

Mitigating Cultural Bias in Diplomacy Education: Toward Sustainable Intercultural Learning

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ABSTRACT:

It has always been a challenge to instruct students with various cultural and national background at universities; it is especially true when it comes to the complex issues of diplomacy. The aim of the paper is to highlight the challenges experts have to face when teaching the subject of diplomacy in higher education institutions. Both professors and students must be aware of the potential cultural bias when the focus is laid on international issues. Nevertheless, there is a demand for being well informed about the current diplomatic activities, which require open-mindedness and an objective approach, which are very hard to reach. The study reveals the competences necessary both for professors and students to avoid or minimize a biased perception of reality and besides, which values are definitely obvious and emphasized when discussing crucial and sensitive topics. The method of analysis is based on secondary literature results and semi-structured interviews with professors and international students at Széchenyi University in Hungary. The study attempts to find out the solutions to minimize bias and strengthen values in the academic discipline of diplomacy.

Keywords: diplomacy, cultural bias, multicultural groups, universities, semi-structured interviews

1. Introduction

With globalization and the rise of international mobility, universities are accepting international students in a growing tendency, especially in social sciences and international relations programs (Andrade, 2006). Teaching diplomacy in this multicultural context is crucial, but also presents many difficulties. These challenges root not only in linguistic and cultural differences, but also in different political socialization, academic traditions and different interpretations. Despite, the science of diplomacy and its practical implications are most important in present times full of conflicts, wars and a global competitive economic environment (Nye, 2004).

Teaching diplomacy is based on students' political, historical and cultural knowledge. In an international students' group, however, students' knowledge of the basics of international relations may have considerable differences, and the concept of 'diplomacy' may even be interpreted differently (Knight, 2022).

The differences may influence students' attitudes towards different schools of thought (realism, constructivism, liberalism) and may also affect classroom discussions. Professors therefore need a sensitive and open-minded approach that allows understanding and confrontation of different interpretations without discriminating against one perspective.

Both teachers and students face the difficulties of keeping an objective stance when it comes to the discussion of any issues and topics related to diplomacy. In academic fields you definitely have to find a solution how to defeat these barriers as the subject of

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diplomacy provides inevitable knowledge for the future experts of political sciences and international relations.

Therefore, in this paper we are attempting to identify the problems in academic diplomacy lectures, define the reasons for cultural bias. The present qualitative research was conducted among professors teaching diplomacy and international students studying the subject at the Széchenyi University (Győr, Hungary). In the semi-structured interviews we aimed to answer the research question: What teaching and learning difficulties can emerge in diplomacy courses in international groups of students? What are the solutions to mitigate cultural bias in these courses?

2. Internationalization process at universities

Internationalizing higher education has been crucial over decades as it is emphasized in the UNESCO's preparatory document for the World Conference on Higher Education:

'the growing internationalization of higher education is first and foremost a reflection of the global character of learning and research. The current processes of economic and political integration, the growing need for intercultural understanding and the global nature of modern communications, consumer markets, etc. are reinforcing this universal context. The ever-expanding number of students, teachers and researchers who study, teach, undertake research, live, and communicate in an international context attests to this overall welcome development' (UNESCO, 1995, p. 33).

Internationalization at higher education institutions (later referred to as HEIs) primarily focuses on research projects, academic mobility and doctorate scholarships to enhance international cooperation worldwide. The process is not merely a theoretical concept in Hungary any more, but is implemented and transformed to practice. It has become an expectation from HEIs to fit these relations into their management strategies and broaden their active cooperations with agencies, stakeholders, companies and research institutions. This tendency proves that mobility of students and teachers is more than getting new studying and teaching experience with new or different methodology but a thoroughly thought out cultural and educational policy with a diplomatic mission (Filep et al, 2021).

In parallel to its traditional and existing academic areas, Széchenyi István University in Győr (Hungary) puts special emphasis on the complex development of the international activities. Since 2019 the university has seen a six-fold increase in the number of international students. The key strategic point in internationalization is raising the number of bachelor and master programmes in English and foster research and publications in English, which - among other factors - increase global visibility and are tools of cultural diplomacy actions (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009).

