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## **Russian Pre-Service and Young In-Service Teachers' Views on Cultural Dimensions of Russian Education: Power Distance**

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## Abstract

*The article discusses Power Distance as one of the cultural dimensions of Russian education based on the perceptions and views of Russian pre-service and young in-service teachers. These views were elicited in the context of a 2 ECTS master's degree course, "Cultural Dimensions of Education," offered at Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia. The course includes Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions and the manifestation of these dimensions in educational settings, Hall's cultural-factors theory (particularly high- and low-context cultures and monochronic versus polychronic cultures), but the research focuses on only one of the cultural dimensions, Hofstede's Power Distance. The students' reflections on their own experiences presented in writing as case studies and discussed with their peer students have been analyzed. Evidence has been gained that large Power Distance is a typical feature of Russian educational settings' attitudes and relationships among all the actors—school administration, teachers, pupils, and their parents.*

*The article discusses some of the cases presented and analyzed by the students and their arguments supporting their points of view.*

## Introduction

Owing to various political, economic, and social factors amplified by globalization processes, the modern world has become an arena of multicultural encounters, and as a result, educational institutions have also become multicultural, with all the stakeholders—school administrators and teachers, pupils, and their parents, interacting with each other in the contexts of cultural diversity. Multicultural educational contexts pose many challenges for all these stakeholders, but primarily, it is the teachers who have to deal with these challenges.

Parrish and Linder-VanBerschoot formulated a whole range of such challenges faced by the teachers (Parrish & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2010, p. 10–11), the most important of which being the following:

1. understanding and appreciating the cultural differences between students,
2. seeing one's own cultural preferences for what they are and not assuming they represent the "right" way of thinking,
3. determining which student behaviors represent cultural values,
4. accepting the dual responsibility of educators to acculturate and respect individual students' cultural backgrounds,
5. accepting that research-based instructional strategies are also culture-based and therefore may at times be inappropriate or in need of adaptation.

As Parrish and Linder-VanBerschoot contend, "the growing multicultural nature of education and training environments makes it critical that instructors [...] develop skills to deliver culturally sensitive and culturally adaptive instruction" (p. 1).

This goal raises a question as to how these skills may be developed. Assumedly, a special training is to be offered for teachers so that they become aware of these challenges and are ready to deal with them. What should teachers know about teaching/learning in multicultural settings to address cultural diversity? The starting point of training teachers in this field seems to be raising their awareness of cultural dimensions of education, that is of how cultural differences are manifested in various aspects of educational context in terms of pupils' and their parents' as well as teachers' and school administrators' expectations, attitudes, and behaviors. Lack of this awareness may result not only in misunderstandings but also in conflicts described in research literature (Henrichsen, 1998; Barzanò et al, 2004).

For example, Henrichsen (1998) describes a case illustrating a conflict which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the USA when there came a great deal of Russian and East European children in the English as a foreign language classes:

The teachers in the ESL classes continued to teach in their accustomed manner, using lots of games and activities to involve the children and to get them to interact. Within a very short period of time, the Russian and eastern European parents were coming to the classroom complaining to the teachers about their incompetence and the "total disarray" of the classes. The teachers tried to explain what they were doing and why, but the parents did not understand and were not convinced of the need for more activity. They wanted their children in their seats listening, reading, and writing, and they considered any teacher who could not deliver this kind of class incompetent. Not finding satisfaction at this level, the parents moved on to the principal of the school. Here, once again, the principal tried to explain the philosophy of the school and of the ESL teachers. Once again, the parents were not satisfied. Before the school district was able to find a solution to this problem, it had grown into a very large one (Henrichsen, 1998, section 2).

Commenting on this conflict, Henrichsen (1998) points out that it was caused by the fact that "school administrators did not acknowledge the cultural differences in expectations which Russian and eastern European immigrant children had about education" and that if the teachers had been aware of the "cultural differences in expectations," they "could have taken steps to defuse the problem and ease both children and parents into the new system more easily" from the very beginning (Henrichsen, 1998, section 2).

