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***Fostering cultural sensitivity among university students through engagement in international projects presenting various methods to enhance the cultural intelligence of university students***

*This study derives its foundation from the outcomes of a Virtual Exchange initiative, involving 73 students from three distinct universities: Budapest Business University, Hungary; University of Sfax, Tunisia and Ismir Democracy University, Turkey. The project provided an in-depth exploration of the three countries from diverse angles, including cultural, social, historical, sociological, gastronomic, and various other perspectives, as observed, and presented by university students. In 8-month research the author examined the cognitive, behavioural, motivational, and cultural aspects of cultural intelligence of university students before and after the 6-week long Virtual Exchange project and compared the pre-and post-project results. The paper summarizes the results of a research carried out in 2024. In this research, the author scrutinized the levels of sensitivity among students both prior to and following collaborative work within a cross-cultural project with their international counterparts. The study aimed to ascertain whether engagement and collaboration within a multinational environment yield supplementary values, as well as identifying the specific soft skills cultivated through such collaborative endeavours. The results indicate that engagement in collaborative international projects with foreign peers can significantly enhance cultural sensitivity.*

*Keywords: cultural sensitivity; cultural intelligence, university students; project work, collaboration*

*JEL: I21, I23*

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## **Introduction**

Virtual Exchange (in short VE) programs use different technologies to allow geographically separated people to communicate and to interact with each other. 73 students from three different universities- Budapest Business University, Hungary; University of Sfax, Tunisia and Ismir Democracy University, Turkey- participated in the project. The 6-week long project provided students with opportunities for intercultural and interactional development through the performance of collaborative intercultural tasks, thus providing them with intercultural experience. The main aim of the international project was to engage students in meaningful discussions on key topics and current issues with international peers, to broaden students' horizons by sharing diverse perspectives of tackling common problems and to experience Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Learning, which involves knowledge sharing, mentoring, and learning from peers, learning from each other.

Literature review

Cultural intelligence means the ability to relate and work effectively in culturally diverse situations. Table 1 summarizes some definitions of cultural intelligence.

Table 1. Definitions for cultural intelligence

Author	Definition
Earley - Ang (2003)	CQ captures a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts
Earley - Mosakowski (2004. p 139-146)	"a seemingly natural ability to interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in just the way that person's compatriots and colleagues would, even to mirror them"

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Stenberg, Wong - Kreisel (2022. p 143-160)	“Cultural intelligence is one’s ability to adapt when confronted with problems arising in interactions with people or artifacts of diverse cultures.”
Ang et al (2020. p 820-845)	“...merely a special case of general intelligence, but there is at least some evidence that cultural intelligence is a distinct construct that is related but nonidentical to general intelligence...”

Source: own compilation

Based on the above collected definition, it can be stated that you are culturally intelligent if you are open to get to know other cultures, try to find opportunities to meet people from other cultures, if you learn about them, if you are open-minded and fully aware of any cultural assumptions and if you are a critical thinker.

The Bennett Scale (2017) has primarily been utilized to examine individuals' cross-cultural sensitivity, although certain scholars have broadened its scope to encompass organizational communications. The framework describes the different ways in which people can react to [cultural differences](#). Bennett originally proposed that trainers should employ the model to assess trainees' intercultural awareness and facilitate enhancements in intercultural sensitivity, also known as cultural sensitivity. This concept involves the capacity to acknowledge and adjust to a novel and distinct culture.

According to Christopher, P and [Mosakowski](#) (2004) people who are detached from their own culture can more easily adopt to new situations, to unfamiliar hosts and can understand the body language easier. It is because individuals detached from their own culture may possess a greater openness to new experiences and perspectives. This openness allows them to approach unfamiliar situations with curiosity rather than with preconceived notions or biases.

Thomson and Esses (2016) suggest in their study that higher education institutions which promote internationalization, should also consider enhancing the social experience of their international students. One of the ways to optimize the international student social and cultural experiment is pairing them with local peer mentors, which is peer-to-peer mentoring. Peer-to-peer mentoring offers several advantages that contribute to its effectiveness, such as relatability, which means that peers often share similar experiences, challenges, and backgrounds, making them uniquely qualified to understand and empathize with each other, thus this relatability creates a supportive environment where mentees feel understood and validated.

Vătămănescu et al. (2019) underscored the constructive impact of organizational policies in promoting knowledge sharing and collaboration. Wangpipatwong (2009) claimed that students' ability to share and a level of competition with group mates are the factors influencing knowledge sharing.

