The Whole Is More than the Sum of Its Parts
On Culture in Education and Educational Culture

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Abstract: The Learning Culture Survey investigates learners' expectations towards and perceptions of education on international level with the aim to make culture in the context of education better understandable and support educators to prevent and solve intercultural conflicts in education. So far, we found that culture-related expectations differ between educational settings, depend on the age of the learners, and that a nationally homogenous educational culture is rather an exception than the rule. The results of our recently completed longitudinal study provided evidence that educational culture on the institutional level actually is persistent, at least over a term of four years. After a brief introduction of the general background, we will subsume the steps taken during the past seven years and achieved general insights regarding educational culture. Last, we will introduce a method for the determination of conflict potential, which bases on the understanding of culture as the level to which people within a society accept deviations from the usual. We close with demonstrating the method's functionality on examples from the Learning Culture Survey.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the increasing internationalization of classrooms and the distribution of e-Learning programs and content through the Internet, a better understanding of the role of culture in education gets indispensible. Reports of increasing numbers of early school leavers and dropouts in universities accumulate which mainly concern learners with a migration rofessional training were not seen as respece responsponsibility of the learners to adapt the given conditions of their learning context, but the educational institutions' duty to ensure that an environment is provided which leads to productive learning for any kind and type of learner (Haberman, 1995). Even established e-Learning providers rather waive the chance to attract a higher number of learners and stick to their local markets, instead of risking unsatisfied learners because of unforeseen cultural conflicts (Richter and Adelsberger, 2011). Meanwhile, in support of finding solutions, the EC defined a related key issue for the 2015-call for project proposals in their Erasmus-Plus program.

In his study, Nilsen (2006) found that the main reasons for students' dropping out were ineffective study strategies, a mismatch between expectations and content in the study program, and a lack of motivation. Bowman (2007) even claims that strong efforts should be made in order not to 'destroy' the initial motivation by confronting the learners with unnecessary conflicts. So far, we know that besides language gaps and content-related issues, the learners' motivation is threatened by unmet expectations and not understandable regulations, arising from culture-specific differences between their origin and the new context.

In e-Learning scenarios, a constantly high level of motivation is the most crucial success factor (Richter and Adelsberger, 2011). If learners lose their motivation in a face-to-face scenario, the educator still has a chance to recognize that and can support the regain of motivation (Rothkrantz et al., 2009). In e-Learning scenarios, this chance rarely is given; without recognizing the learners' mimics and gestures as tools to communicate frustration (Sandanayake and Madurapperuma, 2011), the instructors depend on explicit communication, which often does not happen due to cultural reasons.

The Learning Culture Survey investigates learners' perceptions in different national and regional contexts and aims to support educators to better understand educational culture in general and cultural differences between specific educational contexts, in particular. Such an understanding is relevant for the

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development of culture-sensitive education. We further on aim to support both learners and educators in their preparation efforts when planning to study or teach in other countries.

2 THE LEARNING CULTURE SURVEY (LCS)

In the following we distinguish between "culture in education", which is used as a general term, without a direct relation to a particular context, "educational culture", which is used when a specific context is referred to and "learning culture", which is related to perceptions of and attitudes towards education from the perspective of the learners.

Today's applied comparative culture research mostly refers to culture as persistent value-driven perceptions and attitudes, which, amongst all people within national societies are homogenously favoured or refused (literature reviews from, e. g., Jones, 2007; Leidner and Kayworth, 2006). Geert Hofstede (1980), as a pioneer (Smith, 2006) and still, one of the central proponents of this "etic" concept for culture research, speaks of culture as the "Software of the Mind" which goes back to Montesquieu's "spirit of a nation" (18th century). In his research, Hofstede initially found four cultural dimensions (later on, two more dimensions followed), which focused on basic values and classified around 40 nations through specific key values per dimension. Following Hofstede's demonstrated examples (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkow, 2010), it is possible to predict and compare the relative cultural distance between two nations according to concrete attitudes and perceptions that are related to each of the dimensions. In other words, according to the results, people from one nation are considered more likely to act or react in a certain way than those of another nation. Köppel (2002) suggests that one reason for the persistent high level of popularity of this approach lies in its' simplicity. Alongside its achieved prominence, Hofstede's Dimensions Model has constantly been challenged and criticized on methodological, interpretational, and ethical levels (e. g., Douglas and Liu, 2011; Jones, 2007; Leidner and Kayworth, 2006; Tarras and Steel, 2009).