Barzanò et al. (2004) describe another case focusing on the conflict which started to develop when an experienced Australian teacher in his first year at an international school in Japan (where the staff consists of some local teachers and some teachers from overseas and the students are drawn from local and international communities) instead of answering a student's question concerning the lesson topic suggested that the student find out the answer herself. As the researchers interpret the causes of the resulting conflict which eventually involved the teacher, the pupil, the parents, and the principal, as a basic misunderstanding between the teacher's Australian culture and the Japanese culture; the misunderstanding concerns the purposes of education and what is expected of a 'teacher' in that society (Barzanò et al., 2004).

These cases give evidence of the need for preparing pre-service and in-service teachers for working in multicultural educational contexts. To meet this need, a course is offered at Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (St Petersburg) with the main goal of raising the students' awareness of the cultural factors underlying the interactions in educational settings and through this preparing them for their professional interactions in multicultural classrooms. The core of the content of the course is focused on the cultural-dimensions model developed by G. Hofstede.

## Theoretical Framework

Exploring the cultural differences to identify those aspects of culture that are most likely to impact instructional situations, it is reasonable to turn to one of the most discussed theoretical frameworks, namely that of G. Hofstede.

The cultural-dimensions model was developed by Hofstede (1980) as a result of the study of IBM employees' attitudes to job satisfaction and of the underlying values. The study was conducted in more than 50 countries; the statistical analysis of 117,000 questionnaires containing answers dealing with job-related values "revealed common problems, but with solutions different from country to country" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 13). According to Hofstede, these problems were related to the four following areas (pp. 13–14):

- social inequality, including the relationship with authority;
- the relationship between the individual and the group;
- concepts of masculinity and femininity: the social implications of having been born as a boy or a girl; and
- ways of dealing with uncertainty relating to the control of aggression and the expression of emotions.

Based on these data, Hofstede formulated cultural dimensions which he described as “aspects of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 14). The four dimensions<sup>1</sup> correspond to the above-mentioned problems respectively:

- Power Distance (the degree of unequal distribution of power that is expected and accepted)
- Individualism—Collectivism (the relationship between the individual and the collectivism prevailing in society)
- Masculinity—Femininity (the division of social roles between women and men in society)
- Uncertainty Avoidance (the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous situations)

According to Hofstede, these dimensions form “a four-dimensional model of differences among national cultures. Each country in this model is characterized by a score on each of the four dimensions” (Hofstede, 1991, p. 14). Although other dimensions were identified later, Hofstede described how these four and the underlying values are manifested in teaching and learning (Hofstede, 1986), that is in educational contexts.

Hofstede’s cultural-dimensions model has had a big impact on both research and practice in the area of intercultural communication—it “has been applied in a wide variety of contexts, across most (if not all) of the behavioral disciplines” (Blodgett et al., 2008, p. 339). Soondergaard (1994) analyzed about 550 applications of Hofstede’s model and divided them into four categories: citations, reviews, empirical replications, and applications as a paradigm. In 2001, Hofstede was ranked among the 20 most cited Europeans in the 2000 Social Science Citation Index, and it was pointed out by the Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation (2001) that “there are almost no publications, either from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, history, law, economics or business administration, that do not refer to Hofstede’s work [...] when explaining correspondences and distinctions between cultures” (Orr & Hauser, 2008, p. 2)

At the same time, Schmitz and Weber (2014) contend that Hofstede’s model “has evoked extreme and opposed reactions: many researchers use it as a paradigm for cross-national comparisons, while others criticize it harshly” (p. 11).

Thus, notwithstanding a great impact and wide application, not all scholars accept this framework, and the theory has been critically analyzed and tested for its validity. As stated in the analysis conducted by Soondergaard (1994) examining those studies that attempted to validate Hofstede’s research, almost two thirds of them found little or no support for Hofstede’s cultural framework.