To confirm, Hughes and Wisker (1998) said that giving a peer mentor to the international students help develop their cultural and social experience in the unfamiliar environment, therefore it would be essential to incorporate mentoring foreign students into the curriculum of higher educational as it would support and cultivate better thinking and problem-solving skills in students.

### Participating universities

The nationalities of the participating countries in the present research were Hungarian, Tunisian, and Turkish. The first country is European, the second is African and as for Turkey its small part is European, and most of its territory belong to Asia. The three countries differ significantly across various dimensions, spanning from geography and languages to cultures and beliefs. In the context of the VE project, university students were assigned some topics to work on, such as: labour market difficulties in the 3 countries, style/fashion, gastronomy, gender issues, challenges of today’s youngsters, university subculture, etc.

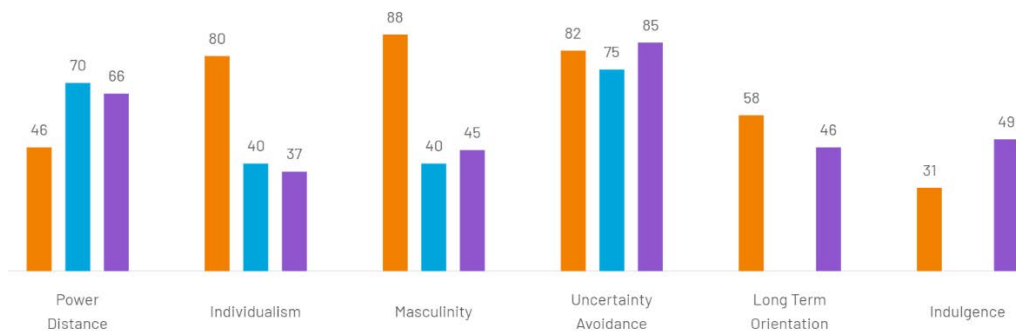
Culture includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, art, norms of behavior, such as law and morality, and systems of belief. To understand a culture, it is essential to understand

not only the language differences, but also the differences in knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

Edward T. Hall (1978) believed that context and meaning are interrelated, and he placed different cultures on a continuum of high to low context according to how people from those cultures interpret and perceive the information that surrounds an interaction or event. Based on Edward T. Hall's model-which discusses the differences between high- and low-context cultures, Hungary, Tunisia, and Turkey are examples where high-context communication is used, where most of the information is assumed to be known, which is the common knowledge. Furthermore, there is a lot of nonverbal coding, and most of the communication is heavily reliant on nonverbal cues. High-context cultures focus on collectivism and relationship-building. High-context communication cultures are usually relational and collectivist, and they focus on interpersonal relationships. Hall identifies these cultures as those in which harmony and the well-being of the group is preferred over individual achievement. From this point of view, the three participating nationalities belong to the same group.

Another theory, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, which is the framework for cross-cultural communication shows the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behaviour. Figure 1 shows Hungary, Tunisia and Turkey based on the 6 dimensions of Hofstede's theory, where Hungary is orange, Tunisia is blue, and Turkey is represented with purple colour.

Figure 1. Hungary, Tunisia, and Turkey based on the 6 dimensions of Hofstede's theory.



Source: own table, based on <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool>

Tunisia scores the highest on Power Distance dimension (70), which means that its members accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place, and which needs no further justification. Hierarchy is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities and they accept the different distribution of power. For Tunisian people status symbols of power are especially important to show social position and indicate the respect that should be shown.

As for the second dimension, Individualism, Hungary scores the highest with 80, which means that people prefer a loosely knit social framework where individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their families only.

As for Masculinity, it is again Hungary scoring the highest (88) on this dimension. The high score indicates that the society is driven by competition, achievement, and success. As for the lower scores Tunisia and Turkey, the dominant values in these societies are caring for others and quality of life.

Concerning the dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance, it pertains to how a society manages the reality that the future remains unpredictable, whether they seek to control it, accept it as uncontrollable, or allow events to unfold naturally. All three countries exhibited high scores on this dimension, indicating a significant demand for laws and regulations to alleviate people's anxiety.

Long-term orientation dimension shows how societies can preserve some links with their own past while coping with the challenges of the present and future. Low-score countries want to maintain traditions and norms while high-score countries make efforts to have changes and to modernize systems in their societies.

The last dimension, the Indulgence vs Restraint dimension shows the extent to which people in the given societies try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. Hungary scores low on this dimension, which means that in contrast to Indulgent societies, Restrained societies do not put much emphasis on leisure time and control the gratification of their desires.