In such a complexity of internationalized academic environment it is an everyday phenomenon to have groups with students with various cultural background, which requires a special attention and consciousness from professors (Qiqieh et al. 2023, 2023; Szőke, 2017). In plenty of university majors, such as law, international economics, international relations, military education, political science, diplomacy has become a central field of science to study.

In Hungary most universities offer diplomat trainings (Széchenyi University, Ludovika University of Public Service) and plenty of university programs include the subject diplomacy in their curricula (law, international relations). The discipline is taught and dealt with in various fields of international relations, law and military sciences.

At Széchenyi University in the study program of International Relations, Hungarian as well as non-Hungarian students take part in the course Theory and Practice of Diplomacy. The aim of the course is to make students aware of the action framework of diplomacy, such as the basics of international law, principles of interstate relations, institutional background, tools of diplomacy (negotiations, correspondence), norms and etiquette. Besides, the course gives a deep insight into relations of international conflicts and its supporting laws, also, reveals conflict solutions by analyzing current events and cases. The aim of the course is not only introducing students to interrelations of diplomatic issues but should make the students apply diplomatic attitudes to other students' national cultures. 'Diplomacy is first and foremost about bridging differences and facilitating mutual understanding': it is able to 'tell another story about a country' that 'may be a story that differs from what official policy would imply' (Goff, 2013:3).

3. Multicultural environment and cultural bias

Due to internationalization efforts of HEIs it is quite common that participants of university courses come from completely different cultures. This situation may offer plenty of positive opportunities to share views but also sets challenges in terms of cultural bias and interpretation frameworks. Diplomatic studies, which examine political history, international relations, value conflicts and communication strategies, are particularly sensitive to this phenomenon (Grincheva, 2024).

The scientific literature presents numerous studies on the issue of cultural bias from a wide range of aspects (Benediktsson, 2010), which reflect the complexity and a wide-scale prevalence in many disciplines. Bias is in the focus of social and human sciences, such as economics, psychology, anthropology, history, sociology, intercultural communication, diplomacy and linguistics. Since each discipline has a different approach to deal with the phenomenon, there is hardly any single definition of the term bias or cultural bias. Thus, I am presenting some of the existing definitions from some scientific fields.

Psychology tends to use a description of differences, and regards bias as differential performance of socioracial (skin color), ethnic, or national groups on measures of psychological constructs such as cognitive abilities, knowledge or skills (Helms, 2010; Afolabi, 2014). History also applies the term as 'standards, assumptions and conventions of the historian's own era are anachronistically used to report and to assess events of the past' (Marwick, 2001.)

Sociology defines cultural bias as follows: 'the extent that the test contains cultural content that is generally peculiar to the members of one group but not to the members of another group', which leads to a belief that 'the internal structure of the test will differ for different cultural groups' (Mercer, 1978).

Cross-cultural studies define the term as 'the systematic cross-national differences in quality of life perceptions which are not explained by objective measures of quality of

life (...) Ordinarily these culture-specific biases are acquired during the socialization process almost as automatically and unconsciously as one learns one's mother tongue. Cultural bias is manifested in the tendency for members of a particular culture to be optimistic or pessimistic, confident or cautious in evaluating their social and physical environment and in revealing these evaluations to others. (...) And cultural bias has something in common with the idea of national character, but it is more limited in scope' (Ostroot, 1985:96). Based on the aforementioned definitions, generally, cultural bias is the interpretation and judgment of phenomena, nations and behaviors by the standards of our own culture. Members of a culture make assumptions about the other cultures' traditions, behavior patterns, conventions or even language. Methods to eliminate the bias vary in the different sciences and scientific approaches of problems.

In economics, the term is also present, mainly in research works investigating corporate trust. According to Guiso (2009) and his colleagues, cultural bias is an attitude with prejudice that originated from individuals regarding foreigners of other nationalities as less trustworthy or different. These assumptions are rather based on cultural stereotypes and historical experiences than on objective experience.

