Article

Comparison of Explicit and Implicit Methods of Cross-Cultural Learning in an International Classroom

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Abstract: The paper addresses a gap in the literature concerning the difference between enhanced and not enhanced cross-cultural learning in an international classroom. The objective of the described research was to clarify if the environment of international classrooms could enhance cross-cultural competences significantly enough or if additional focus on cross-cultural learning as an explicit objective of learning activities would add substantially to the experience. The research question was defined as "how can a specific exercise focused on cross-cultural learning enhance the cross-cultural skills of university students in an international classroom?". Surveys were conducted among international students in three leading Central-European Universities in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary to measure the increase of their cross-cultural competences. The Lithuanian and Polish classes were composed of international students and concentrated on International Management/Business topics (explicit method). The Hungarian survey was done in a general business class that just happened to be international in its composition (implicit method). Overall, our findings prove that the implicit method resulted in comparable, somewhat even stronger effectiveness than the explicit method. The study method included the analyses of students' individual increases in each study dimension and construction of a compound measure to note the overall results. Our findings confirm the power of the international classroom as a stimulating environment for latent cross-cultural learning even without specific exercises focused on cross-cultural learning itself. However, the specific exercise did induce additional learning, especially related to cross-cultural awareness and communication with representatives of other cultures, even though the extent of that learning may be interpreted as underwhelming. The main conclusion from the study is that the diversity of the students engaged in a project provided an environment that supported cross-cultural learning, even without specific culture-focused reflections or exercises.

Keywords: experiential learning; cross-cultural learning; international classroom

1. Introduction

Developing culturally aware professionals is part of the contemporary remit of business schools around the world. Meanwhile, the methods and values of experiential learning spread in higher education spurred by the demand for graduates being able to manage complexity in various environments. In our paper, we provide a brief overview of good practices for cross-cultural learning in higher education, with particular attention to business programmes. Our research is focused on exploring the potential of learning through being just engaged in an international classroom, as opposed to being provided specific class exercises set on cross-cultural learning in addition to that engagement. The objective is to clarify if studying in the environment of an international classroom can have a significant effect on the cross-cultural competences of university students or if applying an exercise focused on cross-cultural learning would lead to much stronger impact. This

focus of research may bring benefits to faculty in charge of international classes, as well as school management planning the next upgrade of school's curriculum. Our empirical investigation is arranged in an international comparative study, gathering data from leading business schools in Hungary, Lithuania and Poland, in the form of student surveys aimed at measuring the improvement in their intercultural awareness and skills.

The objective of the paper is to fill in a gap in the literature concerning the difference between enhanced and not enhanced cross-cultural learning in an international classroom. Our primary intention was to clarify if explicit exercises on cross-cultural learning are strictly required for improving the cross-cultural competences of university students, or the international classroom as an environment can itself provide comparable improvement of those skills. The research question was defined as "how can a specific exercise focused on cross-cultural learning enhance the cross-cultural skills of university students in an international classroom?".

The paper is organised as follows: first, a theoretical background of experiential learning is provided, then good practices in cross-cultural learning are presented, followed by the description of method and organisation of our research as well as findings from the study and, finally, conclusions are drawn. Our theoretical framework is based on experiential learning as a contemporary approach to teaching International Business with particular attention to good practices of cross-cultural learning in a higher education environment.

2. Theoretical Background

Our theoretical lens to the research problem is experiential learning as a contemporary approach of teaching International Business. First, we summarise our understanding of experiential learning from the literature, then we highlight good practices of cross-cultural learning in a higher education environment. These will form the basis of our research approach explained in the next section of the paper.

2.1. Experiential Learning from a Critical Perspective

In their study on the evolution of the term, Seaman et al. [1] concluded that experiential learning transformed from a quasi-therapeutic style of personal growth training into a stand-alone theory on a particular relationship between cognitive and emotional processes and action-reflection cycles. Most authors agree that experiential learning is more effective than traditional methods. It is sometimes called 'action learning', as experiential learning is realised through action, in which "learning by doing" is applied to building and developing new knowledge, skills and abilities.

Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge involving four steps: having a concrete experience, reflecting upon it, conceptualising it and actively experimenting with this new knowledge [2] (p. 194). Its application opportunities are wide-ranging even within higher education and also related to the business discipline. The related literature reflects a plethora of specific methods with particular objectives in different settings. We provide a brief overview of the richness of opportunities below by referring to some of the most inspiring cases.