### **Research methodology and results**

In 2024, the author conducted a survey with university students from three universities: Budapest Business University, University of Applied Sciences, Hungary; University of Sfax, Tunisia and Izmir Democracy University, Turkey. The international project lasted for 6 weeks, starting from the end of February 2024 till the end of April 2024.

The main task of the survey was to examine the participating students' cultural sensitivity and to examine to what extent their cultural sensitivity could change after collaborating with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the researcher also wanted to see whether there was correlation between the number of languages spoken or the number of countries visited and cultural openness.

From Hungary 23 second-year students majoring in Media and Communication Studies participated in the project, from Tunisia there were 25 third-year students majoring in English Studies and from Turkey 25 students (aged between 19 and 22) studying Psychology and Sociology. Altogether 73 students participated in the project, but 64 out of 73 responded the questions in the pre and in the post-project survey, therefore the research cannot be considered representative, but the author believes that it can give a clear picture of the opinions of the university students.

The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions, most of which were closed questions. The questions were based on nominal and metric scales. The questionnaire could be divided into five groups of questions. The first group of questions asked about the typical characteristics of the sample: in which university they study, their age, what they study, their gender and language skill. The next set of questions asked about the cognitive aspect of cultural intelligence, such as travelling abroad, whether they study the culture and language of the country they visit, whether they read about the country prior to travel, whether they follow the news, and how confident they are in their language skills. The third group of questions looked at the behavioral aspect of cultural intelligence, such as whether they follow the behavioral patterns of the country they are visiting, how students deal with cultural difficulties, how they judge people, how much their behavior depends on local customs. The fourth set of questions looked at the motivational aspect of cultural intelligence, such as how willing they are to collaborate with foreigners, whether they are open to collaborating with them, how well they can build relationships and make friends. Finally, the last area covered the cultural aspect of cultural intelligence, with questions focusing on the acceptance and understanding of foreign cultures.

To analyze the questionnaire, the author used the SPSS 28 statistical program. The following statistical methods were used for the evaluations: univariate and multivariate methods, frequency, mean, standard deviation, cross-tabulation analysis, correlation tests and ANOVA.

The 2 questionnaires (pre-project and post-project survey) was completed by 64 students. The sample specification was as follows:

In terms of gender, 34.4% of men and 65.6% of women answered the questions.

By age, the average age was between 18 and 22 years old (81.3%). By ethnicity, 34.4% of respondents was from Tunisia, while 32.8% was from Turkey and 32.8% was from Hungary. 85.9% of respondents are BA students. 42.2 % of the respondents speak 1 foreign language other

than their native language, 40.6% speak two foreign languages, while 17.2% speak three or more foreign languages. 54.7% of the respondents have never been abroad, 14.1 % has been to 1 or 2 countries, while 29.7% have travelled to 3 or more countries and 1 respondent marked the answer “other”.

The following research questions were phrased in the study:

- Q1: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the cognitive aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?
- Q2: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the behavioural aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?
- Q3: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the motivational aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?
- Q4: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the cultural aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?

## Results

The author divided the questions on cultural intelligence into 4 categories (cognitive, behavioural, motivational, and cultural). For each of the statements in each category, the respondents were asked to rate how true they thought the statement was for them on a scale of 5 (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree).

The present paper shows the results of the 4 research questions.

Q1: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the cognitive aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?

Regarding the cognitive aspect of cultural intelligence, the students showed an elevated level of agreement on some of the statements even before the programme started. The results show that they are confident in their language skills, do not avoid collaborating with people who are not fluent in their language, follow international news and do not mind work in a minority group. They showed the least agreement about planning ahead for their interactions with people from other cultures. Their answers showed that students were interested in the cultures of the partner countries and wanted to be actively involved in the project. The greatest difference was observed regarding students' willingness to collaborate with individuals who are not fluent in their language. This implies that this statement elicited the least consistent responses among the participants.

The post-project results show that the average response to each statement increased everywhere except for activity in the project. To assess which of these changes were significant, a two-sample t-test was used. The reason for this was that the pre- and post-project responses of each student could not be linked. The results could only be compared at the group level and so the use of a paired sample t-test was not feasible. In case of equality of variances between the two groups, the student's t-test was used, while in the opposite case the Welch's t-test was used.