Several further reasons than the already found points of criticism affirmed our own doubts if the national values from Hofstedes' dimensions model and the concept of a general national culture would appropriately reflect culture in education. For the context of culture in education, we initially decided to adopt the majority-based and group-related culture definition of Oetting (1993), who suggests to use the term '*to describe the customs, beliefs, social structure, and activities of any group of people who share a common identification and who would label themselves as members of that group*'. We could not imagine that basic values exclusively should be responsible for educational culture. According to our own practical experiences from the fields of school education, Higher Education, and professional training, we saw significant differences between their modi operandi, which did not necessarily reflect basic values or national cultures at all.

Another reason for doubts regarding the applicability of Hofstede's dimensions model in the context of educational culture resulted from the reported experiences from Mitra et al. (2005) which later on were confirmed by Buehler et al. (2012): Both research groups found that the children in their studies below an age of twelve years acted quite differently from older children as they rather followed their curiosity than the assumed cultural biasing. Last, we were unsure if the culture within educational institutions actually stays persistent over time after changes regarding basic conditions took place.

2.1 LCS: Operationalization

Besides a cross-disciplinary literature review on reported conflicts in education and culture research in general, we conducted qualitative pre-studies involving university students and educators. In the conducted (informal) interviews, we asked them for perceived cultural conflicts during their times of studying abroad and related to other (foreign) students within the home university. The first version of our questionnaire considered both the reported conflicts in education from the literature and issues that arose from the interviews.

The questionnaire was designed for the context of Higher Education and originally consisted of 128 items related to the following aspects of education (Richter, 2011):

- Role, responsibilities, and tasks of lecturers
- Feedback
- Motivation
- Gender issues
- Several aspects of group work
- Time management
- Role, responsibilities, and tasks of tutors
- Demographic data

For recognition, the full questionnaire has permanently been published in English language under the DOI: 10.13140/2.1.2877.5206 (Richter, 2014).

In 2009, we decided to start with our investigation within the only two national contexts, which Müller et al. (2000) found to having more or less culturally homogenous populations, i. e., Germany and South Korea. These two national contexts conveniently also appeared perfectly suitable for the initial study because of their generally very different educational systems and traditions.

Before the implementation took place, the questionnaire was translated to German and Korean. Several test studies and refinement cycles were applied in both contexts in order to ensure its' comprehensibility and appropriateness. The students perceived some of the originally included statements as confusing and some others even as irritating. Regarding socially sensible topics, we had to expect that the students would rather provide socially acceptable answers than expressing their actual opinions; even though the respondents were considered to stay anonymous. Thus, we removed related items and reformulated others. In the end, 102 items remained for the initialization of the field study.

For most of the items, we applied a 4-point Likert Scale. We wanted to force the respondents to take a position instead of giving them the chance to choose a neutral response option (Garland, 1991). Our aim was to design a standardized questionnaire, reusable in later steps within any context in the same form (just translated to local languages). For future contexts, we had to expect that items might not apply in the same measure as experienced in the test studies. Thus, we provided an additional answer-option, which was "not applicable in my context". We visually separated this option from the main scale in order to avoid that respondents misinterpret it as an integral part of the general answer options. The strategy of separated positioning worked out well: In later studies, this option rarely was used.

2.2 Evaluation and Interpretation

As only criterion for the evaluation, we decided to exclusively accept fully completed questionnaires including both the items that had to be evaluated and (most of) the demographic data.

From our investigated contexts, we received very different sample sizes, which, in the original design of the scale, would not have been comparable amongst each other because of the extreme values' different impacts on the full samples. In order to solve this problem, we followed the recommendation of Baur (2008: 282) and binarized our results for the contrasting across contexts in positive and negative answers. Baur particularly recommends the binarising of ordinal-scaled results in order to produce clearer results and prepare ordinal-scaled data for operations that originally are reserved for interval-scaled data. There is a controversial discussion on applying higher-level statistical methods to ordinal-scaled data (Knapp, 1989). We followed the recommendation of Porst (2008) to case-sensitively check the results for appropriateness, which, in our case, revealed inconsistent results when calculating variance, co-variance and standard deviation. In contrast, the calculated mean was sound between the 40- and 60-quantiles and thus, usable to provide information on the answer distributions, which else would have been lost after the binarising process. When directly contrasting results across contexts, we focused on the percentage of positive answers.

For the decision if a result regarding a certain item actually reflects culturally motivated or rather individual preferences of the students, we generally assumed that if we find a clear tendency to rejection or acceptance (negative/positive), the answer was culturally motivated, else, individually. As a clear tendency, we defined everything below 40% positive answers as rejection and everything above 60% positive answers as acceptance. All items evaluated between 40% and 60% positive answers were assumed to be too close to an equal distribution and thus, probably expressing individual preferences. We chose such a large interval as our "fuzzy area" because in our context of learning culture, we had to deal with opinions of people on aspects of life, which at least to a large part were not substantial for the respondents' survival or the general functioning of societies. On individual level, such types of opinions easily could be changed from one to another moment. Moreover, we did not know if our results would reveal persistent over time on the large scale.