Hofstede’s critics argue that the dimensions of his model are IBM-specific constructs, and therefore, they can serve only as standards of comparison among IBM employees (Schmitz & Weber, 2014, p. 19). Based on this argument, Schmitz and Weber (2014) conducted their research on the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension hypothesizing that this dimension is not valid beyond the IBM sample. They replicated the original items Hofstede used as indicators of this dimension and applied them in the interviews with and questionnaires given to workers of another company in Germany and France and also teachers in both countries. The research findings showed that in all the four samples, the items did not indicate the Hofstedean dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance (Schmitz & Weber, 2014). The items of measurement of Hofstede’s dimensions and hence the validity of the dimensions were

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<sup>1</sup> Later, two other dimensions were identified, but the first four had been included into the model.

criticized in other studies, and even new measures for Hofstede's dimensions were suggested (Dorfman & Howell, 1988).

Another essential criticism against the use of the cultural-dimensions model is that Hofstede "identified a dominant cultural profile for each country while not every citizen of that country has the same cultural profile" (Ford et al., 2003, p. 8). It has been argued that "cultural differences can be usefully described along these dimensions but that within any culture individuals will differ in how strongly they display these tendencies" (Parrish & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2010, p. 5). This kind of criticism has also been raised in a number of other studies. Blodgett et al. (2008), for example, examined Hofstede's framework to assess the validity of the cultural dimensions when applied at the individual level. The study's sample included undergraduate, faculty, and doctoral students' samples, and the findings gave evidence that the framework's macro-level comparisons are not valid in an individual-unit analysis.

One more critical point deals with Hofstede's denial of cultural changes based on his idea that cultures "are extremely stable over time" (Hofstede, 2009, p. 34). This assumption was re-examined in several further studies. For example, 25 years after Hofstede's study, Fernandez et al. (1997) conducted a research of work-related cultural dimensions in 9 countries, the data being collected from business students and professionals. The research findings showed that societal changes such as economic growth, education, and democracy can affect cultural dimensions. Wu's research (2006) conducted 30 years after Hofstede's study investigated occupational culture in higher-education settings in Taiwan and the USA. The research findings show that "work-related cultural values in a specific culture are not static and can be changed over time. When the political, societal, and economic environments change, people's cultural values also change" (Wu, 2006, p. 33).

At the same time, it is worthwhile to point out that there is still no absolute agreement concerning the rate of changes of cultural values, and this issue has been under discussion among scholars. For example, Curwood on the one hand states that cultural models "are dynamic and malleable, not static, and inflexible" (Curwood, 2014, p. 13) and on the other hand draws on Cohen (1989), Sarason (1990), and Putnam and Bortko (2000), who argue that "school-based teaching and learning have historically been resistant to fundamental change" (as cited in Curwood, 2014, p. 14). Curwood (2014) contends that "this resistance may be rooted in powerful cultural models that function to enculturate teachers into specific ways of thinking, doing and being" (p. 14).

Another remarkable point of criticism concerns Hofstede's rhetoric. The text analysis conducted by Fougere and Moulettes, who explored the rhetoric used by Hofstede to legitimize the validity of his cultural dimensions, revealed that "his binary oppositions tend to construct the world as characterized by a division between a 'developed and modern' side and a 'traditional and backward' side" and that he described "Western people as 'developed and modern' and non-Western people as traditional, irrational and prone to mysticism" (Fougere & Moulettes, 2007, p. 2). According to Fougere and Moulettes (2007), this kind of discursive construction is based on a colonial thinking (p. 21).

Notwithstanding the criticism of Hofstede's cultural-dimensions framework for its rigidity, lack of validity, and colonial thinking, Ford et al. (2003) argue that it is a relevant paradigm for further research. The research presented below is based on Hofstede's framework, particularly on the manifestations of cultural dimensions in education.

