

# Cultural Differences between Czechia and Slovakia in the Light of Global Literacy

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**Abstract:** National culture and its various dimensions seem to affect various aspects of our lives. However, the role of national culture in the development of global literacy is still unclear. The aim of the paper is to evaluate whether the existence of cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia can lead to differences in the level of global literacy of university students. The questionnaire-based survey was conducted on a sample of Slovak and Czech university students studying economics and business. The results indicate that despite significant cultural differences between the two nations in terms of some dimensions of Hofstede's framework, no significant differences in the level of global literacy between both groups of students were detected. It seems that national culture does not play an important role in the development of global literacy and/or the cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia are not so significant. These considerations deserve further investigation.

**Keywords:** national culture; dimensions; global literacy

**JEL Classification:** I23; J16; Z10

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## 1. Introduction

National culture is supposed to affect many aspects of our lives. Literature offers plenty of proves on influences of national culture in such fields as entrepreneurship (Bogatyreva et al., 2019; Laskovaia et al., 2017), informal learning (Kim & McLean, 2014), or strategies for conflict resolution (Le Nguyen et al., 2016). However, little is known about the association between national culture and global knowledge, awareness and the ability to grip global issues, which is also referred to as global literacy (Cakmak et al., 2017). One of the few studies in a similar regard proved some impact of national culture on intercultural competences, however, it appears to be relatively small compared to the influence of organizational culture or gender (Graf, 2004).

The interest of the author is to look in more detail at the level of global literacy of the university students and its determinants. As already suggested by Nair et al. (2012) one of the challenges of promoting students' global literacy lies in developing the capacity of their tacit understanding to connect local and global aspects so that they are useful and meaningful to their lives and work. Previous studies have already showed that there are some factors that help to promote global literacy, such as enrolment in courses related to international business, contacts with foreigners at campuses, gender (e.g. Meng et al., 2017; Karanikola, 2022), communication in foreign languages or the use of social media (Kilinç & Tarman, 2022). Hence,

it is reasonable to assume that national culture could also be an important determining factor in this regard.

When looking at differences in national cultures, Hofstede's (1980) pioneering work on cultural dimensions is among the most attractive. Subsequently, the researchers tried to go beyond the original database by studying other countries that were not included in the pilot work. This was also the case of Slovakia and Czechia, whose cultural differences form the main object-matter of this paper.

One of the important studies in this regard is a work by Kolman et al. (2003) who identified huge cultural differences not only in comparison to Western Europe but also within the group of Central European countries. Specifically, when referring to the original (uncalibrated) scores suitable for comparing these countries, the biggest difference between Slovakia and Czechia (i.e. by 57 points) was detected within masculinity/ femininity dimension, where Slovakia scores extremely towards masculinity. The authors explain this mainly by the fact that, when describing an ideal job, Slovaks do not see much importance in working with people who easily cooperate with each other. The following are the same differences (by 28 points) in the case of power distance and individualism versus collectivism. These differences are mainly explained by various family structures. While in Slovakia extended patriarchal families used to be typical, in Czechia standard families are smaller with a less strong position of the father.

Subsequent studies challenged especially the extreme position of Slovakia with regard to power distance and masculinity, as well as significant differences between Czechia and Slovakia. Bašňáková et al. (2016) showed greater similarities between the Czechs and Slovaks when compared to previous estimates, without reaching extreme values. However, the largest difference between the two nations (by 21 points) still remained in masculinity dimension.

Hence, it is reasonable to expect that existence of cultural differences between Czechia and Slovakia is also reflected in some dimensions of global literacy. The next part of the paper explains methodology applied in the study, followed by the results and their discussion. In addition to a brief summary of the results, the conclusion also provides some implications for future research in this direction.

## 2. Methodology

Based on the above considerations, the research questions posted in this paper should be as follows:

- Are cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia underpinned by differences in selected dimensions of global literacy?
- Are there any gender differences in this regard?