Cultural background determines the attitude towards studying, expectations of the education system, as well as communication styles and behaviour patterns (Hofstede, 2001; Gudykunst, 2004). For example, students from collectivist cultures often emphasise group work and respect for authority, while students from individualistic cultures are typically more independent and critical of the role of the teacher. These differences can influence academic performance.

According to Berry's (1997) acculturation model students can employ four types of adaptation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization. Integration, which is preserving one's own culture while adopting the values of a new culture, has the most positive psychological and academic outcomes (Ward et al., 2001). The process of adaptation is not a linear process, and a number of factors affect its success, like language skills, social environment, and teacher sensitivity.

Adaptability is not an inborn skill, but a skill that can be learned and developed. Through a conscious development of intercultural sensitivity, and communication skills, students can become more effective in working with people from different cultures (Deardorff, 2006). Higher education institutions are responsible to provide a supporting environment, for example by offering mentoring programs, cultural trainings. This may contribute to the reduction of dropout student numbers (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

4. Purpose, data and method of research

The purpose of the paper is to discuss emerging (cultural) difficulties in diplomacy courses with international students from various countries, learning in the same group: We suppose that the difficulties emerge from different cultural backgrounds and the sensitivity of topics covered at the course. Quantitative methods do not seem appropriate for this research, so we used qualitative methodology (Kvale, 2012; Babbie, 2020), such as secondary literature review and semi-structured interviews, to get authentic results on the effect of different cultural backgrounds on teaching and learning the subject diplomacy.

The selection of interviewees is based on convenience sampling when the author asked easily accessible respondents, students and professors at Széchenyi University. We set the criteria that students must have completed a diplomacy course at the university and professors must have experience with teaching the subject.

The semi-structured interviews seemed the most suitable method, as they contain predetermined questions but allows flexibility depending on the answers and let the respondents add any remarks or further information. A total of 46 interviews were conducted, 28 male and 18 female interviewees answered the questions. 4 professors and 42 students were involved in the research.

The questions targeted to reveal how difficult it is to discuss sensitive diplomacy related topics with groups of international students. We intended to have an insight which are the most crucial factors hindering knowledge transfer in diplomacy courses and how cultural bias is present.

5. The interviews

The research is a small-scale one, so the analysis relies on the responses of 46 respondents. The relatively low number of respondents is partly rooted in the unwillingness to take part in interviews in spite of anonymity. The interviewees were students of the BA program International Relations at Széchenyi University, coming from 15 countries altogether. The 4 responding teachers are of Hungarian nationality, teaching diplomacy among other courses. All 46 respondents met the requirement to be parts of a diplomacy course.

We must mention that the number of the sample examined in the present study cannot provide results applicable for a broad generalization. We are planning to increase the number of respondents, also by involving other universities to have more perspectives of cultural bias. The selection process should be carried out with purposive sampling method.

37 of the 42 students are studying abroad for the first time in their lives, and only 5 students have previous experience of studying abroad. Regarding the countries of origin, 7 students were Hungarians, the international students come from 4 continents (Europe, Asia, Africa and America) and 14 countries, such as Spain, Portugal, the Ukraine, Belarus, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Laos, China, Nigeria, Kenya, Republic of South Africa, Cape Verde, Brazil, Columbia.

The interviews included 15 open-ended questions regarding the difficulties of discussing and learning diplomacy related topics. Open-ended questions allow the interviewees to say and explain their experiences and opinions, which give us a more detailed and complex picture of the main focus, that is cultural bias. Each interview was about 15-20 minutes long, depending on the amount of information the respondents shared with us. We will present the results based on the questions organized in three thematic units: 1) cultural background, 2) background knowledge, 3) motivation to learn diplomacy.