We cannot clearly determine if the individual responses of the participants in our study are driven by desires (what they wish to be) or the status quo (what they expect to be due to prior experiences). In retrospective and for most cases, the results are quite clearly showing that the students evaluated according to their experiences.

2.3 Implementation

As for the first wave of our large-scale implementation, we found very different conditions in the contexts of Higher Education in Germany and in South Korea.

In Germany, we were able to address the entire student populations of three universities by using our online questionnaire, i. e., the University of Cologne, the University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg, and the University of Potsdam. Each of the university-administrations sent the invitation for participation to all of their registered students through their internal E-Mail distribution system. The response rates were between 2-6% for each university and confirmed the usual experiences for response rates in online questionnaires. In total, from the three universities, 3225 students started answering and 1817 students left fully completed questionnaires. The distribution between female and male students was 544/1268 (five students used the option "other").

In the context of Higher Education in South Korea, we did not have the opportunity to use the online survey within the universities due to legal issues but instead, had to collect the data "on the street", using the paper-based version. In order to still receive something close to random samples, we followed the suggestion of Kromrey (2006) and chose our respondents on the basis of a random-route algorithm. More than 50% of the Korean population lives in and around Seoul. The city has more than 50 universities and a subway system, which links the suburbs and close cities with each other. Thus, we limited our investigation to this city. Due to permanent traffic jam and uncomfortable parking situations, Korean students usually and frequently use the subway. Because of these characteristics, we eventually decided to conduct our survey in the subway and predefined a fixed algorithm where to enter the subway and how to decide which persons were to be invited for participation: Go down the main entrance to the gate, take the first wagon entrance available on your right side and ask all people that appear to have an age between 18 and 30 (starting on your right side and going around in this wagon) if they currently are university students, at least have six further stations to go, and are willed to participate in our survey. After completion of one round, leave the subway on the next stop where another line crosses its way and change the subway line. If possible, follow the direction to the centre. In order to involve a high number of subway lines (and thus, catch students on their way to different universities), we started with the only available round-line in the city and randomly changed the initial entry point each day. The condition regarding the six further stations was related to the average time required to complete the questionnaire. Most participants in the German sample (which ended before the Korean study) needed 11-15 minutes for the completion of the online questionnaire. The subway trains in Seoul take about three minutes from one to another station. We calculated that 18 minutes should be enough to introduce how to proceed (no long considerations but intuitive and quick answering), hand out the material, let them complete the questionnaire, and collect the results; in most cases, this calculation worked. For most people, sitting in the subway is boring and so, we achieved a response-rate of 50% (counting just persons claiming to be university students). We had three weeks for the data collection, and received 286 fully completed paper-based questionnaires with a relationship between female and male students of 153/131 (two students selected "other"). 58 of the "delivered" questionnaires had to be rejected because relevant items were left unanswered. The students within the sample studied at 39 universities. From nine universities, we received nine and more completed questionnaires.

The received data-sets with many sample elements per university from the German sample were predestined to drive an in-depth analysis by comparing the data not just on university but also on faculty level. The Korean sample, in contrast, was well suitable for a broad analysis on university level.

We were not yet able to determine if the found educational cultures from Higher Education would be transferable to other educational contexts. In the end of 2011, we conducted small-scale studies in five randomly selected enterprises for that purpose: We randomly chose them from the list of stock-noted enterprises (DAX), which provide in-house training. Five enterprises eventually granted their participation. However, we were restricted to involve a maximum of 25 participants per enterprise. Apart of defining the condition that the selected employees should work in positions, in which they actually are meant to participate in the provided in-house trainings, we had no further influence on who exactly would be invited; this was an internal decision. As a result, we received seven and more responses just from two of the five enterprises. However, the results from these two enterprises eventually revealed sound because in relevant aspects, they reflected the specific characteristics of the enterprises' organizational cultures' and the age and positions of the participating employees. For this study, we slightly modified the used terminology in our questionnaire. As an example, we changed the term "professor/lecturer" to "instructor".

Between 2012 and 2013, we received further translations of the questionnaire to Bulgarian, Chinese (simplified and traditional), French, Greek,

Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Turkish. With the support of guest students, we drove test studies in their home countries, which were Bulgaria (30 sample elements), Ukraine (53), Turkey (40), and British (30) and French (25) Cameroon. These results surely were not representative for each of the countries' contexts of Higher Education but provided first impressions of what we could expect in large-size investigations. In the summer of 2014, we completed another large-size study (online) at the university of Accra in Ghana with 306 fully completed questionnaires (response rate around 3% and female/male relationship 126/177). In the end of the year, we started the implementation of the LCS online-survey in France. The study in France is ongoing since we yet just managed to involve a single university with limited access to the students (so far, we received 75 fully completed responses).