Hofstede presented the differences between small and large Power Distance cultures as manifested in an educational context thus (Hofstede, 1986, p. 305):

## Small Power Distance

Stress on impersonal "truth" which can in principle be obtained from any competent person

A teacher should respect the independence of his/her students

Student-centered education (premium on initiative)

Teacher expects students to initiate communication

Teacher expects students to find their own paths

Students may speak up spontaneously in class

Students allowed to contradict or criticize the teacher

Effectiveness of learning related to the amount of two-way communication in class

Outside class, teachers are treated as equals

In teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the student

Younger teachers are more liked than older teachers

## Large Power Distance

Stress on personal "wisdom" which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)

A teacher merits the respect of his/her students

Teacher-centered education (premium on order)

Students expect teacher to initiate communication

Students expect teacher to outline paths to follow

Students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher

The teacher is never contradicted nor publicly criticized

Effectiveness of learning related to excellence of the teacher

Respect to teachers is also shown outside class

In teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the teacher

Older teachers are more respected than younger teachers

The descriptors of these oppositions pinpoint the ends of the continuum along which the corresponding feature may be observed in a certain culture. Based on Hofstede's descriptors, it is possible to infer the characteristic features of an ideal teacher in small and large Power Distance cultures. Presumably, an ideal teacher in small Power Distance cultures is one who creates a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom for discussions, who can confess that he or she does not know something, who respects the pupils and elicits their personal opinions, and who may be contradicted and criticized. The opposite ideal is a teacher as a wise, all-knowing guru who maintains strict order and discipline, who expects respect from the pupils and their parents, and who can never be contradicted or criticized.

## Research Design and Methodology

The research question of this study is "What are Russian pre-service and young in-service teachers' views on the Power Distance dimension of Russian education?" The research uses qualitative methods. It analyzes Russian pre-service and in-service teachers' views on Power Distance as manifested in educational settings as well as various cases drawn from the students' experience, cases showing the impact of the culture on teachers' and students' behaviors.

The data were collected during 5 academic years (2011–2012, 2012–2013, 2013–2014, 2014–2015, 2015–2016), when 5 cohorts of students (38 students in total) majoring in early-foreign-language education took a master's degree course called "Cultural Dimensions of Education" (2 ECTS) offered at Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia. The main goal of the course is raising the students' awareness of cultural factors underlying the interactions in educational settings and through this awareness preparing them for their professional interactions in multicultural classrooms. The course includes Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions and their manifestation in educational settings, Hall's cultural-factors theory (particularly high and low context cultures and monochronic versus polychronic cultures). The research focuses on only one of the dimensions, Power Distance.

About 70% of students had already started their professional career as teachers of foreign languages at primary schools and preschool institutions in St Petersburg and the St Petersburg region. None of the students had studied the course topics before. All the students gave written consent permitting the use of their written assignments for research purposes.

In the light of the criticisms of the Hofstedeian cultural-dimensions framework, several decisions were made concerning the cultural-model presentation to the students and the discussions:

1. Owing to the criticism of the dimensions' validity, the decision was made not to inform the students immediately about the Russian cultural-dimensions scores, which are available at the website of the model,<sup>2</sup> but rather to elicit their own opinions based on their own experiences and observations.
2. Due to the criticism of Hofstede's rhetoric as that of a "colonial thinking" discourse, it was essential to come to an agreement with the students to avoid evaluating various dimensions as "good" or "bad."
3. Taking into account the criticism that cultural dimensions are macro-level constructs and are not always applicable at the individual level, the students should be aware of the "uniqueness of human mental programming" (Hofstede, 1986, pp. 5–6), of the role of personal psychological features which have an impact on behaviors and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>.

attitudes. Students should also learn to distinguish between what people in certain situations do and think under the influence of their culture and what they do and think under the influence of other factors. In this respect, it is important to analyze and discuss the cases presented by students in terms of cultural and individual factors driving the behaviors of the actors described in the case studies.

4. Arguably, cultural dimensions are tacit and not static, and owing to globalization and recent political and economic transformations, they have been changing. That is why the course included discussions of the globalization of education, and one of the discussions was aimed at identifying the changes in the educational context related to the transformations that have been going on in Russian education since the 1990s (Pogosian, 2012).