The test results indicate significant differences in five instances. Post-project completion, students tended to express the sentiment that prior to communicating with individuals from other cultures, they should formulate plans outlining their objectives and approach to interacting with these individuals. They also showed greater agreement that they could immediately sense when something was going well or badly in a new cultural situation and that they could easily find solutions to problems in unexpected situations. A negative change from the previous is that more people agreed that they prefer to avoid working with people who are not fluent in their common language. The dispersion of responses after the project is still the largest here, and has even increased compared to before, suggesting that students' responses have become even more

divergent in this respect. Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and results of the two-sample t-tests for the pre- and post-project conditions.

Table 2: Cultural intelligence (cognitive)

	PRE		PRO		t test		equal variances
	Mean	Deviation	Mean	Deviation	t	sign	
Before I communicate with people from a new culture. I prepare and plan what I want to achieve.	3.59	0.886	4.02	0.745	-2.916	0.004	No
I plan how I'm going to relate to people from a different culture before I meet them.	3.52	0.943	3.89	0.779	-2.453	0.016	No
When I am in a new cultural situation. I can immediately sense whether something is going well or is wrong.	3.70	0.770	4.00	0.735	-2.232	0.027	No
If something unexpected happens while working in a new culture. I can easily find out the solution.	3.64	0.764	3.95	0.844	-2.197	0.030	Yes
I avoid working with people who don't speak my language fluently.	1.94	1.006	2.72	1.453	-3.537	<0.001	No
I follow international news.	3.80	0.839	3.84	0.912	-0.303	0.763	Yes
It is OK for me to work in teams where I am in a minority.	3.83	0.767	3.98	0.701	-1.202	0.231	Yes
I trust my language knowledge.	3.89	0.758	4.13	0.630	-1.902	0.059	Yes
I want to find information about the 2 partner countries before the project starts. / Before the project I read about the 2 partner countries.	3.58	0.869	3.73	0.930	-0.982	0.328	Yes
I want to be / was active in the project.	4.27	0.718	4.20	0.647	0.517	0.606	Yes
I am interested in the culture of the 2 partner countries.	4.22	0.701	4.27	0.718	-0.37	0.709	Yes

Source: own compilation

The second research question was the following:

Q2: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the behavioural aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?

For the behavioral aspect, it can also be seen that participants showed an elevated level of cultural openness for most of the statements. This is particularly true in terms of their ease in accepting cultural differences in greetings, norms and traditions and their general perception of being able to deal with differences well. Conversely, however there is high agreement with the statement that their judgements of people include how they maintain their cultural norms. The results showed that students were open to getting to know students from the other two countries and thought that their communication skills would improve because of the project. The largest variance was found in statements about whether certain characteristics contribute to how they judge people and whether they would like to take a leadership role in the project. In these cases, students' responses were therefore relatively different from the other statements. After the project was completed, these differences increased.

For the behavioural aspect of cultural intelligence, we get a mixed picture of changes compared to the pre- and post-project averages. As with the previous research question, t-tests were used to evaluate the significance of the differences. In this case, four statements show significant differences between the pre- and post-project states. There was an increase in the ability of students to change their behaviour or expression when required by a cultural situation and an increase in whether they eventually took on a leadership role in line with their prior expectations. Conversely, the students' perceptions regarding whether the project enhanced their communication skills shifted in a negative direction. Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, and t-test results for the pre- and post-project conditions.

Table 3: Cultural intelligence (behaviour)

	PRE		PRO		t test		Equal variances
	Mean	Deviation	Mean	Deviation	t	sign	
I can change the way I act when a cross-cultural situation seems to require it.	3.73	0.672	4.03	0.616	-2.604	0.010	No
I can alter my expression when a cultural situation requires it.	3.70	0.659	4.00	0.617	-2.630	0.010	No
I modify my speech style (e.g.: accent. speed. tone) to suit people from a different culture.	3.70	0.885	3.89	0.779	-1.272	0.206	Yes
I can easily change my body language (e.g.: eye contact. gesture. posture) to suit people from a different culture.	3.72	0.806	3.89	0.799	-1.211	0.228	Yes
I can easily accept cultural differences in greetings. in traditions and other norms.	4.22	0.766	4.03	0.712	1.435	0.154	No
I can handle cultural differences easily.	3.91	0.729	4.03	0.734	-0.967	0.335	Yes
I judge people how they talk to me.	2.50	1.098	2.59	1.400	-0.422	0.674	No
I judge people how they write to me.	2.50	1.084	2.58	1.412	-0.351	0.726	No

I judge people how they preserve their cultural norms.	3.02	0.766	2.97	1.333	0.244	0.808	No
I am open towards getting to know students from the 2 partner universities in the project.	4.27	0.740	4.09	0.886	1.191	0.236	Yes
I think my communication skills will improve / improved in the project.	4.20	0.800	3.86	0.924	2.250	0.026	Yes
I would like to be the leader / was one of the leaders in our international team.	3.25	0.873	3.61	1.033	-2.126	0.036	No

Source: own compilation

The third research question was the following:

Q3: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the motivational aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?