Also in the end of 2014, we were able to repeat our investigation in one of the German universities, namely the University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg. The questionnaire, again, was implemented as online survey, and all registered students were invited by the administration using the internal E-Mail distribution system. The investigation served two purposes, first, to find out if the educational culture in this university generally kept persistent over the past years, and second, if the immense logistic and personnel changes that had taken place in the meantime were reflected in the results. The University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg still is a quite young and relatively small university. It is constantly expanding on all levels, regarding offered subjects to study, employed professors and staff, and infrastructure. In order to achieve meaningful results with a repetitive investigation, we at least had to wait three years in order to ensure that the prior investigated generation of students (Bachelor and Master) were completely substituted through new students; else, we would have risked to receive data that reflected the memory of students instead of the status quo. Anyways, a very low number of students still remained because, after having finalized their Bachelor degrees, they started studying in a Master program. However, the number of students per year who are accepted to enter the Master programs is very limited in this university and the entry conditions are challenging. In the repetitive study, we received 375 fully completed questionnaires, which is 6,6% of the whole student population (5621). The relationship between female and male respondents was 166/208 (one student decided for "other").

3 FINDINGS ON LEARNING AND EDUCATIONAL CULTURE

With our data, we were able to answer most of our beforehand open general questions of educational culture. In the following, the findings are discussed in detail and separated by category.

We use net diagrams for the visualization of the results from two or more contexts. Each diagram is related to a thematic block, like for example "Tasks of the Lecturer". We consider all items within the same thematic block to being directly related amongst each other. In the diagrams, we only display the results according to the found percentage of positive answers. Since the option "Not applicable in my context" has really been used (below 1%), the rest of the answers can be expected to be rejections.

Please note that displaying the data in this way is meant to facilitate the recognition of differences between contexts, to some extent, eye-candy, but only the crossing points on each of the axes of the diagrams actually represent defined values.

3.1 Learning Culture in Faculties

The German samples were large enough to analyse the data on faculty level. In Figure 1, we exemplarily display the results of the University of Cologne regarding the thematic block "Tasks of the Lecturer".

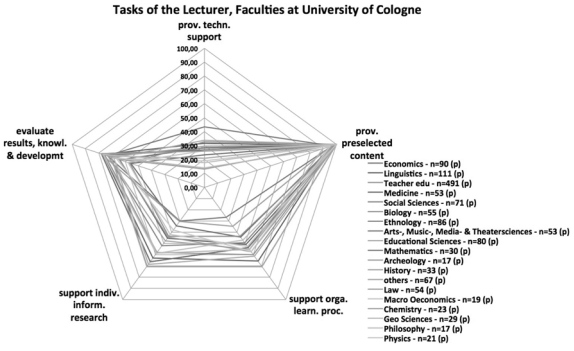

Figure 1: "Tasks of the Lecturer", Faculties (Cologne).

On faculty level, we found deviations in the answers of the students regarding all thematic blocks and between each of the faculties within all three universities. The general characteristics of the found patterns were similar across faculties and items. The displayed thematic block "Tasks of the Lecturer" was the one with the highest level of diversity. Regarding this thematic block, the expectations of the students generally were higher in faculties with low numbers of students than in larger faculties.

3.2 Educational Culture in Universities

For the comparison of the educational cultures on university levels, we calculated the positive percentage values over the whole datasets (not about the averages of the faculties) from each of the German universities. Figure 2 displays the results regarding the thematic block "Group work efficiency".

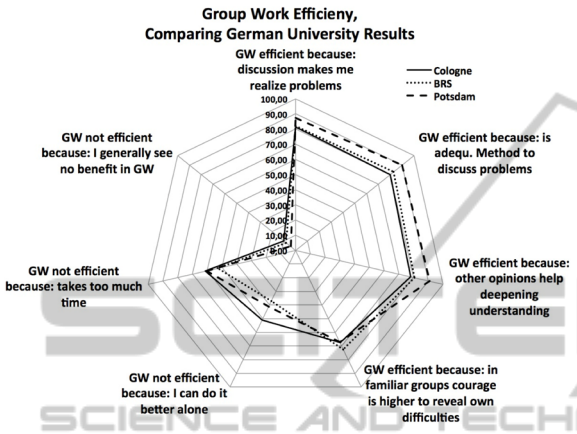

Figure 2: "Group Work Efficiency", German Universities.