Hence, the aim of the study is to evaluate whether the existence of cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia can lead to differences in the level of global literacy of university students.

First, the cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia were analyzed. For this purpose, the concept developed by Hofstede et al. (2010) and the scores available at country comparison of Hofstede Insights (2023) were used. Based on this, Slovakia and Czechia score within particular cultural dimensions as follows:

Table 1. Cultural differences between Czechia and Slovakia. (Adopted from Hofstede Insights, 2023.)

Cultural Dimension	Czechia	Slovakia	Difference
Power Distance	57	100	-43
Individualism/ Collectivism	58	52	6
Masculinity/ Femininity	57	100	-43
Uncertainty Avoidance	74	51	23
Long Term Orientation	70	77	-7
Indulgence	29	28	1

The table shows that the biggest cultural differences between Czechia and Slovakia are obvious within power distance dimension as well as masculinity dimension. In both cases Slovakia reports the highest possible scores, thus being a culture with a high power distance and a masculine type of society. The third dimension, which shows higher difference is uncertainty avoidance, which is higher in the case of Czechia. In the case of the rest of cultural dimensions negligible differences are obvious. On the basis of this knowledge, those dimensions of global literacy were subsequently selected, which could be most connected with the cultural dimensions showing the biggest differences. Following dimensions were taken into consideration: risk-taking, relationship development, self-awareness, self-efficacy.

The tendency to take risks is mainly connected with the avoidance of uncertainty, since, as shown by e.g. Çera et al. (2020) highly uncertainty-averse countries tend to be less risk tolerant. With regard to a relationship development dimension within global literacy there is at least partial contentual overlap with masculinity/ femininity and power distance cultural dimensions. For building and maintaining relationships with foreigners it is essential to be open for communication also within domestic environment. Similarly, these two cultural dimensions are also related to self-awareness as critical aspect of global literacy (Nam & Fry, 2010) lying in understanding of own cultural background, its barriers and limitations, needed prior to understanding other cultural profiles. Self-efficacy, often defined as confidence in achieving goals and solving issues, has strong consequences for behavior within organizations, especially from knowledge sharing point of view (Yoon & Han, 2018), similarly as distribution of power within organization and society.

To evaluate students' level of literacy within these dimensions an online questionnaire-based survey consisting of particular statements was used. Risk-taking attitude was assessed with a general risk-taking question/statement adopted from Dohmen et al. (2017), as well as three complementary statements also focused on the riskiness of purchasing behavior proposed by Donthu and Gilliland (1996). The rest of global competence dimensions were assessed by 21 statements adopted from Arevalo et al. (2012). Survey participants expressed the extent to which they agree with each statement on this 7-point Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree. Some statements were negatively worded, and therefore the answers to them were subsequently reverse coded. In general, higher scores indicate higher risk-taking tendency and higher level of global literacy in the rest of dimensions.

Survey participants were students studying economics, management and business at two universities, namely: University of Economics in Bratislava, Faculty of Business Economy with seat in Košice, Slovakia (150 students) and Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Economics and Administration, Czechia (71 students). It is important to note that in the case of both countries, the responses of only those students who in specific cases stated their national culture as Slovak or Czech were included in the research. Hence, for example, in the case of Czech sample a significant portion of Slovak students studying in Czechia was excluded from the research. Thus, the final number of responses included in this research was 134 Slovak and 49 Czech students. In terms of gender, the research sample consisted of 114 women and 69 men. The students filled out the questionnaire in the last week of the summer term of the academic year 2021/2022 immediately after the particular course under the supervision of the teacher. Hence, all the students participating at the particular course filled out the questionnaire. The significance of differences in the mean scores of responses to individual statements within particular dimensions of global literacy were subsequently tested via a two-sample t-test. The MS Excel Data Analysis tool package was used for data processing.