6. Findings

6.1. Results of the interviews with the students

The first unit of questions aimed at the respondents' cultural background, including questions about the preferences and best elements in their own cultures, conflicts with other nations/cultures, and how they see their cultural values, among many others, in the world. The basic problem emerges from the different interpretation differences and different value systems. (Numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents.) Respondents do not find human rights equally vital (17), or they find some much more important than other rights, depending on their social backgrounds. Socialization traditions and political education deeply effect the students' attitudes to the current and historical conflicts in the world. Also, their behavior and learning strategies root in their original cultures, which are really challenging to change or cannot be changed at all (Popov et al, 2012).

Students who have themselves experienced wars, suffered traumas or any political suppression, are much more sensitive (13), and unconsciously defend their own viewpoints against those who come from countries without bigger war conflicts and have never lived in a colonized society. Some students coming from countries with colonies are doubtful about the situation, as they think on the one hand, 'colony' is an outdated term (4), on the other hand, they helped the colonies to develop and learn more values (10).

Almost half of the respondents (19) do not definitely find their own social system better than others'; still they are ready to defend it in case of offending or scornful remarks and in discussions. However, most interviewees have a more critical approach to other countries' mistaken decisions than to their own one's (26).

To avoid conflicts in the course, some students (12) rather hide their own ideas and opinions. This phenomenon is explained in broad-scale dimension based cultural research works (Hofstede et al, 2010; Trompenaars, 2004) but the focus of the present paper does not allow a deep analysis of these researches. According to the Hofstede model of cultures, collectivistic cultures like Laos, Brazil or Columbia find loyalty to others important and do not express individual opinions without discussing them with their fellow nationals. As opposed to it, masculine cultures, such as Russia, rather prefer sharing their opinions and use their power dominance to solve conflicts. Considering Trompenaars's theory (2004), Russia, being a particularistic culture, also deal with contracts and rules with a higher grade of flexibility compared to universalistic cultures who follow the rules and laws by all means (like Western European countries). Due to the strong influence of political systems on the students' way of thinking and attitudes, a strongly politically determined discipline, such as diplomacy, requires a lot of effort to overcome cultural differences.

Table 1: Bias factors in diplomacy courses due to cultural background of students (source: own compilation based on own research)

Cultural background bias factors	% (N=42)
priority of human rights	40.47
country in war	30.95
colonizer position ignorance	9.52

colonizer position, help in development	23.8
positive social structure	45.38
mistaken decisions of others	60.9
hiding opinions	28.62

The second thematic unit investigated how much the students' background knowledge influenced their attitude to their own and to other cultures. The questions included topics like current conflicts, historical context and cultural differences.

The interviewees seemed to be sensitive to current conflicts in the world and most respondents knew about the war cases (35), at least of those, which are of global interest. The conflicts which are not in the center of media contents, are mostly known by respondents coming from the very region. Due to the different education systems and strategies in the countries, the emphasis is on completely different parts of history and current political processes (which can be also ideology based). The question about certain past events and relations between them found out that many were unknown for some interviewees (8) and about the half of the students had some idea about them (23) and the remaining (11) respondents claimed to have an insight into the interrelations. As an additional remark, the students (13) stated they knew their own countries' stand to the conflicts.

Some questions aimed to find out if the respondents have any knowledge of other nations' cultural background. The 28 positive and 14 negative answers suggest that misunderstandings in diplomacy courses originate from the lack of knowledge of foreign cultures. We did not ask any questions about how much they know their own cultures as we supposed that the respondents had sufficient knowledge of their own backgrounds.

Table 2: Bias factors in diplomacy courses due to knowledge background of students (source: own compilation based on own research)

Background knowledge bias factors	% (N=42)
knowledge of war conflicts	83.33
past wars not known	19.04
knowledge of the existence of wars, other conflicts	54.76
insight into deeper relations of wars, other conflicts	26.19
knowledge of other cultures	66.66
no knowledge of other cultures	33.33
aware of own country's attitude to international conflicts	28.62

The third group of questions aimed at the respondents' motivations to learn and discuss diplomacy related topics in the courses and share their ideas with the course participants.