After having built the averages of each university, patterns resulted, which were very similar to each other. We yet had to find out, if the data of the South Korean sample would lead to a similar effect. Figure 3 displays the results from the thematic block "Group Work – Evaluate Statements", considering only the South Korean universities, where at least nine sample elements were available.

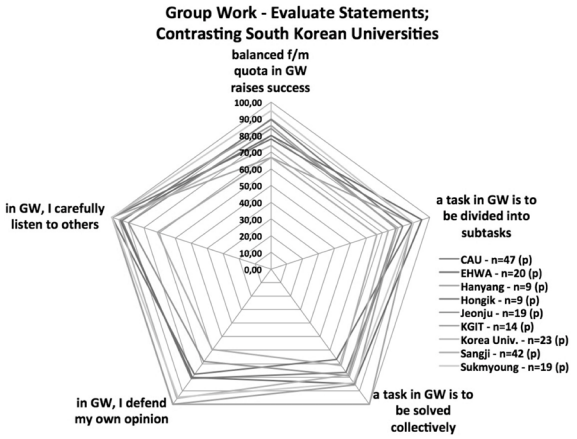

Figure 3: "Group Work - Evaluate Statements", South Korean Universities.

Also here, we can find quite similar patterns when comparing the results of the South Korean universities. In the South Korean sample, we found extreme outliers regarding some thematic blocks, mainly from universities with very small numbers of sample elements and particularly from the KGIT, which just provides extra occupational programs.

3.3 Educational Culture: National Level

In order to evidently conclude that our findings actually had something to do with culture on a national level and not just with university traditions, which, by coincidence, were found to be similar, we needed to find clear differences between the averages of the German and the South Korean universities. We did not expect to find such differences regarding all thematic blocks but surely regarding the thematic blocks "Tasks of the Lecturer" and "Role of the Lecturer". South Korean universities, by law, must employ one professor per each 10 registered students. In Germany, no such regulation is defined which often results in very crowded classes and rather anonymous students who do not expect any services from their professors apart of being responsible for a lecture and providing evaluations. Thus, the expectations, which South Korean students assign to their lecturers, are far higher, and the student-lecturer relationship, is much closer. Further on, South Korean students would never question their lecturers but instead expect them to always provide the best possible solution for a specific problem. German students, in contrast, explicitly learn from the very beginning to put everything into question. Figure 4 displays both national university averages regarding the thematic block "Role of the Lecturer".

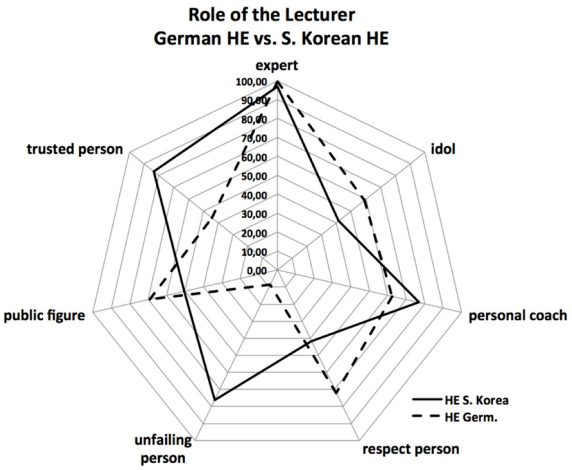

Figure 4: "The role of the Lecturer", Comparing results from German and South Korean Universities.

Figure 5 displays the average of both national datasets regarding the thematic block "Tasks of the

Lecturer". As expected, regarding the items "technical support", "support for the individual literature research", and "support for the organization of the individual learning process", the expectations of the students were very different between both national contexts. While the responses of the German students were indifferent towards all three items (results between 40 and 60%), the Korean students did very clearly demand related services.

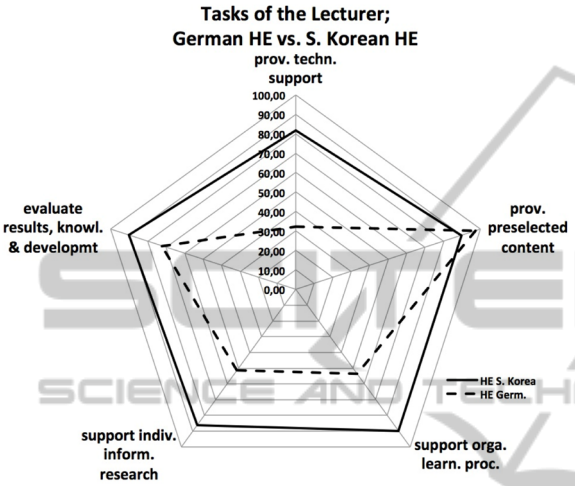

Figure 5: "Tasks of the Lecturer", Comparing results from German and South Korean Universities.