The course design and methodology were aimed at involving the students in critical analyses, reflections, and discussions. The following sequence of learning activities was implemented:

1. The introduction of the cultural dimension (as explained by Hofstede) followed by the students' discussion and sharing of their opinions about the extent of the dimension's manifestation in Russian culture. This discussion is regarded as relevant for the students because it makes them aware of their own culture, as "cultural knowledge often goes unquestioned because it is part and parcel of our daily lives" (Curwood, 2014, p. 15).
2. The introduction of the ways in which the dimension is manifested in educational settings (Hofstede, 1986).
3. The students' assignment to describe in writing their own experiences or cases they observed concerning these manifestations. The students published their assignments on the discussion forum.
4. Classroom discussions (90 minutes of face-to-face sessions devoted to each dimension) of the students' assignments, commenting on the experiences described and their interpretations of the cultural dimensions and underlying values.
5. Final assignment – the students' reflection papers "Cultural Dimensions of Russian Education" (2,000 words).

This way of structuring the students' activities made it possible to collect their views and opinions for further analysis and also to observe and analyze their face-to-face discussions.

## Research Findings and Analysis

The following section presents the views of Russian pre-service and in-service teachers on Power Distance in Russian educational settings. The analysis starts with the opinions elicited when the students first learnt about Power Distance dimension and shared their general views. The analysis proceeds with such aspects as the preferred age of teachers, classroom management, teachers' wisdom, teachers' and parents' relationships, and, finally, how and what Russian students feel when exposed to new educational contexts when teachers do not exercise the power the students have been used to.

## Power Distance in General

Having learnt about the Power Distance dimension, all the students in all the cohorts immediately recognized Russia as a country with a high score in this dimension. This coincides with Hofstede's research-based scoring of Russia (98 out of 100), and it is evident in practically all spheres of life when people deal with the authorities in all kinds of organizations, including the educational ones, as affirmed unanimously by the students:

I would score my culture as one with a large Power Distance.

I would definitely score Russia as a culture with a high level of Power Distance.

It is noteworthy that while practically all the in-service teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the Power Distance relationships between school authorities and teachers and complained about the lack of collegiality, all the students had a positive attitude to the large Power Distance at the classroom level, their arguments being "how else you can have pupils learn properly," "both pupils and their parents are to respect and obey the teachers," "only knowledgeable people can be teachers," and so forth. They could hardly imagine that any other, alternative values and attitudes could be possible or worthwhile. In other words, they were convinced that it was for the sake of the pupils that large Power Distance was the only possible kind of relationship in educational settings for appropriate teaching and learning.

The general descriptions of the Power Distance dimension given by the students based on their own experience correspond to Hofstede's descriptors of large Power Distance cultures. Although the students' opinions regarding Hofstede's formulations were different in details (some picked only some features for their comments, while others gave detailed characteristics of the educational relationships in terms of Power Distance), there was no one who characterized the relationships manifested in Russian education as small Power Distance relationships. Below are some of the students' views.

Teachers have a very high authority; their word is the only true one and is not to be questioned. The older the teacher, the more respect he/she has. Young teachers are considered inexperienced. Parents more willingly approve of older teachers teaching their children. (Female student, 2011–2012)

A teacher in Russia is the center of the educational process. The teacher is in the center of the class; children should be allowed to act (speak and so forth). Any pupils' initiative tends to be construed as an act of disobedience. (Female student, 2011–2012)

In Russia, there is a big psychological and physical distance between teachers and students. Teachers are usually dressed in an official way, and they address the pupils with their surnames. Students should be obedient and respect the teacher. There is a strict hierarchy in student–teacher relationships. The roles of teachers and pupils are very strictly defined.

I consider the Power Distance in Russia to be very large. Teachers are gurus (as Hofstede describes). Teachers possess the highest authority for children; they must be strict and have great knowledge. They must control the work of the whole class and be responsible for the knowledge of the children. Children must obey the will of the teacher and follow all the instructions given. Children are generally taught to respect the teacher and to be obedient.

