

ANALYSING EXPATRIATES' EXPERIENCE WITH "CULTURE SHOCK" IN CZECH REPUBLIC – RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY STUDENTS AND THEIR THEORETICAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract:

This paper presents the results of an analysis of 95 interviews conducted by Skoda Auto University (SAU) students with expatriates who have lived and worked in the Czech Republic (CR) for a minimum of 2 years. Interviews were held during the period of October 2022 – May 2023. The paper is divided into three parts.

Part one describes the objectives and methodology of the research. The research pursued had the following objectives:

- (1) to answer to the question if "culture shock" should be understood as a closed linear or as a repetitive cyclical process (Marx, 2011);
- (2) identification of the main expatriates' adaptation problems to Czech culture;
- (3) convey to Czech SAU students practical insights into both the nature of culture shock and critical aspects of the Czech culture in the view of expatriates;
- (4) exploitation of the research results in adaptation programs for SAU foreign students.

The research methodology was based on structured interviews containing 14 open questions. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and they covered the following topics:

- (1) identity (i.e. nationality, time spent in CR) of the respondent – 6 items;
- (2) preparing to stay in the CR – 2 items;
- (3) the most difficult adaptation problems in the beginning of the stay in the CR – 2 items;
- (4) recurring and current adaptation problems – 4 items.

The interview results were analysed in two steps. The first step was conducted by the students, who:

- (1) identified all adaptation problems of the respondents including their resources;

(2) explained what they learnt from the interviews. In the second step the authors of this paper conducted open coding of both the answers to interviews questions and the results of the students' analysis. Open coding is the systematic analysis of qualitative data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships (Saldana, 2021).

Part two describes research results. Analysis of the interviews led to the following findings:

- (1) Sample description – i.e. majority of respondents (68) came from EU countries; average time spent in the CR was 5,9 years;
- (2) Preparation to stay in CR - majority of the respondents (72) did not prepare;
- (3) The most difficult initial adaptation problem – language barrier;
- (3) Recurring and current adaptation problems – i.e. understanding the Czech administrative system; some Czech cultural traditions; cultural prejudice and stereotypes of some Czechs;
- (4) Czech students' lessons from the interviews – new knowledge about culture shock (i.e. long-term learning process; importance of language skills) and about critical aspects of the Czech culture (i.e. many Czechs are xenophobic).

Part three presents the conclusions of the project. In reference to the objectives of the research, it can be concluded:

- (1) Results of the interviews indicate that culture shock represents a repetitive cyclical process;
- (2) Main adaptation problems of expatriates to Czech culture are associated with language barriers, reserved behaviour and cultural prejudice of Czechs, as well as the functioning of the Czech administrative system;
- (3) Students gained new insights into both the nature of culture shock and Czech culture;
- (4) Selected interviews will be integrated in a form of short case studies into the SAU adaptation program for foreign students; Czech language courses on these programs will be more practically oriented. Due to their success, interviews with expatriates will also be integrated into the teaching at a SAU partner university in Finland.

Keywords:

Acculturation, culture shock, structured interviews, adaptation problems, adaptation program, open coding, Czech culture, Czech language.

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