians, a Finno-Ugric ethnic subgroup that migrated from the Karelian Isthmus to Central Russia in the mid-17th century after the Ingrian war) to whole republics (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Kalmykia, Sakha Yakutia, Caucasian republics, etc.). Bearing in mind the cultural diversity of the Russian Federation itself with various, and often different types of

culture, we can assume that a typical high-profile university has a multi-ethnic student body (Valeeva & Valeeva, 2017; Voevoda et al., 2016).

Most Moscow-based universities enrol a substantial number of students from the post-soviet countries (Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) and the neighbouring states (Finland, China, Mongolia, Iran, Korea, etc.) as well as numerous applicants from the regions of Russia. Traditional historical ties between the countries, lower tuition fees and the absence of negligible language barriers attract students to the universities of Russia, especially from the former Soviet republics. As for the citizens of the country, for them getting an education in the central regions of the country is not only a matter of prestige but a break away from regional and ethno-cultural isolation and sometimes isolationism.

It is often taken for granted that the people from the post-soviet states, let alone people from Russia, will follow the same cultural and behavioural patterns, no matter where they work or study. But the situation that used to exist in Soviet universities is a thing of the past. In the 20th century, university staff considered the needs of the average student paying little attention to the cultural factors in education or professional communication. That was explained by the common corporate university culture and provided for a unified communication model both for the students and the faculty. Today practice shows that those common social and cultural norms as well as social behavioural patterns have been replaced with specific cultural and ethnic traditions.

Belogurov (2002) speaks about a split in the formerly unified supra-ethnic field and, as a result of divergence, the emergence of independent ethnic fields. The stress is placed on respecting ethno-cultural originality of students and faculty which helps individuals to preserve their cultural identity. Any individual's behavioural pattern is only one of a multitude of psychological typologies and the existing models of reality, but their knowledge of other cultures and the practices of co-existence are not the same as they used to be. The essential con-

dition of cultural interaction is real intercultural communication based on mutual comprehension and respect.

As a result of the changes, intercultural communication in the modern university has acquired a new aspect – teaching students and the faculty to understand the implications of communication not only with foreign students but also with their peers from the various regions of Russia. A basic precondition of successful intercultural communication is understanding and interpreting implications. Socio-cultural specifics have a direct impact on communication and interaction between students as well as between students and teachers. That concerns behavioural patterns, status and gender norms, communicative styles, etc. *'While cultural competence focuses on individual cultural icebergs, intercultural competence involves the use of a horizontal model which can predict what will happen when people of different cultures interact – when icebergs collide'* (Weaver, 2014, p. 96-97). As educational migration cannot be stopped, and internationalisation of university education is on the rise, it is necessary to work out strategies for preventing and eliminating communication barriers in the multi-ethnic education space of universities.

Most universities in Russia have plenty of international students as well as students from the various regions of the country. Classes are mixed, with a multitude of cultures, and teachers never know where the students come from unless they ask. Addressing cultural diversity in the classroom is viewed both as a challenge and an opportunity to develop cultural awareness. It is necessary for teachers to overcome the existing cultural stereotypes. For that matter, it is important to know how to deal with representatives of various cultures in order to let them feel at ease and achieve better results.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research carried out by a group of university professors and students in 2016-2019 aimed at defining the cultural imperatives of the students in multicultural universities in Russia and their im-

act on behavioural practices in academic discourse. The cultural specifics of regional diversity have seldom or never been studied before (Nau-mov, 2000). Considering the various aspects of the suggested classifications, it was decided to interview students and conduct a questionnaire survey, analyse the results and see how various classifications can be used for teaching purposes and for facilitating communication between students and lecturers in the multicultural education space of the university. In total, over 280 university students aged 18-21 were interviewed – from Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Yesenin Ryazan State University and the State University of Karachay-Cherkessia. That made it possible to analyse the behavioural communicative practices of the respondents and define the types of cultures they belong to. Among the respondents were representatives of Caucasian, Central Asian states, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova as well as the Russian, Caucasian, Kalmyk, Tatar, Bashkir and Yakut cultures of Russia.

The research rests on Edward Hall's theory of high and low context cultures, Geert Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, Fons Trompenaars' model of national culture differences and the model of cross-cultural communication developed by Richard Lewis. Although Hall, Hofstede and Trompenaars have received criticism in recent decades (Cardon, 2008; McSweeney, 2002), there is no denying the fact that they have made a significant contribution to communicative studies and their classifications make sense. The above-mentioned theories were applied to the field research.