Thomas et al. [3] reported a role-playing exercise in their efforts of letting students understand the consumer behaviour process decisions through the eyes of a number of stakeholders. The rich context of the experience for the participating students resulted in a higher level of engagement and more effective understanding of the related concepts. In a different exercise, Winsett et al. [4] also recorded increased satisfaction with the experiential learning exercise, although the teachers in that case aimed for social learning made possible through affectively and physically engaging students.

In their efforts to apply experiential learning in the context of business courses, Ferguson et al. [5] asked their students to write a class blog and take it as a medium for students to engage in social reflective observation related to the class material. Students tried to draw meaning from their experiences and incorporate that meaning into new learning conceptualizations. Teachers asked students to fill out a survey questionnaire at

the end of the courses and learned that the blog assignment won positive assessment by students. Eckhaus et al. [6] also employed an experiential learning technique in management education. They used an accountancy-oriented board game which was developed in order to support students' learning of cost management concepts and tools. The teachers examined the impact levels of game entertainment and comprehensibility on the course material comprehension, and they also assessed the exercise's effect on grading. Results showed positive confirmation of expectation across all the examined factors.

Zhai et al. [7] made the point that applying the flipped classroom method significantly increased student satisfaction with the course. Students actually watched a recorded lecture online at home and completed the related exercise in class. The researchers pointed out that despite the innovative approach was overall popular, the students' prior individual learning experience seemed to be influential in terms of how they managed in the changed settings.

In a contemporary setting, Peterson [8] applied experiential-learning innovation for Web 2.0 in his marketing course in an effort to enhance students' critical- and creative-thinking skills. He managed to engage students in creativity that is focused on writing poetry about a course-related topic and then recording a three-minute rap video based on this poetry. Notwithstanding the extraordinary framing of the usual skills development exercise, the teacher recorded deeper engagement in the project and was satisfied with the presentation of the completed video with its contemporary visual format and content.

More recently, universities around the world embarked on their third mission, i.e., teachers try to take students outside the classroom and connect them to stakeholders from a much wider range than what they are used to. Zyngier [9] explained an Australian experience of a project aiming at students' refined appreciation of class equity, social and economic justice, involving students to cooperate with disadvantaged communities. The teacher proudly reported how students eventually felt connected to and involved in their community. Schaupp and Vitullo [10] engaged students in a global consulting project for international clients. Students worked both in the classroom and outside with a client which also included international travel. The whole project was also done in collaboration with fellow students from a partner university abroad. Such a mix provided students with extraordinary learning opportunities they would have never experienced in any business course taught in a traditional way.

Other researchers made it clear that despite the eventual success of experiential learning exercises, there are significant challenges to meet for those teachers who are entrepreneurial enough to try some innovative application of the theory. Schaller [11] analysed a case where students were asked for participant observation of consumer behaviour at sporting events in an effort to take them beyond the classroom and into the real world. The teacher asked students to observe the world through the lens of what they have learned in the course. The challenge for the teacher and also for the students was that applying experiential learning takes significant extra effort and time. As a solution, the fieldwork took place during scheduled class time, with all the practical challenges arranging that. On a positive note, they concluded that the real benefit was that an unknown or unfamiliar context enhanced students' learning experience.

The above examples illustrate how a diverse array of potential methods are available for educators willing to teach according to the principles of experiential learning. In general, we can conclude that practical student engagement leads to better learning, as also [12] claimed that we learn 80% of what we experience.

However, due to the inherent nature of experiential learning, much of the learning is implicit, i.e., it remains part of the overall experience without necessarily acknowledging or measuring the improvement in knowledge and skills along certain aspects. What should be raised to the conscious attention of the students can be a valid question for teachers, as well as the school or programme management, especially in light of the significant costs experiential learning methods incur.

2.2. Good Practices of Cross-Cultural Learning

Universities, and particularly business schools, aim to improve the future competitiveness of their students by offering them intercultural opportunities integrated into the curriculum. These efforts run in parallel with initiatives to shape the cross-border labour market for the graduates of higher education [13]. Most schools have entered into partnerships with international partners and offer cross-cultural projects in an effort to support students' skills development. Experience shows that university education is a good opportunity for students to work on their cross-cultural skills and allows to achieve significant, sustainable results [14]. Research confirms that face to face communication is very effective in cultivating the cross-cultural awareness and the ability to work in international teams [15]. Student exchange programmes are understood to be successful in both resulting remarkable life experiences and positively affecting students personal and professional development. An important part of the results is enhanced cross-cultural competence, so that they understand differences between one another better [16].