The question about the main reason for taking up the diplomacy course brought a foreseeable answer, as well. Not astonishingly, the majority of the students (29) prioritize the credit points when selecting courses. Going deeper into the question, the research revealed various motivation factors. 16 respondents plan to work in a country different from their own, and they expected the opportunity to get more knowledge about international affairs. 8 interviewees saw the opportunity to exchange opinions with foreign

students about current political and diplomatic issues. The highest number of respondents (36) wanted to participate in a course where they can learn something new, that is, diplomacy. Interestingly, only 2 respondents plan to work in a diplomatic field at embassies or consulates. (Both students have experience of diplomatic activities as they have an insight into them because their parents are diplomats.)

Active participation in the discussions and other tasks are typical of the motivated students. 27 respondents were ready for any classroom activities (for example discussions, project work, research, case studies), while the remaining 15 students did not show much willingness to make their contributions in the course. Nevertheless, cultural background and culture dependent communication styles highly influence the promptness to share their opinion explicitly. 3 respondents explained that they seem less motivated because their career perspectives are beyond the field of diplomacy.

Table 3: Bias factors due to students' motivation to learn diplomacy (source: own compilation based of own research)

Motivation bias factors	% (N=42)
course attendance for credit points	69.04
learning something new	85.71
plan to work abroad	38.09
plan to work as diplomats	4.76
no interest due to plans to work in a different sector	7.14
willingness to active course participation	64.28
reluctance to active course participation	35.71
aware of own country's attitude to international conflicts	28.62
eager to change opinions	19.04

6.2. Results of the interviews with the teachers

The research also involved teachers of diplomacy at Széchenyi University and wanted to investigate their experience of teaching the course to multicultural groups. We asked four teachers (Hungarians) who had to answer questions in the same thematic organization as the students did. The teachers see the courses and issues diplomacy from a different perspective. We found it necessary to reveal how teachers can identify and tackle cultural bias in the student groups. We attempted to find out how they see the importance of background culture and knowledge, and students' motivation possibilities, and how much they can identify the students' cultural bias in the diplomacy courses.

This part of the paper is just highlighting an overall analysis of how teachers deal with cultural bias in their courses. As the number of respondents is low (4) and the experience seems alike, we find it redundant to express the answers in numbers (like we did when presenting the students' responses above).

The first group of questions targeted the potential effect of varied cultural background on teaching diplomacy. Each respondent claimed that cultural differences formulated different attitudes to a number of norms. Human rights are regarded as a priority in a number of cultures (western cultures,) while others put national sovereignty and social cohesion on the first place (Asian cultures). The students mostly see the solutions of diplomatic problems through the glasses of their own cultures and are hard

to convince of any other opportunities. Seemingly, they find cultures equal, but they mostly mention positive examples from similar cultures.

Interpretation gaps may occur when the same event is analyzed from two cultures standing on the opposite side or position in history. Occupiers/colonizers may find victory and success what those cultures who have ever been occupied by other countries (for example Portugal and Cape Verde) regard as defeat and suffering. This phenomenon leads to different interpretation ways of the same events, where students try to idealize the diplomatic steps of their own homelands, and are much more critical towards other nations. The responding teachers can accept this behavior as confirmation of national identity; however, they make the students aware of their cultural bias.

In Europe, diplomacy is taught in the framework of Western practices and strategies, but students from Asia and Africa may have a different approach to problem solving strategies. The African, Chinese or South American diplomacy patterns differ from Western and Europe-centered concepts (Acharya, 2011).

Considering the second thematic unit, teachers find heterogenic levels of the students' background knowledge, also the grade of interest in certain topics varies. It is hard to expect the students to discuss cases if the focus of their political and historical education lies on different strategic points. The issue of Spanish enclaves was impossible to discuss with Chinese or Lao students because the topic is not in their curricula and does not make news in media. As opposed to it, African and European students added some remarks to the discussion.

Teachers find that dissimilarities in educational systems, assessment methods and course materials cause differences in the students' communication style and willingness to discussion. According to their experience, east Asian students are less likely to express opposing opinions, while Africans and Western Europeans do not find it problematic to attempt to convince others of their ideas. Teachers find it a challenge to change these attitudes in students, as they do not find it important to adapt to others in communication style. In this aspect, they are unconsciously biased with their own communication strategies. The respondents react to the oral unequal contributions of the students by giving them written tasks or research work.