## 3. STUDY AND RESULTS

### 3.1. General observations

The questionnaire contained three parts with 28 questions (in the form of statements), which the respondents were asked to answer. The statements described characteristics of the selected types of culture and their applicability to the respondents. In Part A the students were requested to indicate their ethnic identity. Part B contained 17 yes/no

questions which addressed the culture types suggested by Hall and Hofstede. Their classifications describe the following indices: high and low context; power distance; collectivist-individualist; feminine-masculine, and uncertainty avoidance (which was not considered). Out of the seven dimensions suggested by Trompenaars, we took only two: individualism vs. communitarianism, which largely overlaps with the collectivist-individualist indices of the first two authors, and universalism vs. particularism. Part C contained 11 questions defining the three types of cultural norms specified in the model developed by Lewis: linear-active, multi-active and re-active.

### 3.2. Procedure

The questionnaire was offered to the respondents in paper form, by e-mail and social networking, in Google Forms.

The students who agreed with the statement 'I speak openly and directly' were seen as belonging to low context cultures, while their peers who marked that they used implications, polysemy and hints were ultimately grouped as high context representatives. Further on, questions 5-8 double check questions 1-3 and define their cultural affiliation more precisely (cf.: 1 – I speak openly and directly; 2 – I use hints and polysemy in communication; 3 – My words can be interpreted in different ways; 5 – My relatives and friends are fairly talkative, they freely use gestures; 6 – I can interpret statements with regard to the time and situation; 7 – I prefer to give examples supporting my viewpoint or the facts I speak about; 8 – I prefer to give evasive answers). Thus, a Kabardian student who agrees with statement 1 and disagrees with statement 2 does not belong to a low context culture as might be assumed at first glance as the negative reaction to the next six questions (3-8) overrides the indicators in the first two and gives more objective information. There may be several reasons for a positive answer to the first question and a negative answer to the second one: the majority of the surveyed Kabardians live in Moscow and are influenced by the lower context Russian culture. Kabardian students appreciate such ethnical-

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ly determined personal qualities as integrity, candour and openness – that makes them give answers that are dictated by their ethnic behavioural patterns.

The students' affiliation with monochronic and polychronic cultures was defined on the basis of answers to questions 4, 9-14 (cf.: 4 – I don't like when people interrupt each other in a conversation; 9 – I think that every person should be given an opportunity to express their view, the speaker should not be interrupted; 10 – I don't like to be interrupted in the process of any activity; 11 – I usually plan my actions and try to stick to the plan; 12 – I appreciate punctuality; 13 – For me, contact with people is more important than punctuality; 14 – I can do several things at a time). It is evident that the attitude to interruptions indicated in question 4 is double-checked in questions 9-10; the attitude to punctuality is checked in question 12 and double-checked in question 13.

Affiliation with collectivist or individualist culture was defined on the basis of the answers to questions 15-16 (15 – Personal goals are more important to me than group goals; 16 – It is important to me what my friends and relatives think about me). Affiliation with high or low power distance culture was checked by question 17 (I find it important to maintain good relations with authorities, even at the expense of sacrificing my own interests).

Part C of the questionnaire contained 11 multiple choice questions aimed at defining whether the respondents belong to linear-active, multi-ac-

tive and re-active cultures. Questions 5-7 and 9-10 go back to conversation interruptions, punctuality, the use of gestures and planning (cf.: 5 – In a conversation with my friends, I often / seldom / never interrupt the speakers; 6 – In class, I often / seldom / never interrupt my fellow-students; 7 – I am punctual / not always punctual / never punctual; 9 – Representatives of my culture gesture a lot / do very little gesturing / do no gesturing; 10 – Representatives of my culture stick to the plan / change plans easily / make adjustments to plans). In this way, the respondent's attitude to planning, which first appears in question B-11 is double-checked in question C-10.

### 3.3. Findings

The analysis of the data received as the result of the survey made it possible to affiliate the respondents with the types of cultures given below.

#### 3.3.1. Correlation between typological and ethnic cultures

*High and low context cultures.* The analysis of the data received through the survey showed that students belonging to high context cultures are Russian, Tatar, Bashkir, Yakut, Buryat, Kalmyk, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Caucasian and Transcaucasian, Moldavian, and Central Asian. They use more symbols and non-verbal cues in communication, meaning is embedded in a situational context.

Low context culture students are Karelian, Finnish, Latvian, Estonian, Polish. Lithuanians stand in-between. They assign primary meaning to the objective communication message and secondary meaning to the context. Russian culture has certain traits of low context culture that is why on the axis of high and low context cultures it stands lower than the cultures of the North Caucasian republics.