Younger teachers must respect older teachers because of their experience. It is perceived as impolite to argue with more experienced teachers or to make judgments about their methods of teaching. (Female student, 2013–2014)

### **Older Teachers are Better Than the Young Ones**

One of the detailed cases described by an in-service teacher deals with the respect for the older teachers and such a lack of trust in the young ones that parents even change the school of their children so that a young teacher will not teach them:

I started my professional career as a classroom teacher in grade 2. The teacher who had worked the year before, in grade 1, had retired aged 62. I knew that there were 28 pupils in this class, but only 27 pupils were present at the celebrations of the start of the academic year. One of the pupils, Polina, did not show up during the first week of classes, as she had been travelling with her parents. But when she eventually came to school, she stayed there only for one week, and afterwards, I never saw her again, as well as her dancing partner Anton, who also was a pupil in my class. It turned out that as soon as Polina's parents found out that a young university graduate took the position of the former experienced teacher, they hurried to the principal asking for a placement in another class in grade 2, the one with an experienced classroom teacher, but as long as there were no vacant placements in other classes at all, they chose to take their daughter to another school. Because Polina and Anton took dancing classes together, it was convenient for their parents that both children went to the same class, so Anton also went to the same school with Polina.

It is a pity that the girl's parents did not even give me a chance to demonstrate what kind of teacher I was—my age was the only indicator for them that I was not good enough. (Female student, 2014–2015)

### **Classroom management**

Hofstede's descriptors are also suggestive of the features of the typical classroom management in large Power Distance cultures: there is strict order and discipline in the classroom maintained by the teacher, and the teacher leads the conversation flow and gives permission to speak, to stand up, to go out, to move, and so forth. Here is an example provided by one of the young pre-service teachers that gives evidence of this at the primary-school level:

When I had just started to work as a teacher, I was surprised that the pupils were constantly asking for permission to do something during the lesson: "May I sharpen the pencil?", "May I ask Sasha for an eraser?" (Female student, 2012–2013)

Based on Hofstede's descriptors, it is also possible to infer the main features of the teaching/learning process, which is also rooted in the central role of the teacher and his/her valued qualities:

- The teacher transfers the knowledge, gives the assignments and the instructions as to how to do them, and checks how correctly the assignments have been done.
- The teacher is responsible for the pupils' achievements, and that is why the number of tests and the amount of home assignments may be too large, but even if the pupils are heavily overloaded with assignments, neither the pupils nor their parents will complain: the teacher knows better what is needed for the pupils to succeed.

## The Teacher and the Knowledge

It is important to point out that Hofstede's descriptors are presented as oppositions between small and large Power Distance cultures, but it does not imply that while the teacher in a large Power Distance culture is to be knowledgeable and wise, the teacher in a small Power Distance culture is supposed to be ignorant. The descriptors refer to the attitudes to knowledge in different cultures. Arguably, individual features of the person, personal knowledge, and wisdom are valued and respected in all cultures. As for small Power Distance cultures where the stress is on the impersonal truth which may be obtained from various sources, it is clear that it is the truth and the ability to find it that are valued.

Owing to the recent and fast development of information technologies in the contemporary world, this ability becomes very relevant, as it is quite possible and even easy for students to find out the information that is not known to their teacher, and it becomes more significant for students to learn how to find the truth rather than learn it exclusively from the teacher. This attitude to the truth and to the ability to find it are common to the small Power Distance cultures, where the teachers even encourage students to find the information and the answers themselves, but they are not common and are not accepted in large Power Distance cultures. The situation below describes the reaction of a Russian teacher to the student's attempts and desire to share the information he found himself, information that is evidently not known to the teacher.

My husband was very interested in history and geography when he was at school. He read a great deal of books, surfed the Internet, and watched interesting programs on TV. Several times, when he found out some mistakes in her lessons, he tried to help his geography teacher, an old woman. He tried to share the information politely when he was sure that he was right. He never expressed disrespect, he just wanted to help and discuss some information that could be interesting and useful to others. Anyway, she showed no interest in his initiative and even gave him bad grades for being 'too clever.' (Female student, 2013–2014)

Commenting on this case, the student wrote the following:

This case in my opinion demonstrates the impact of Russia's large Power Distance on education. The teacher was not ready to have relationships of equality with her students; she did not want the pupils to take the initiative, and to challenge her own authority and the power to translate her wisdom to students.