### 3. Results

First, the differences in the selected dimensions of global literacy between Czechia and Slovakia have been analyzed. Besides this, table 2 reports also gender differences of the whole sample. When reporting the differences in the mean score, the results of statistical testing of the significance of the differences at the 5% level are also reported.

Table 2. Differences in the level of global literacy between Czechia and Slovakia and in terms of gender

Dimension	Culture			Gender – whole sample		
	Slovakia mean <i>variance</i>	Czechia mean <i>variance</i>	Difference <i>p-value</i>	Women mean <i>variance</i>	Men mean <i>variance</i>	difference <i>p-value</i>
Risk-taking	3.4235 <i>1.1863</i>	3.5306 <i>1.1345</i>	-0.1071 <i>0.2771</i>	3.4122 <i>1.0542</i>	3.5181 <i>1.3682</i>	-0.1058 <i>0.2612</i>
Relationship Development	5.1169 <i>0.5940</i>	5.2449 <i>0.6008</i>	-0.1280 <i>0.1610</i>	5.1740 <i>0.5410</i>	5.1135 <i>0.6932</i>	0.0605 <i>0.3045</i>
Self-awareness	5.0566 <i>0.4438</i>	5.2566 <i>0.4141</i>	-0.2000* <i>0.0356</i>	5.1617 <i>0.4279</i>	5.0248 <i>0.4586</i>	0.1368 <i>0.0888</i>
Self-efficacy	4.7603 <i>1.2958</i>	5.0536 <i>0.9688</i>	-0.2933 <i>0.0559</i>	4.8432 <i>1.2602</i>	4.8315 <i>1.1695</i>	0.0117 <i>0.4725</i>

\* Asterisk indicates statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level.

The results indicate that Czech students show slightly higher level of global literacy as their Slovak counterparts, however the difference is statistically significant only in the case of self-awareness. Higher global competence of Czech students in all dimensions can be attributed to more internationally oriented environment in which they operate. Czech students seem to be more exposed to multiculturalism due to higher portion of foreign students studying at Czech universities. This can partially explain also the significant difference in self-awareness that is connected with recognition and respect for diversity.

When looking at gender differences within the whole sample, women tend to be slightly more risk-averse compared to men. On the other hand, women perform slightly better in development of relationships, as well as in self-awareness and self-efficacy. However, none of these differences are statistically significant. Considering huge cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia in masculinity dimension it can be expected that a more detailed look at both countries separately in terms of gender may yield distinct results. Hence, further gender related differences were tested. In the case of Slovakia, the total of 91 women and the total of 43 men were in the research sample. In the case of Czechia, research sample consisted of 23 women and 26 men. Table 3 shows results of this gender analysis.

Table 3. Gender differences in the level of global literacy in Czechia and Slovakia

Dimension	Slovakia			Czechia		
	Women mean <i>variance</i>	Men mean <i>variance</i>	difference <i>p-value</i>	Women mean <i>variance</i>	Men mean <i>variance</i>	difference <i>p-value</i>
Risk-taking	3.3956 <i>1.0931</i>	3.4826 <i>1.4089</i>	-0.0870 <i>0.3339</i>	3.4783 <i>0.9370</i>	3.5769 <i>1.3488</i>	-0.0987 <i>0.3750</i>
Relationship Development	5.1227 <i>0.5419</i>	5.1047 <i>0.7196</i>	0.0181 <i>0.4499</i>	5.3768 <i>0.5081</i>	5.1282 <i>0.6762</i>	0.2486 <i>0.1335</i>
Self-Awareness	5.1020 <i>0.4233</i>	4.9601 <i>0.4843</i>	0.1419 <i>0.1256</i>	5.3975 <i>0.3932</i>	5.1319 <i>0.4146</i>	0.2656 <i>0.0756</i>
Self-Efficacy	4.7445 <i>1.3288</i>	4.7936 <i>1.2544</i>	-0.0491 <i>0.4084</i>	5.2337 <i>0.8371</i>	4.8942 <i>1.0671</i>	0.3395 <i>0.1160</i>

In the case of both countries are men slightly less risk-averse than women. Similar results for both countries are shown for the dimension of relationship development and self-awareness with slightly higher scores for women, while this difference is more obvious in the case of Czechia. On the other hand, opposite differences in terms of gender are found in self-efficacy dimension, which may be related to the fact that Slovak women grew up in a markedly masculine society. However, none of these differences are statistically significant.