*Monochronic and polychronic cultures.* Monochronic cultures are Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In Russia, these are Kalmyks, Buryats and Yakuts. These students prefer to do one thing at a time. They are task-oriented, concentrate on the job at hand and take time commitments very

seriously. They value a certain orderliness and do not like interruptions. Polychronic students will do multiple things at the same time. They manage interruptions well with a willingness to change plans often and easily. The overwhelming majority of students from Russia and the near abroad represent polychronic cultures.

*Individualist and collectivist cultures.* Students belonging to individualist cultures (again Finland and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) emphasise the priority of individual needs over group needs. In collectivist cultures the situation is just the opposite. These are Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Bashkirs, Tatars, Caucasians and Transcaucasians, Moldavians, and Central Asians – Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kirgiz and Kazakh students. It is worth mentioning Yakuts, Buryats and Kalmyks who have traits both of individualistic and collectivist cultures.

*High and low power distance cultures.* Students of high power distance cultures (Russia and the majority of the neighbouring states) believe in strict authority and hierarchy while those representing low power distance cultures (Finland and the Baltic states) profess egalitarianism and shared power. This is manifested in the way low power-distance students (especially international students from the USA, Canada and France) treat the teaching staff and administration – without familiarity but with a feeling of equal opportunity to express their opinions.

*Masculine and feminine cultures.* The feminine-masculine dimension describes the extent to which a culture exhibits masculine or feminine attributes and the extent to which gender distinctions are maintained. Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Caucasians and Transcaucasians, Moldavians, and Central Asians are traditionally masculine, or task-oriented. They recognise the importance of achievement, material possessions, success and competitiveness. Finland and the Baltic states, being person-oriented, belong to feminine cultures.

A mixture of masculine and feminine traits and traditions is observed in Tatar, Bashkir, Yakut, Buryat and Kalmyk cultures. Interviews revealed that

senior generation women belonging to these cultures seem to be gaining top positions on the socio-cultural iceberg, the lower part of which is supported by the traditional masculine community. This new placement of sociocultural priorities is now being projected onto their understanding of the organisational structure of university administration.

*Universalist and particularist cultures.* Russia and the rest of the post-soviet states as well as Turkey belong to particularist cultures in which the bonds of particular relationships are stronger than abstract rules. In Russia, the majority of the population, including students, considers that rules can be bent and laws can be broken. A popular phrase describing their attitude to law is 'it all depends'. It is alarming that a number of students interviewed admit that speeding is a negligible breach of rules: 'rules are made to be broken' seems to be a popular phrase. Their 'universalist opponents' from Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania believe in law and order and tend to follow the rules, no matter what the situation suggests.

*Linear-active, multi-active, re-active cultures.* Considering Lewis's (2019) tripartite division of cultural categories, we see that linear-active students, punctual good planners do one thing at a time. Their body language is often restrained. Unlike the first type, the talkative, unrestrained multi-actives feel comfortable doing several things at a time and appreciate relationship rather than punctuality.

Re-active students are good listeners who see statements as promises and thus place priority on courtesy and respect. That is particularly evident in the classroom: promises are not to be broken and respectful behaviour is expected of both the students and the teachers.

Latvian students are primarily linear-active, while the students coming from Finland, Estonia and Lithuania, being basically linear-active, have traits of re-active culture. Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Moldavian students are multi-active with re-active traits. Armenians, Tatars, Bashkirs, Buryats and Yakuts are re-active, although Tatars have traits of multi-active culture. Most Caucasian

and Central Asian students are multi-active with Kabardian and Karachi respondents displaying re-active features.

### **3.3.2. Cultural traits of the post-soviet states**

The cultures of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova have many common traits: they are high context, collectivist, polychronic, masculine, particularist, with high power distance, multi-active with re-active traits. The average representative of these cultures is open and straightforward, which indicates their affiliation with low context culture. But at the same time, they often use hints and implications, which indicates high context. They joke, use metaphors, their actions are spontaneous and action planning is approximate. Punctuality runs second in importance to interpersonal relationships. Group goals are valued higher than personal goals.

Azerbaijani culture is high context, collectivist, polychronic, masculine and particularist, with high power distance. But unlike the cultures of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova it is re-active. Azerbaijanis are sociable and loquacious, they are apt to resort to the use of gestures and implications – metaphors, polysemy, shared texts. They prefer to give indirect rejections so as not to hurt the interlocutor. That eventually may lead to misinterpretation of their intentions. Azerbaijanis are impulsive, they easily change plans and are not always punctual.

Rather a small sample does not make it possible to give reliable data on Georgian, Armenian and Turkmen cultures. The information received in interviews allows us to assume that these cultures are high context, collectivist, polychronic, masculine and particularist. Armenians are more taciturn than Georgians and are more apt to follow ethnic traditions.