The results of both national contexts fully confirmed what we expected to find from our experiences. Regarding other thematic blocks, prior known differences also were mostly reflected. Where we actually found amazing results in the South Korean context was regarding the thematic block "Feedback". While we had expected that criticism generally would be a difficult matter for the South Korean students because of the Asian concept of shame, the students eventually claimed the contrary, which was, perceiving (constructive) critique towards their work results and study progress as motivating, and even feeling confused in the lack of critical feedback.

3.4 Findings Regarding Educational Culture in Professional Training

We evaluated the results of the two enterprises that provided seven and 14 sample elements. We found significant differences between the learning cultures of each of the groups of employees, which were in line with the basically different organizational cultures of the enterprises. The results additionally differed a lot from the results from the German universities. For example, instructors in professional training were not seen as respect persons but just as experts in their field and were expected to provide far more support than the lecturers in the universities. This fully reflects their particular role in the context of professional training. In the context of professional training, group work generally was seen as difficult, and learning tasks were reported to rarely being completed in time (Richter and Adelsberger, 2012).

3.5 Persistence of Learning Culture

From our repetitive study, which took place in the Winter 2014/15 at the University of Applied Sciences BRS, we learned that Learning Culture appears to slightly change in accordance with changes of educational practices on faculty level, while the average university results kept almost the same. For example, in 2010, the department of Forensic Sciences had recently started with just a very small number of students. In that time, we found the students perceiving their lecturers much more as coaches than in 2014, when the number of students studying Forensic Sciences was much higher (see Figure 6).

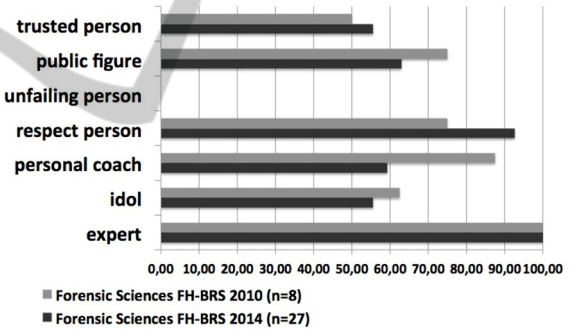

Figure 6: Changes in Learning Culture between 2010 and 2014; Forensic Sciences: "Role of the Lecturer".

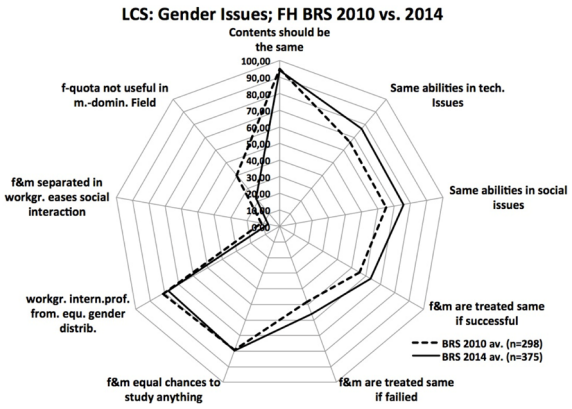

Figure 7: Persistence of Educational Culture: FH BRS 2010 vs. 2014; Thematic block "Gender Issues".

Almost no deviations larger than 10% were found between the average results from both studies on university level. Figure 7 shows the thematic block "Gender Issues" with the highest found level of deviation.
The found changes fully reflected the German "Zeitgeist": Currently, an intensive public discussion started regarding the legal enforcement of a female quota for Top-Management positions.

3.6 Limitations

Besides the fact that educational culture varies between academic and professional education and thus, the results of the LCS are not transferable across educational contexts, we found significant deviations between our test studies from British and French Cameroon. We conducted an a-prori analysis and from 55 sample elements, a single one from French Cameroon was wrongly assigned to the characteristics of the sample from British Cameroon. This means that we generally cannot assume that Learning Culture is homogenous within a country. Examples showing homogenous educational cultures must rather be understood as exceptional cases.