As for the motivational dimension of cultural intelligence, the participants were already culturally open before the project. This is particularly true for statements relating to good relations and friendship with people from diverse cultures and to tolerant and respectful communication with people from other cultures. The results showed that the students were enthusiastic about working in an international team, thought they could motivate their peers and did not particularly expect language barriers to be a major problem in communication. The largest variance is like the behavioral aspect for statements about factors that influence people's perceptions. and includes the statement about the difficulty of language barriers. Hence, it is in these instances that students' opinions exhibit the most divergence. These differences increased further after the project.

Here as well, the change in attitudes before and after the project is mixed, with both cases where students were more open at the end of the programme and cases where their attitudes changed in a negative direction. In this case, however, only two t-tests show a meaningful change. On the one hand, there was an increase in students' confidence in their ability to deal with unfamiliar cultural situations and, on the other hand, they were more likely to think that they would ask questions and make observations before forming a view about a culture to see if the view was true.

Table 4: Cultural intelligence (motivational)

	PRE		PRO		t test		Equal variances
	Mean	Deviation	Mean	Deviation	t	sign	
I have confidence that I can get on well with people from a different culture.	4.09	0.729	4.11	0.737	-0.121	0.904	Yes
I am certain that I can make friends easily with people from other countries.	4.09	0.729	4.20	0.596	-0.930	0.354	Yes
I can adapt to the lifestyle of a different culture easily.	3.67	0.778	3.91	0.830	-1.648	0.102	Yes
I am confident that I can deal with a cultural situation that's unfamiliar.	3.69	0.732	3.97	0.776	-2.109	0.037	Yes



I am patient and respectful when communicating with someone from a different culture.	4.16	0.781	4.30	0.609	-1.136	0.258	Yes
Before settling on a new belief or idea about a different culture. I use questions and observations to see if it is accurate.	3.81	0.710	4.11	0.693	-2.394	0.018	Yes
I judge the people by their appearance.	1.92	0.931	2.16	1.383	-1.125	0.263	No
I have prejudice against certain people.	2.28	1.031	2.45	1.402	-0.790	0.431	No
I have prejudice against certain cultures.	2.25	1.054	2.39	1.341	-0.660	0.511	No
It is/was difficult to work together while we are having language barriers.	2.39	1.048	2.78	1.266	-1.901	0.060	Yes
I can/could motivate my groups mates in the project.	3.94	0.833	3.78	0.881	1.031	0.305	Yes
I am/was enthusiastic about working in an international team.	4.11	0.779	4.00	0.891	0.739	0.461	Yes

Source: own compilation

The fourth research question was the following:

Q4: Comparing the data received for questions asked before the project started and after the project was completed concerning the cultural aspect of cultural intelligence where can improvements be seen?

Among the various aspects of cultural intelligence, the cultural dimension has the highest pre-project averages, so students have the highest cultural intelligence. This suggests that students are particularly open to learning about other cultures, learning a few words in the language of that culture before their visit, and collaborating with people from other cultures and learning as much as possible about that culture before their visit. Additionally, the results indicate that students are enthusiastic about cultivating and sustaining friendships throughout the project. They also demonstrate openness to meeting new people, visiting different countries, and learning about their cultures as part of the project experience. The most notable variation was observed in the students' perceptions regarding their likelihood of making friends. Similarly, the most divergent responses after the project's completion were noted in the students' views on the success of this friend-finding endeavor.

After the project, the means increased for all but one variable, but only two variables showed significant changes based on t-tests. After the project, students were more likely to agree to talk to their family and friends about their culture. This increase could easily be since exposure to other cultures encouraged students to share their experiences with those close to them and thus to talk about their own culture.