However, the majority of university students do not participate in international exchange programmes, hence "internationalization-at-home" activities remain an important opportunity for skill development [17]. Griffiths et al. [17] (ibid.), using a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test survey, concluded that these activities can have a significant effect on a range of cultural competences. Wang and Kulich [18] also found that students participating in at-home cultural diversity programmes and even online intercultural exchanges improved their intercultural competences in a comparably similar extent as those involved in international cultural encounters.

The background of students also appears to be a relevant factor that affects how their cross-cultural skill development can be improved. Alon et al. [19] in their major comparative study found that cultural intelligence varies across countries, while some nationalities are suggested to have a higher propensity for cross-cultural business interactions. According to their results, other important factors leading to cultural intelligence are the international experience of the individuals (in how many countries they have lived, studied or worked for more than six months before), the level of education (highlighting the responsibility of universities' related efforts), and the number of languages spoken.

International classrooms may provide a natural environment of peer-to-peer mentoring, which is a standard solution for managing cross-cultural challenges in multinational organizations. Calza et al. [20] emphasise that the involvement of local nationals and learning local traditions and customs are crucial for cultural understanding and smooth cooperation in multinational teams. Desai et al. [21] add that not only cultural diversity but also other types of diversity should be addressed in a mentoring relationship, including cross-race, and cross-gender differences. They highlight that peer-to-peer mentoring should be reciprocal in order to support mutual trust that allows cross-cultural adaptation. Griffith et al. [17] provide additional insights suggesting that peer-to-peer mentoring efforts focus on improving the individual's flexibility and openness, personal autonomy, perceptual acuity and fulfilment. Besides peer-to-peer mentoring, from another point of view, Seidl [22] emphasised the importance of emphatic teachers who create an emotionally literate learning environment in the international classroom.

Balter-Radic et al. [23] examined the opportunity to allow students to work in global teams in order to improve their intercultural competence, with very positive results revealed in their survey of 115 students working in 22 virtual international teams. Bücker and Korzilius [24] also suggest a type of at-home exercise: cross-cultural roleplays. They have measured the effectiveness of the exercise and proven its effect on metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural intelligence. Students also developed their confidence in cross-cultural encounters, as a result of the experience. Pillay and James [25] achieved similarly good results with using games which students later claimed as their preferred method for improving their cross-cultural skills, team work, decision making and self-awareness. Zhou [26] also introduced action-based learning experience in a selected course, and their quantitative data results clearly indicated the positive perception of stu-

dents regarding their own improvement of language proficiency and cultural competences. Various simulations are often a good learning method. Joardar et al. [27] simulated a business meeting where students from two fictitious cultural groups negotiated according to the instructions provided and learnt through self-reflection, while Gjicali et al. [28] used a game-based social simulation where students learnt through the trial-and-error method as well as feedback received.

Mitchell and Benyon [29] also introduced modern technologies to the cross-cultural learning exercise. Students were allocated to groups of different cultures and given the task to communicate via email, Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp and similar channels. In the end, they were asked about their impressions and responses showed their honest surprise by the great learning experience of working with a global partner.

The success of these programmes, however, is not guaranteed. Clapp-Smith and Wernsing [30] identified four types of triggers that support real transformative experience for the students: immersing with locals, including their habits and traditions, re-defining what "normal" means, trying to communicate in another language and reflecting on the experiences. De Hei et al. [31] also noted that interest in working with a culturally dissimilar groups is an important factor of success. Figueira and Duarte [32] also emphasised the potential impact of motivation in this regard.

Concluding, we can say that careful analysis of the literature on experiential learning and cross-cultural learning indicates that although there have been studies on development of cross-cultural competences in international/global student teams and also on enhancing cross-cultural learning at universities' international classrooms, there is still a gap in the literature concerning the comparison of enhanced and not enhanced cross-cultural learning in an international classroom. Based on the literature review, we created the following research proposition: "even a single exercise with a clear focus on cross-cultural learning can result in an increase in the cross-cultural awareness and related generic abilities of students". We aimed to explore the potential of applying an explicit cross-cultural learning exercise in comparison to a control case where no such exercise was used, but students learned in an international class.

3. Materials and Methods

Based on the theoretical framework of experiential learning and the good practices of cross-cultural learning in higher education settings, we developed our research approach focusing on the comparison of two fundamental ways of cross-cultural learning.