Naturally, the reactions of teachers to the fact that they do not know something or that students notice mistakes they make may be different. Here is an observation made by one of the students:

Teachers are also human beings—that is why they can make mistakes. However, not every teacher can admit his/her mistake, especially when the students have noticed it. Usually, the teachers will say "I have written it like this on purpose because I wanted to check you," although sometimes in such situations, teachers get rude, and it happens very seldom that a teacher will be grateful to the students for being attentive and helpful, but the fact that there are teachers like that makes me feel glad. (Female student, 2012–2013)

This student's comment ("sometimes in such situations, teachers get rude") implies that in the context of large Power Distance, classroom relationships, behaviors, psychological atmosphere, and so forth depend heavily on the teacher's temper and mood. The teacher is given much power and may use this in various ways. The case below shows the extent of overusing this power:

Chemistry class, grade 11. The lesson starts. The teacher says, "You are all prospective janitors." The pupils are silent because they know as soon as they say anything, they will be sent outdoors. The teacher starts asking about the home assignment. One of the pupils' reply is wrong. The teacher's reaction: "Did you drink glue when you went to kindergarten?" Somebody smiled. Then the teacher continues, "Your whole class is a dark forest, only oaks, fir-trees, stumps, and stubs." The teacher may be rude, humiliate the pupils, but they are afraid to reply. (Female student, 2012–2013)

The above case and the student's comment demonstrate the extreme use of the teacher's power, enabling the teacher to humiliate the pupils and making pupils accept the humiliation. At the same time, this case should not be considered typical, though when discussed with peer students, it did not cause any surprise or any doubt that the story is true. However, to avoid overgeneralizations and stereotyping, it should be emphasized that not all Russian teachers are rude, though they do dominate classroom communication, that not all Russian pupils are obedient—they may be very naughty and difficult to deal with—and that a teacher's ability to be strict and demanding, to maintain discipline, and to have pupils learn properly is highly praised.

## Teachers and Parents

Strict and demanding teachers may not be liked very much by the pupils, but they are supported by parents, which is discussed in the case below:

When I was a pupil, a friend of mine had problems with reading aloud and with comprehending the texts. Our primary-school teacher was not kind to him, she often scolded him and gave him bad grades. And once she even gave him a grade 0. I am sure she did not write 0 in the school registry, but she wrote 0 in his diary. His parents were told to come to school to discuss his academic progress. When the parents came, they together with the teacher scolded their son, and when they came home, the boy was also beaten. As a result, after some time, his reading was improved. I think this case demonstrates large Power Distance, where parents take the side of the teacher in the conflict with the pupil. (Male student, 2015–2016)

## Students' Reactions to Unusual Teachers' Behaviors

It is remarkable that having learnt about the alternative attitudes, values, and behaviors, the students started reflecting on their previous educational experiences with foreign teachers and analyzing the situations in which they were in the past from the point of view of the Power Distance dimension. These reflections and the students' comments give evidence that the awareness of cultural-dimensions theory sheds light on the underlying values that have an impact on the behaviors and attitudes in the educational settings.

It happened some years ago when speaking clubs for learning a foreign language were still gaining popularity. Our group gathered for the first meeting of the club. We were quite different people, not familiar with each other. Our club was moderated by Peter, a middle-aged, highly educated, very nice teacher from the USA. When Peter asked us to introduce ourselves, there was quite a long pause—no one wanted to start because we expected that the teacher must designate the first person to speak. We all saw ourselves in the traditional position of the students, and we put Peter on the teacher's pedestal and were ready to execute his orders. Peter quickly found a way out of the situation—he pointed at the nearest person and said: "Well, let's start

with you, please.” The process of communication began. (Female student, 2011–2012)

The next case describes practically the same situation—it involves a foreign teacher and Russian students:

After a short introduction, the new teacher from the USA asked us what topic we would prefer to discuss. The answer was a confused silence. All persons thought: “*You* are a teacher and *you* must set the topic. What kind of teacher is this, who consults with students? Perhaps he is not prepared for class.” All these arguments were read very well on our faces.