Table 5: Cultural intelligence (cultural)

	PRE		PRO		t test		Equal variances
	Mean	Deviation	Mean	Deviation	t	sign	
I talk about my own culture with my friends.	3.97	0.816	4.28	0.678	-2.357	0.020	Yes
I talk about my own culture with my family.	3.72	0.845	4.16	0.895	-2.845	0.005	Yes
When working with people from a different culture. I research that culture and try to improve my knowledge about it.	3.91	0.706	4.06	0.794	-1.176	0.242	Yes
I prefer to work in teams with people from different cultures.	3.97	0.755	4.11	0.838	-0.997	0.321	Yes
I feel comfortable collaborating with people from very different cultures to me.	3.91	0.684	4.14	0.794	-1.789	0.076	Yes
I try to learn a few foreign words in the language of any culture I visit.	4.13	0.787	4.36	0.601	-1.894	0.061	Yes
I feel a natural drive to connect with other cultures.	3.88	0.745	4.03	0.835	-1.117	0.266	Yes
I am open towards getting to know other cultures.	4.19	0.664	4.38	0.549	-1.741	0.084	Yes
I would like to visit the 2 partner countries after the project is finished.	4.19	0.833	4.36	0.721	-1.248	0.214	Yes
I would like to keep the connection with the students of the 2 partner universities.	4.25	0.756	4.19	0.924	0.419	0.676	Yes
I want to learn about the culture of the 2 partner countries.	4.25	0.756	4.34	0.739	-0.709	0.479	Yes
I will find/have found friends from the 2 partner universities.	4.02	0.807	4.03	1.112	-0.091	0.928	Yes
I would like to meet my foreign groups mates in person in the future.	4.11	0.819	4.19	0.941	-0.501	0.617	Yes

Source: own compilation

## Conclusion

The fundamental aim of the study was to examine whether engagement and collaboration within a multinational environment can have supplementary values and to reveal and identify the specific soft skills used through such collaborative tasks.

Participating in international projects that involved collaboration between Hungarian university students and students from countries like Tunisia and Turkey offered several advantages. First engaging with students not from Europe provided firsthand exposure to global issues such as economic disparity, political systems, or environmental concerns, making Hungarian students more informed about global challenges and solutions. Furthermore, collaborating in English (or even exploring other languages spoken in these countries) strengthened communication skills, especially in a multicultural context. This is crucial in business and international settings. Also students encountered different ways of thinking and problem-solving, which led to more innovative solutions as they learned to integrate diverse perspectives. Learning about the educational approaches and industry practices in Tunisia and Turkey helped Hungarian students expand their understanding of global business, economy, and policy. As the project often came with unexpected challenges, it showed students how to remain resilient and flexible in dynamic, cross-cultural settings.

The research results have demonstrated that engagement in collaborative international projects with foreign peers can significantly enhance cultural sensitivity of university students.

The findings indicated that students were receptive to building relationships with students from the other two countries and believed that their communication skills would enhance because of the project. The results show that they are confident in their language skills, do not avoid collaborating with people who are not fluent in their language. The post-project results show that the average response to each statement increased everywhere except for activity in the project. The greatest variance was observed in statements concerning whether specific characteristics influence their judgments of people and whether they aspire to assume leadership roles in the project. In these instances, students' responses were notably distinct from the other statements. Following the project's completion, these differences further intensified. Regarding the motivational aspect of cultural intelligence, participants were culturally open even before the project commenced. There was a rise in students' confidence regarding their capacity to handle unfamiliar cultural situations. Conversely, they were more inclined to believe that they would inquire and observe before forming opinions about a culture to verify their accuracy.

Based on the findings, we can confirm that it is vital to boost university students' cultural sensitivity. Enhancing the cultural intelligence of university students can involve various strategies to develop their ability to effectively interact and work in diverse cultural settings. Our project was an Experiential Learning Projects, which is one type of strategy to develop their cultural intelligence. The project required students to collaborate with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds and engage in group projects with diverse teams in multicultural settings. Intercultural Competency Training is another alternative, where various workshops and seminars can provide practical skills and strategies for navigating cross-cultural interactions. Furthermore Study Abroad Programs and Cultural Exchange Events can effectively enhance the cultural intelligence of university students, thus preparing them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and diverse global environment.

By participating in such international projects, Hungarian students not only gained academic and professional skills but also became more well-rounded individuals, better equipped to thrive in an interconnected global society. The results of the research might have been derived intuitively but one goal of the study was to articulate the practical applicability of similar international projects by emphasizing the importance of participating in international projects with university students and providing them the opportunity to experience peer-to-peer learning. While this study focuses on collaboration between Hungarian, Tunisian, and Turkish students, the framework can be adapted to other international educational settings. The results might offer practical strategies for universities to design more effective cross-cultural learning experiences, equipping students with critical skills for the global workforce. In the short term, this research helps educators improve their intercultural programs. In the long term, it contributes to producing a workforce better prepared for the globalized economy.

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