4 DETERMINING CONFLICTS IN EDUCATION

Being able to recognize cultural differences regarding selected issues across educational contexts is not yet sufficient for understanding or even determining at which level a particular cultural distance could eventually lead to a conflict situation and maybe become a threat for the motivation of learners. Cultural distance has been a subject of discussion since some decades. A clear definition of the term does not exist but it originally was used in the context of etic culture research, in which the cultures of whole societies were quantified and compared according to a small number of key values (such as provided by the dimensions model of Hofstede et al., 2010). Shenkar (2001) criticised the general concept of cultural distance as creating the illusion of an easy way to measure something, as complex as culture that actually is not fully comprehensible at all. In this context, Chen (2010) and Hatakka (2009) argued if quantifying cultural barriers and in the wider sense also culture-related conflicts would make sense on this level at all, because they can be highly context-related: Not the measurable culture-related aspects alone are responsible for barriers, but the whole set of characteristics within a situation, including ones' individual ability to deal with unexpected situations. In the field of Technology Enhanced Learning, Pirkkalainen et al. (2014) revived the term "cultural distance" with the meaning to determining individual reasons for selected culture-specific barriers against the production, usage, and/or repurposing of Open Educational Resources.

In our research, we needed to find causative characteristics because, even though, being unable to eliminate all potential reasons for conflicts, we can avoid going beyond the pain thresholds of the learners. Pain thresholds on individual level depend on whole situations and current moods, but on the larger scale, the crossing surely also is triggered by specific characteristics or events that generally are considered as "must-be" or "no-go"; eliminating such triggering characteristics would be a good start towards culture-sensitive education.

The whole discussion on how to quantify culturally relevant aspects through key-values for whatever purpose appeared like circling around and did not lead us to a solution in terms of finding measures for conflict detection and prevention. What if the concept of quantification itself simply isn't adequate for our purpose? Pless and Maak (2004) suggested generally not to understand culture as static set of variables, but as a measure to which extent people within a society tend to accept deviations from what they would consider to be appropriate. This understanding of culture appeared promising for our purposes.

Until some years ago, in Germany, the "Central Office for the Allocation of Places in High Education" ("Zentralstelle für die Vergabe von Studienplätzen") assigned students who wanted to study in a specific field to more or less random universities. This means that generally it was assumed that qualified enough German school leavers were capable to study in whichever university, independent of the institutional culture and local practices. Adopting the idea of Pless and Maak and combining it with the results from the LCS, this would mean that all characteristics provided by German universities would define something like a minimum area of acceptance, and in its' extremes, define the pain threshold. To which extent students can cope with more extreme situations, might differ individually.

We did not have a chance to investigate the German universities, which we considered having most extreme characteristics according to guidance and strictness – on the one side, the two German military universities with their trimesters and on the other, anthroposophical universities with a very low amount of formal examinations. Our samples, how-

ever, included some faculties with extreme characteristics. We assumed these could alternatively be used to define the margins of the acceptance level. The investigated South Korean universities, in contrast, included extreme cases, from very small universities to large ones and even a university with exclusively extra occupational programs for adults. We again created net diagrams contrasting both contexts but this time, not according to the individual characteristics or average values, but the whole spectrum between found extreme values. The Figures 8 and 9 show the results according to the thematic blocks "Time Management" and "Role of the Tutor".

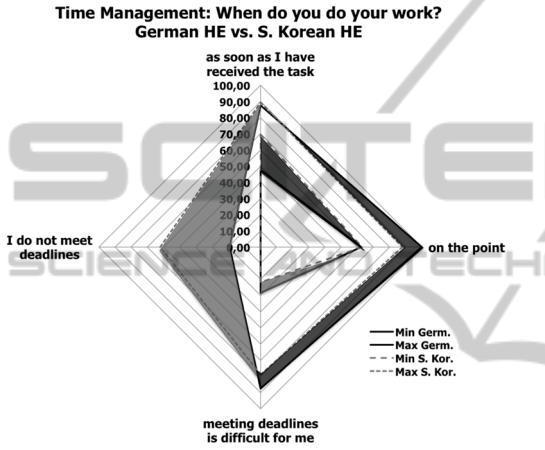

Figure 8: Thematic block "Time Management"; Contrasting Areas of Acceptance to define Cultural Distances.

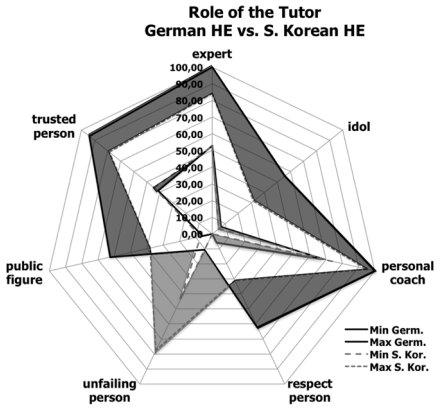

Figure 9: Thematic block "Role of the Tutor"; Contrasting Areas of Acceptance to define Cultural Distances.

For better recognition, we filled the parts of the "acceptance areas" from each context if outside the defined area of the other one, dark for the German context (not within the answer spectrum of the South Korean students) and grey for the South Korean. Figure 8 (on the left side) shows that not meeting deadlines appears to be more accepted in the South Korean context than in the German context. In fact, in South Korean universities, students often get a second chance when they have reasonable excuses why they missed a deadline. Work results of the German students usually will not be accepted anymore after the deadline has expired.