However, the teacher was prepared for the situation—he took out a pre-prepared sheet of paper with the questions and topics and set the main topic for discussion himself. The audience sighed with relief. (Female student, 2012–2013)

It is interesting that practically the same situation was described by another student:

I went to school in the 1990s. It was a difficult time, and there were not so many opportunities for us to communicate with native speakers of English. And somehow, our English teacher succeeded in inviting her pen friend to Russia. Of course, she invited him to our school for us to practice English. He was a pleasant man, also a teacher, from the USA. He entered the classroom, introduced himself with a smile, and proposed that we ask him any questions or suggest any topic for discussion. But we kept silent and just looked at him, making him a little bit nervous. We were used to listening to our teacher telling us what topic we were going to discuss, and besides, nobody wanted to be the first to speak—we were waiting for our teacher to choose the topic for discussion. (Female student, 2011–2012)

The students also provided cases pointing out the impact of small Power Distance cultures on Russian educators who had some experience of either studying or working abroad. The case and the comments below give evidence that the new kind of teacher behavior is not accepted by the students:

A new teacher came to our university to teach us a translation course. She had just come back from England, where she had been studying for three years. She was young and friendly; she used to communicate with us as with equals from our first lesson. She suggested that our lessons be like discussions, that we not put down some theory in our notebooks or check our home assignments the way we usually did with other teachers. We were to find various versions of translations and discuss them together, we were to find information we needed ourselves. The classes were interesting, but still, some students hated her lessons because they wanted her to take the initiative, just to tell the rules of translation and the examples of good translations, as they said—they wanted her not to talk, but to teach. (Female student, 2013–2014)

Commenting on this case, the student wrote the following:

This case shows that Russian students, after having experienced the inequality in communication with teachers in school and having gotten used to hierarchy in teacher–students relationships, have problems with getting used to another, more democratic style of teaching common to countries with lower Power Distance. It is much easier for them not to take the initiative but just respect the authority and follow the instructions.

The last three cases demonstrate that Russian students are very sensitive to any unfamiliar traits in the teacher’s behavior, and they also do not feel comfortable in the new learning situations caused by these new traits: they are reluctant to take the initiative, to discuss, and to voice their opinions. And that is actually how learning is understood—listening to the teacher and taking notes, reading the textbook, and doing the assignments.

## Conclusion

The opinions of Russian master’s degree students, all being pre-service or in-service teachers, on the Power Distance dimension as manifested in Russian educational settings correspond to the descriptors which Hofstede interprets as large Power Distance.

Although the goal of this research was not to test Hofstede’s framework, it should be pointed out that the features of teaching/learning, the attitudes, and the values attributed by Hofstede to large Power Distance cultures about 40 years ago coincide with those in Russian education today. Judging by the students’ statements, all the large Power Distance values described by Hofstede draw a picture of a typical good teacher for this kind of culture.

In Russian culture, the ideal for a teacher is to be knowledgeable, wise, experienced, strict, authoritative, dominating, demanding, and formal. Arguably, wisdom and knowledge are central in this paradigm, as it is for wisdom that the teacher is respected and consequently cannot be criticized. The teacher’s knowledge is the source of his/her pupils’ knowledge—the teacher knows not only what is to be learnt but also how it is to be learnt, and that is why there is no reason to look for other sources of knowledge, to argue, or to express one’s own opinion. It takes time to gain knowledge and to acquire teaching skills. That is why long teaching experience is regarded as a merit, and as a result, it is natural that older teachers are more respected than the young ones. The teacher also maintains strict order in the classroom, where the atmosphere is serious and there is no room for laughter and entertainment.

Cultural diversity in Russian schools and pre-school institutions has been growing due to the increasing numbers of labor migrants from the former Soviet republics, and school teachers need insights into the cultural differences relevant for interactions with these students and their parents. At the same time, raising the educators’ awareness of cultural differences in educational settings is only the first step toward overcoming the cultural barriers and transforming the potential barriers and obstacles into the advantages of a multicultural school environment. The research presented should be widened and followed by broad comparative research of not only cultural differences but also the competence, skills, and solutions required for teaching and learning in multicultural classrooms.

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