The cultures of Central Asian states (Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan) have very much in common due to their geographical position, historical past and the linguistic similarity of their languages (with the exception of Tajik), which have always promoted active regional contacts and cultural exchange.

These cultures are seen as high context, collectivist, polychronic, masculine and particularist, with high power distance and multi-active character. Although the representatives of the cultures concerned are sociable, they avoid straightforwardness in communication. Instead, they tend to be evasive, use implication, and resort to mimicry and gestures to express their attitudes. Punctuality and planning do not count for much in their hierarchy of values. In communication, Uzbeks are less patient than the representatives of the other Central Asian states, supporting an interactive conversation they can interrupt the speakers. Central Asian cultures profess social hierarchy and respect for their elders. Education is teacher-oriented and science is focused on the founders of scientific schools and heads of research institutions that are formally recognised.

Cultures of the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are considerably different from the rest of the cultures described. They may be described as low context, monochronic, individualist, feminine and low power distance. Latvian culture is described as linear-active, while Estonian and Lithuanian cultures, although also linear-active, have re-active traits.

### 3.4. Limitations

The research group needs to further examine gender characteristics and carry out a more representative sample survey in each of the ethnic groups. It is also worthwhile to give more detailed and profound correlations between diverse ethnic cultures and their typological characteristics, with more detailed criteria.

## 4. DISCUSSION

How can the obtained data be applied to organising the teaching process in a university? The description of cultural specifics of students' cultures helped draw conclusions about the possible communication failures and conflicts in the classroom (Lukešová, 2015) and make recommendations on how to prevent them. But what is more important, it helps educators facilitate and control intercultural communication and interaction in the multicult

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tural stratum of a modern university. In this respect, one of the guidelines is the illustrious phrase: 'When you get your 'Who am I?' question right, all of your 'What should I do?' questions tend to take care of themselves' (Rohr, 2011, p. 31). The lecturer should be able to consider the cultural specifics of students, especially their belonging to a certain context and ethnic culture. But it is equally important to remember that teaching is a two-way process – 'the teacher also brings a range of diversity issues to the classroom' (Du Plessis & Bisschoff, 2007, p. 246) as they belong to certain types of cultures and manifest their specific characteristics in intercultural communication. In the multicultural education space of modern universities, it is important 'to look at how participants respond to teaching contents, materials and methodologies' (Borghetti & Beaven, 2018, p. 37), to work out strategies and tactics of interaction between students and teachers which will help to facilitate communication and prevent misunderstanding. Teachers often fail to realise that students' seemingly unenthusiastic classroom performance is often culturally motivated. While preparing the class for a discussion, the lecturer can hardly expect all the students to actively participate in it – that does not depend only and solely on the student's readiness for the class, but mostly on the culturally determined communicative practice and ethnic cultural practices.

International students and a significant percentage of regional students have to adapt to studying in the atmosphere of multilingualism: their mother tongue, Russian as the language of instruction and one or two foreign languages as part of the curriculum. In the post-soviet states, Russian is taught as a foreign language, with the exception of Belarus and Kazakhstan. Students coming from the post-soviet states and the regions of Russia speak in mother-tongues belonging to several language families: Indo-European (Belarusian, Ukrainian, Moldavian, Lithuanian, Latvian), Turkic (Azerbaijani, Uzbek, Kirgiz, Turkmen, Kazakh, Tatar, Bashkir, Yakut, etc.), Uralic (Estonian), Mongolian (Kalmyk, Buryat), and Caucasian languages embracing three language families. Coupled with the foreign languages traditionally learned at school and university, students have a combination of grammatically different languages to learn – synthetic, analytical and agglutinative.

The process of communication in a language different from the mother-tongues is a complicated process which involves information perception, decoding, processing and then encoding the response. More often than not, international students who are not proficient enough in Russian find it difficult to follow the lecturer. Trying not to 'lose face' they refrain from asking the lecturer or their peers for help and finally show poor learning outcomes. In the language class, the situation gets even more difficult when they face translation from one language into another. At the primary stage, the process usually involves deciphering the phrase into the mother-tongue and then into one of the foreign languages under study.

Besides linguistic difficulties, students' performance in the classroom is seriously affected by ethnic and culturally determined behavioural patterns.