3.1. Empirical Approach and Sample

We conducted two surveys in two countries—Poland and Lithuania—to measure the effectiveness of a group project focused on cross-cultural learning in terms of its impact on cross-cultural competences. A year later, the same survey was conducted in Hungary, albeit in a course which was of general nature, not focused on developing cross-cultural competences. We aimed to compare the enhanced cross-cultural learning in SGH Warsaw School of Economics (Poland) and KTU—Kaunas University of Technology School of Economics and Business (Lithuania) with the "natural" learning in cross-cultural teams at CUB—Corvinus University of Budapest (Hungary).

To check the effectiveness of doing a major project in multinational teams during a course of International Management at SGH and during the course of International Business Management at KTU two short surveys were run among international students (EU and non-EU ones) taking these classes in the 2019–2020 autumn semester. Projects in both courses (and both schools) were run by the same instructor. The first survey was held before the project in multinational teams was started, and the second one, when it was finished. Both surveys included the same four questions:

1. How would you assess your level of knowledge about national cultures different from yours?

2. How would you assess your level of experience in dealing with representatives of national cultures different from yours?
3. How would you assess your ability to communicate with representatives of national cultures different from yours? (communication meant here as 'sending a message to another person that is understood exactly as intended by you')
4. How would you assess the level of your cultural awareness? (cultural awareness meant here as 'understanding of the differences between yourself and people from other national cultures, especially differences in attitudes and values, and the ability to take the viewpoint of another culture)?

Additionally, the first survey included a starting question about earlier experience in working in an intercultural team with two possible answers: either Yes or No. The second survey did not have this question but ended with question 5: To what extend did the IB project done in multinational teams increase the level of your cross-cultural competences? When answering questions 1–5, students were supposed to use a seven-point Likert-scale.

The Polish and Lithuanian surveys were done in a classroom in a paper form. In each case, students filled in the surveys on a voluntary basis. Each time, once the survey was distributed, students were told they could refuse filling in the surveys and that their grading would not depend on doing that. Students were also told that if they agreed to fill in the surveys, they had to put their names on them, as the idea was to compare their answers from before and after the project. Students were assured that their names would not be revealed afterwards.

At SGH, survey no. 1 was filled in by 23 students present in the classroom and survey no. 2 was filled in by 22 students present during the last class (there were no objections). However only 16 students filled in both surveys as the attendance was not compulsory and some students missed either the first or the last class of the project. At KTU, survey no. 1 was filled in by 24 students present in the classroom and survey no. 2 was filled in by 23 students present during the last class (there were no objections). However, only 19 students filled in both surveys for the same reasons as at SGH.

The Hungarian survey was conducted in a Business Economics course that was provided fully on-line because of pandemic restrictions. The class was formed of 29 students, 27 of which were from abroad, outside the EU. As the survey was run during the pandemic lockdown period of autumn 2020, it was carried out in an online form. Students filled in the surveys on a voluntary basis, their grading did not depend on it. Students put their names in the form as the idea was to compare their answers from before and after the course. Students' identity was not disclosed, and they were informed about that. Questions of the Hungarian survey were identical with the Polish and Lithuanian surveys. The Corvinus survey no. 1 was filled in by 29 students, and survey no. 2 was filled in by 22 students (seven students did not answer the second survey). As a result, we had 22 complete answers.

In each of the university surveys, there was a considerable gap in time between the first and the second survey so when filling in the second survey students could hardly remember their answers provided in the first survey. Keeping the surveys short and simple helped us to keep the refusal rate at zero level.

3.2. Analytical Method

Due to the relatively small size of the samples in each country (ranging from 16 to 22 students each), no sophisticated statistical analysis was applied to the data collected. The direct comparison of the results following the structure of the questionnaires was conducted in an effort to provide exploratory findings about the research topic.

The increase in four dimensions of cross-cultural learning was assessed, and answers were broken down according to the level of increase along the Likert-scale. The four dimensions were:

1. The level of knowledge about other national cultures,
2. The level of experience in dealing with representatives of other national cultures,

3.　　The ability to communicate with representatives of other national cultures,
4.　　The level of cultural awareness.

The sum of the total increase by each dimension (i.e., the survey questions) for the total sample was calculated in an effort to represent the impact of the class activities by the separate aspects for the sample as a whole. The points' increase along the Likert-scale indicated by the same respondent, calculated as the difference of his or her response scores between the first and second surveys, was understood as the individual improvement score. These individual improvement scores for each student were added up to show the total point increase by each dimension for the total sample. The cases in which there was a decrease between the two responses of the same student were not calculated in the overall increase measure but noted separately in our analysis.