In Figure 9, the spectra from the thematic block "Role of the Tutor" are contrasted: On the first sight, the result we found in the South Korean context was very surprising for us: The responses of the South Korean students were very similar regarding both of role of the lecturer and the role of the tutor. We particularly could not imagine that tutors (who in our experience are older students) could be considered to be unfailing. In later informal interviews with colleagues in Seoul, we found out that even though tutorials take place in a far more familiar environment than lectures, mostly, the professors themselves hold the tutorials. We do not know if the answers of learners in pure online environments would be the same in this (for us) very particular situation. Further (qualitative) investigations in the South Korean context are scheduled for 2016. This experience particularly showed us that involving native people is essential for the interpretation phase.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Culture often is promoted as something that easily can be reduced to a small number of dimensions and basic values. As such, it is understood as a set of characteristics that apply to all people within nations in the same measure without regard of their particular life situations. Our research on educational culture of the past years revealed fundamental restrictions against such a generalization and transferability of results across educational contexts (school education, higher education, professional training). Against common practice, we additionally found that age and language influenced the culture-related perceptions of our investigated learners.

After we found that this commonly promoted concept of culture does at least not apply to the context of education (Richter and Adelsberger, 2012), we had to reconstruct our understanding of culture before starting further investigations. Our currently completed longitudinal study in the context of the Learning Culture Survey provided the last missing evidence that educational culture is persistent enough on university level so that initializing an international collection of related data on a large scale actually makes sense. Further on, our quantitative

results from the LCS questionnaire revealed appropriate to recognize, measure, and understand cultural differences in the context of education.

While we currently collect our data just in the context of traditional (face-to-face) education, we assume that the results are fully transferable to TEL; at least for learners and educators who are used to traditional forms of education and newly enter such a scenario. An extension of our studies to educational programs that exclusively offer online access is planned for the next years.

The datasets from the LCS enable learners and educators who are going to study and/or teach in other cultural contexts (online or offline) to start their efforts with a better understanding of the expectable peculiarities. In terms of conflict prevention, learners can adjust their initial expectations and find out about commonly accepted behavior in the targeted context (e. g., higher education in a specific country. Educators get an impression of the reasons for particular attitudes of their future learners and can develop a better understanding of their needs in terms of adopting their own accustomed teaching design (and practices) to the new conditions.

The data can also be used in the retrospective, in order to find the origins of repeatedly occurring culture-related conflicts in distinguished educational settings (possibly even resulting in higher dropout rates): On the basis of the issues considered in the LCS, monitored events and situations can systematically be analysed for possible reasons (see e. g., Richter and Adelsberger 2014), improvement potential can be determined, and the next generation of learning design can be defined accordingly.

As for the forecasting of possible educational conflicts, the approach to define cultural distance and related conflict potential on the basis of the level of acceptance is demanding but the results appear promising. However, even if one day, we will be able to determine conflict potential in specific educational settings, we will never be able to generally prevent all possible culture-related conflicts in education. We have too little understanding of additional influences and particularly, cross effects between different influence factors. Anyways, for specific situations and constellations, we eventually are/will be able to estimate where culture-related conflicts are likely to emerge. Further research is required on this issue and planned for the next years.

The results of our longitudinal study indicate that, on faculty level, the LCS reflects the students' reaction on changes in their own learning environments. We have the intention to investigate to which extent this finding could reveal helpful in the context of impact management and quality management.

6 NEXT STEPS AND CALL FOR CONTRIBUTION

With our questionnaire our and hitherto achieved understanding of educational culture, we are able to conduct standardized investigations regarding particular issues in different national and educational contexts and compare found results across contexts. We yet lack the understanding to explain (in detail) the reasons for found results. For this purpose, additional qualitative investigations need be implemented as follow-ups. We are currently developing standardized methods that enable us not only to pointedly investigate reasons for certain cultural perceptions and attitudes of learners but which additionally are similar enough to lead to results that eventually are comparable across contexts.

We are constantly extending our database and looking for opportunities to conduct the LCS in further educational contexts. Our long-term aim is to develop and provide an open database on educational culture. This database shall support both educators and learners all over the world to better understand other contexts' educational cultures. Such an understanding is essential, particularly when having to cope with the demands of culture-sensible education in international classrooms or with too highly or wrongly set expectations.

However, for that purpose we need a lot more reliable data from all over the world. Hence, we would like to invite other researchers and educational institutions to take part and contribute to the Learning Culture Survey.

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