#### 4. Discussion

Despite obvious difference in the uncertainty avoidance between Slovakia and Czechia, no significant difference was found in terms of risk-taking tendency. It can be explained by the composition of the research sample, since in the case of this study it was not an entire population but a sample of young people who tend to be more risk tolerant. Aversion to risk has a growing tendency during the course of life (proved e.g. by Dohmen et al., 2017), while this growth can be non-linear in individual countries, resulting in greater differences between individual cultures, which, however, should be subjected to further investigation. With regard to gender it is not possible to confirm the prevailing findings resulting from empirical literature (e.g. Charness & Gneezy, 2012; Twumasi Baffour et al., 2019) that men tend to tolerate risk better than women. The insignificance of our results with respect to gender differences suggests rather the existence of publication bias related to gender differences, as already pointed out by Croson and Gneezy (2009).

As for the other dimensions of global literacy, statistically significant differences from a cultural point of view were found only in self-awareness, which is significantly higher in the case of Czech students. Atwater et al. (2009) also pointed out in their study that self-awareness is related to some cultural characteristics, including power distance. Graf (2004) also found some influence of national culture on intercultural competences, however, it appeared to be rather small. Hence, an ability to be globally literate in today's interconnected world does not seem to be primarily a matter of national culture. This ability, or at least some of its dimensions, can be most probably well teachable via classroom-based courses (as pointed out by e.g. Arevalo et al., 2012) or outside classroom via other extra-curricular activities (as show by e.g. Meng et al., 2017).

Regarding the cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia itself it should be noted that, when compared to the previous work by Kolman et al. (2003), current scores indicate smaller differences. It is obvious especially in the case of masculinity/ femininity dimension within which the original difference of 57 points is currently at the level of 43 points. Since our sample consisted exclusively of university students, i.e. young people, this difference can be expected to be even smaller, thus explaining no significant gender gaps within both cultures. Overall, the cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia seem not to be so significant and possibly should be subject to revision within future research. There are also other studies that challenge some of Hofstede's original findings. For example, Eringa et al. (2015) showed significant differences in the majority dimensions explained either by relatively small samples or little stability of cultures.

## 5. Conclusions

The paper was focused on evaluation of cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia and their association with selected dimensions of global literacy. The research sample consisted of university students approximately the same age as the representatives of the respective culture. The results show that cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia are still strong in some dimensions of Hofstede's framework, but seem to be diminishing over time. Despite these cultural differences between the two nations, no significant differences were found in the level of global literacy between the two groups of students, except for self-awareness. Hence, cultural differences between Slovakia and Czechia shown within Hofstede Insights (2023) seem not to be underpinned by differences in selected dimensions of global literacy.

Insignificance of the findings with regard to majority of investigated global literacy dimensions can basically be explained by two considerations. First, the nature of national culture does not appear to affect development of literacy related to global environment and foreignness markedly, since this is rather teachable competence. Second, the evaluation of cultural dimensions of Slovakia and Czechia should be revised, since cultural differences between these countries seem not to be so huge in some dimensions, especially masculinity/ femininity and uncertainty avoidance.

In terms of gender, no statistically significant differences were detected in any of the analyzed dimensions. This is true both for the entire sample as well as when looking at the

national subsamples separately. There is not a significant gender gap neither in the case of Slovakia nor in Czechia, which also do not support the generally declared high difference between the two nations in the masculinity/ femininity cultural dimensions. A more detailed investigation of these connections represents an interesting future research ambition.

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