Linear-active and monochronic Bashkirs, Yakuts, Kalmyks, Central Asian, Latvian, Estonian students, usually wait for their turn to speak and expect the teacher to ask them to do so. Otherwise they will refrain from speaking in class. For them, a discussion is an exchange of monologues. At the same time, Lithuanians and Uzbeks are more in-

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teractive and will eagerly participate in a lively discussion. Bashkirs, Yakuts, Kalmyks maintain minimal eye contact, tend to answer direct questions and show no desire to develop situations, for example, in a language class.

A multi-active and polychronic teacher may think that a linear-active student is not ready for the class while the situation is easily explained in terms of cultural psychology – the student is unwilling to stand out from the crowd and is waiting for their turn to speak. The author taught a Kalmyk student who never volunteered to answer or participate in a classroom discussion. But when asked, he always spoke readily and coherently – looking sideways. The same student failed to speak about health and illnesses (a regular topic for discussion in the language class) because a Kalmyk male is not supposed to speak about ailments. Speaking about wealth, success and plans for the future is also avoided in Kalmyk culture.

Yakut, Kalmyk and Bashkir students are commonly less talkative than Tatar and Caucasian students. Kazakh students resort to subtle and allegoric criticism. Uzbeks are more easy-going and active than Turkmen and Tajiks. It is impossible for representatives of many Central Asian cultures to lose face: Uzbeks take it hard when they are publicly criticised, for example, when they get a low grade.

Linear-active students (Latvia, Poland) tend to plan their projects and write term papers in advance. They are punctual and meet the deadlines. But during the examination period it is more difficult for linear-active students to cope with several subjects at a time. Re-active cultures usually do

things in time. Multi-active students feel comfortable doing several things at a time (alas, the majority of the author's students), they appreciate relationship rather than punctuality and seldom meet the deadlines.

When a polychronic teacher asks the students to answer their homework one by one in a language class and tells the rest of the class to do another exercise at the same time, monochronics will feel frustrated.

Communication practices can be determined by ethnic cultural rules of behaviour as well. A female student from one of the Caucasian republics refused to answer in seminars and was nearing mid-term failure. When the teacher asked her for an explanation after classes she said that in their culture young women were not supposed to speak publicly in the presence of unfamiliar men – her fellow-students. The problem was that she had chosen a public profession. While working in pairs or in small groups, Caucasian students tend to seek leadership. If there are two or more Caucasian male students in the class, there may be a conflict of interests. A first-year Chechen male student was genuinely bewildered and frustrated when three female students got higher grades for the first-in-term test. He was a well brought up young man but his academic success ran contrary to his social and gender status as he perceived it. The fact that his academic status turned out to be lower than his social status led to an inner personal cultural conflict as he was not ready to face this socio-cultural challenge. This is a mixture of how masculine culture, ethnic practices and gender roles manifest themselves in the classroom.

Individualist culture students prefer to work at their own projects, while collectivist cultures are prone to develop the project in a team. More often than not, an 'individualist' student will refrain from speaking first, thinking that others will do it more eagerly (Barieva, 2017, p. 301). If the lecturer asks a Kalmyk and a Moldavian to work at a project together, they may find the situation uneasy and the result will be less effective, if not a complete failure. Individualist culture students, often with traits of high universalism (*dura lex sed lex*), will refuse

to let other students copy their homework or test, and that may lead to misunderstanding and even conflicts in the class. As Russians profess particularism (meaning that rules can be altered or broken if necessary), they find it difficult and even funny to learn that the Russian word *списывать* has no English equivalent.

Representatives of all Russia's cultures that were considered in the study profess high power distance and tend to treat their elders and administration with respect. That is why the staff are often revered. They respect other people's social status, obey their bosses and do not question what the teacher says. For them, education is teacher-oriented. That is why, the students expect the teacher to assess their knowledge and grade the answers. Low power distance cultures consider education as student-oriented. That is why the students expect the teacher to teach them critical thinking and ask for their opinion while assessing knowledge is seen as a hindrance to creativity (Kahl, 2013, p. 2611). Thus, cultural classifications and psychology do not only describe the two existing models of teacher-student relationship, but show that the teacher-oriented model is a culturally determined phenomenon and not the heritage of 'totalitarian regime' as it is sometimes claimed to be.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is evident that cultural differences may lead to misunderstanding between communicants. In certain cases, the cultural clash may create barriers in academic communication and provoke intercultural conflicts between students as well as misunderstanding between students and lecturers. The success of teacher-student relationships in the multicultural space of modern university is largely determined by the teacher's readiness to consider the characteristics of cross-cultural psychology. It is hardly possible that teachers should be aware of all the subtleties of various cultures, but in the multi-ethnic education space it is imperative to expose the faculty to the types and specifics of the cultures students belong to in order to prevent communication failures. That will help to break barriers and promote intercultural communication.

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