In addition to the four dimensions represented in the questionnaire, a compound measure was constructed on the basis of the arithmetical average of results across the four dimensions. The sum of total increase by the compound measure reflects the impact of the examined class activities based on the selected sample at the given university.

In a separate assessment, special focus was made on the increase in the level of cross-cultural competences, broken down by the fact of whether the respondent had had earlier work in an intercultural team or not. This assessment was needed in an effort to filter out the moderating factor of earlier cross-cultural experience on our results.

Finally, results were assessed by comparing findings from the Polish and Lithuanian samples, representing the "explicit method", against the Hungarian findings, representing the "implicit method". First, the results of the explicit method were calculated as the weighted average of the results from the Polish and the Lithuanian samples, as they differed in size. Then these aggregated results of the explicit method were compared directly against the results from the implicit method, i.e., the Hungarian results.

4. Results

The assessment of our results is presented in three sections below. First, we summarise our findings from the Polish and Lithuanian surveys, which were focused on measuring the improvement in cross-cultural competences as a result of an explicit exercise with that focus. Then we highlight key findings from the Hungarian survey which addressed the improvement in the same dimensions in a general business course with any specific exercises on cross-cultural learning but arranged in an international class. Finally, we compare the results from the two methods, the explicit (Polish and Lithuanian) and the implicit (Hungarian) methods.

4.1. Results of the Explicit Method

Our findings from the Polish and the Lithuanian surveys are summarised in this section, together with their comparative assessment.

4.1.1. Findings at SGH, Poland

It was possible to compare students' answers to questions 1–4 only in 16 cases, so all indications below are out of 16. In the case of level of knowledge about other national cultures, nine students indicated that it increased (in one case it was the increase by 4 points, in two other cases by 2 points). Four students did not indicate any increase, while three students indicated a decrease of knowledge. When asked about the level of experience in dealing with representatives of other national cultures, 10 students declared an increase (in one case it was an increase by 4 points, in two other cases by 2 points). Six students did not indicate any increase in their experience. Concerning the ability to communicate with representatives of other national cultures, nine students declared an increase (in two cases by 2 points). Seven students did not indicate any increase in their ability to communicate. As for the level of cultural awareness 11 students indicated its increase (in one case it was the increase by 3 points, in three other cases by 2 points). Four students did not indicate any increase, while one student indicated a decrease of cultural awareness.

In an effort to allow for more analytical insights, we calculated the total number of points increased for each examined aspect. Results from this calculation indicated that the greatest increase occurred in the level of students' cultural awareness, closely followed by an improvement in the level of experience in dealing with representatives of other national cultures, and the level of knowledge about other national cultures. However, the improvement in students' ability to communicate with representatives of other national cultures was shown to be much less, compared to the other three aspects. We also calculated a compound measure to reflect the overall improvement across the four aspects surveyed. Given the direct and similar nature of data in all four aspects, we selected the arithmetical average as a tool for the compound measure which can reflect the overall extent of improvement in student's answers. Results show that close to half of the total improvement came from moderate development (increase by only 1 point) in our Polish sample. For all the detailed results see Table 1.

Table 1. SGH survey results—questions 1–4.

Increase in Increase	the Level of Knowledge about Other National Cultures	the Level of Experience in Dealing with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Ability to Communicate with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Level of Cultural Awareness	Compound Measure
by 1 point	6	7	7	7	**6.75**
by 2 points	2	2	2	3	**2.25**
by 3 points	0	0	0	1	**0.25**
by 4 points	1	1	0	0	**0.5**
by 5 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
by 6 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
overall increase in points	**14**	**15**	**11**	**16**	**14**
decrease	3	0	0	1	n/a
neutral	4	6	7	4	n/a

All of the 16 students benefited from the exercise, as 15 of them reported a high, very high and extremally high increase of their cross-cultural competences when the project was finished—see the detailed answers in Table 2. Out of this group, only three students had not worked in an intercultural team before. All three students reported a very high increase in their cross-cultural competences.

Table 2. Increase in the level of cross-cultural competences—SGH students.