The third group of questions about motivation made inquiries about how teachers could mitigate cultural bias and how they can motivate students to be active participants in the diplomacy course. The above mentioned written tasks can trigger the communication willingness of less communicative students, which also reduces the feeling of embarrassment of being a silent participant.

Being aware of the fact that students may have personal conflicts because of their different national backgrounds, it requires a conscious strategy from the teachers to motivate them with creative and useful tasks, which prevents students from bigger conflicts in the lectures (c.f Nádai, 2022). Due to the present war between Russia and the Ukraine, Russian and Ukrainian students could not be forced to work together; Pakistani and Indian students may also have difficulties in teamwork, as it happened in the courses. In case of past conflicts between two countries (like colonizers and colonies), students are ready to communicate with each other, although some tensions might occur. In all these situations, teachers introduced topics, which cannot be connected to the potential conflicts between the students.

To mitigate cultural bias and motivate students to brainstorm, the teachers offer literature resources with various aspects. Besides, students have to present their own cultural values and highlight some points, which need improvement. Developing objective perspective and critical thinking, a less biased conversation can start. The respondents claimed that all the new methods, new tasks, and self-reflection require a lot of time to settle any conflicts, which seems a big challenge within one semester (the length of the course). It still happens, in spite of the fact that during the 6-semester-long BA program, the students take part in courses supporting their cultural adaptation skills (such as history, intercultural communication, international protocol, international institutions).

7. Discussion

7.1. Students' responses

The research findings presented in this paper are based on a small-scale research as a first phase of a longer and wider-scale research. The aim was to investigate how cultural bias can be tackled and mitigated in diplomacy courses with international students' groups. We conducted a qualitative research using semi-structured interviews with BA students and professors at Széchenyi University (Győr, Hungary).

The results demonstrated that cultural bias is present in the students' way of thinking which can be rooted in their variable cultural background, (mostly lack of) background knowledge and their motivations, as well. Regarding different cultural backgrounds, it was a remarkable result that almost 62% of the responding students were much more critical towards the mistaken decisions of other nations than to their own ones. Cultural bias is obvious when it comes to discussions about diplomatic solutions of conflicts between two or more countries. Bearing this in mind, it was most surprising to see that 45% of the interviewees do not definitely find their social and political structure the best. Almost 29% of the students are not interactive in the courses and hide their opinions, which is not definitely related to their insufficient knowledge, but rather to culturally specific characters of their communication style.

With regards about the second issue, that is background knowledge, 83% of the responding students claimed to know about current global conflicts, but astonishingly only about 55% admitted to have an insight into the complex relations. However, according to the responses, one third of the students think they have knowledge about the other students' cultures. Cultural bias in this part of the interviews could be noticed that the students were much more interested in problems connected to countries similar to their cultures. It is in alignment with the findings of several recent studies which investigated how cultural background affects perception of other cultures and social processes (c.f. Spiegler et al., 2022; Bartasevičius et al., 2024).

Motivation reasons show less bias than the previous two factors. It is an outstanding and promising result that 85% of the responding students find diplomacy related topics and the course useful and wished to learn something new. As opposed to this result, a relatively low proportion, 19% of the respondents are eager to exchange ideas with students from other nations and take the chance to improve their knowledge and discussion skills. 7% of the students showed reluctance as they were not interested in diplomacy and they had different career perspectives.

On the whole, in response to the research question, which examined the presence of cultural bias in diplomacy courses with international students, and the way of managing the phenomena, we can state that cultural bias is massively present which cannot be reduced to zero. It is hard because of the natural feeling of national identity, but new methods, critical thinking and development of the students' background knowledge may contribute to minimize bias.

7.2. Teachers' responses

The teachers' responses relied on their experience on teaching the subject diplomacy and their ideas are also rooted in their own deeper cultural background knowledge. This enabled the professors to give more analytical answers to the questions than the students did.

According to the teachers, the connection between the students' cultural background knowledge and their cultural bias can be tackled in the practical parts of the lessons. In case of classroom discussions, the responding teachers confirmed that the students rather mentioned positive examples of managing political conflicts with diplomatic tools in connection with their own countries. A good example for this is the comment on a Pakistani student who emphasized his government's struggles for peace in the incident over Kashmir with India (aljezeera.com). The student mentioned as a positive example that his country initiated an open debate on global conflict prevention and peaceful resolution in the United Nations' Security Council. And in 2024 they reached a quiet diplomatic agreement by opening the border for Indian pilgrims.

Considering the second thematic unit, the background knowledge, teachers experienced biased attitudes in the students' remarks in interactions, as they could explain phenomena from their own cultural background, but teachers consider it as a sign of a strong national identity. For instance, Lao students had plenty of information of the current labour market force and labour migration of Vietnamese people (vientianetimes.org.la), but they did not have any knowledge of labour workforce in India. Beside the presence of bias in students' remarks, the teacher respondents explained it also with the different education systems and social backgrounds where subject of knowledge transfer has different accents.

Motivation factors were mostly lacking the traits of bias. It was generally concluded that it is especially hard to motivate students to communicate with each other in the course, because according to the teachers' responses, the students cannot or do not want to separate international conflicts from private ones. Thus, they project their affectedness in war situations to students who are nationals of an enemy country (like in the case of Ukrainian and Russian students, c.f 5.2). Thus, professors find it necessary to develop critical thinking in students and highlight the problems from many perspectives.

An effective task could focus on students' stories about their own traditions, what they find valuable in their cultures. Another way of making students conscious about resources for their conflicts can rely on groupwork when the members discuss situations that may lead to cultural shock (misunderstandings in mails, concept of time). Besides, stereotypes can be discussed where the students explain their ideas on the truth content of stereotypical statements. Taboos and myths can be dissolved this way. Target exercises

on general problems (sustainability, improving lifestyles of students at the university are also effective ways of building bridges between the cultures.

8. Conclusions

In a small-scale research, the present paper investigated cultural bias in diplomacy courses using the method of semi-structured interviews with international students at diplomacy courses and professors teaching the subject at Széchenyi University. The findings proved that cultural bias is present in the multicultural groups when it comes to discussions of international conflicts and war cases, and its solutions. Students tend to defend their own nation's conflict resolution strategies. The strong cultural bias is rooted in cultural differences, lack of background knowledge about others' cultures and global conflicts far from their countries, which make no global news every day. In diplomacy courses knowledge transfer and interactive task management is hard to carry out because of a prevailing unconscious cultural bias. Teachers have to make efforts to mitigate the level of bias in the students with new methods, presenting the diplomatic problems from multiple perspectives (Gay, 2010). Discussing taboos, stereotypes, cultural values and doing joint problem solving tasks can improve dialogue between international students in the courses. Obviously, the students also need to be willing to learn to understand other cultures' attitudes and develop critical thinking as well as be open-minded.

9. Recommendations and limitations

Limitations of the present study allowed us to draw tentative conclusions. The number of respondents is too low to generalize, so we should conduct the research on a larger scale, involving students and teachers from other universities and increase the respondents' number at Széchenyi University. Besides, both the responding teachers' number and their cultural background must be diversified, as it was the case with the responding students. It is also advisable to involve experienced diplomacy experts in the research. Inviting students to take part in the interviews from other university programs could give us more general and authentic findings and impressions. A relevant part of the research can be a detailed description of cultural values of the participating respondents' nations. The question also needs further investigation, to what extent cultural bias can be minimized, as obviously it is impossible to ignore it completely according to the results of the present study. Another factor to examine is the issue of teachers' sensitive approach to the topic which helps bias mitigation processes without undermining students' cultural identities. Future research will consider these limitations, and will increase the sample size to get results, which are proper for generalization. Despite, the present study delivers applicable insight into the difficulties of instructing multicultural diplomacy courses due to cultural bias of the students.

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