Increase Description	Earlier Work in an Intercultural Team	No Earlier Work in a Intercultural Team	Overall
Extremely high	2	0	2
Very high	6	3	9
High	4	0	4
Moderate	1	0	1
Little	0	0	0
Very little	0	0	0
None at all	0	0	0

Interestingly, in three cases, students declared a decrease of knowledge about other national cultures and in one case a decrease of cultural awareness. The reasons for such declarations might have been twofold. Either these students were not sure about their state of knowledge and awareness and were not able to indicate them properly in any of the questionnaires or, having done the project in an intercultural team, they realised that earlier (filling in the first questionnaire) they had overestimated their knowledge about other national cultures and their cultural awareness, so in survey no. 2 they 'corrected' their answers.

4.1.2. Findings at KTU, Lithuania

It was possible to compare students' answers to questions 1–4 only in 19 cases, so all indications below are out of 19. In the case of level of knowledge about other national cultures, 10 students indicated that it increased (in two cases by 2 points). Seven students did not indicate any increase, while two students indicated a decrease of knowledge. Asked about the level of experience in dealing with representatives of other national cultures, seven students declared an increase (in one case, it was an increase by 3 points, in another case by 2 points). Ten students did not indicate any increase in their experience, while two students indicated a decrease. Concerning the ability to communicate with representatives of other national cultures, five students declared an increase. Eleven students did not indicate any increase in their ability to communicate, while three students declared a decrease. As for the level of cultural awareness, eight students indicated its increase (in two cases, it was an increase by 2 points). Nine students did not indicate any increase, while two students indicated a decrease of cultural awareness.

Results from the total number of points increased indicated that the level of students' knowledge about other national cultures improved the most, closely followed by the level of experience in dealing with representatives of other national cultures and the level of students' cultural awareness. Similarly, to the Polish sample, the improvement in students' ability to communicate with representatives of other national cultures was shown to be much less, compared to the other three aspects. Results from the compound measure revealed that almost two-thirds of the total improvement came from moderate development (increase by only 1 point) in our Lithuanian sample. For all the detailed results see Table 3.

Table 3. KTU survey results—questions 1–4.

Increase in Increase	the Level of Knowledge about Other National Cultures	the Level of Experience in Dealing with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Ability to Communicate with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Level of Cultural Awareness	Compound Measure
by 1 point	8	5	5	6	**6**
by 2 points	2	1	0	2	**1.25**
by 3 points	0	1	0	0	**0.25**
by 4 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
by 5 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
by 6 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
overall increase in points	**12**	**10**	**5**	**10**	**9.25**
decrease	2	2	3	2	n/a
neutral	7	10	11	9	n/a

Only 14 students (out of 19 students) benefited from the exercise, as they reported a high, very high and extremally high increase of their cross-cultural competences when the project was finished—see the detailed answers in Table 4.

Table 4. Increase in the level of cross-cultural competences—KTU students.

Increase Description	Earlier Work in a Intercultural Team	No Earlier Work in a Intercultural Team	Overall
Extremely high	4	0	4
Very high	3	0	3
High	7	0	7
Moderate	4	0	4
Little	1	0	1
Very little	0	0	0
None at all	0	0	0

Similarly, as in the case of SGH, a few KTU students declared a decrease in each category. The reasons for such declarations might have been similar as those of the SGH students.

4.1.3. Comparison of SGH and KTU Results

Comparing the SGH (Polish) and KTU (Lithuanian) data, one can clearly see that the overall learning experience of SGH students was more significant. There might be several reasons for this. First of all, every KTU student in the sample had an earlier experience of working in an international team and had some personal life experience (such as previous work and experience abroad, international experience acquired travelling or studying abroad, high level of education and knowledge of foreign languages). This may mean that KTU students' increase in knowledge was lower than in the case of SGH students without such prior experience, and this may explain why there was more novelty in their learning, and they did indeed learn more.

Another reason might be the fact that KTU intercultural groups were less diverse, as there was a domination of Lithuanian students in the class. The third reason may be seen in the slightly different content focus of the tasks performed by the international teams at both schools. Both at SGH and KTU, the students were asked to do the analysis on their own within the formal framework provided by the course instructor. Additionally, SGH students were required to write two reflection papers which forced them to think more about their learning experience; hence their greater awareness of what they had learnt. It was not possible at KTU for some formal reason, so in a less formalised way students were just asked to reflect on their learning experience.

4.2. Results of the Implicit Method

Our findings from the Hungarian surveys are summarised here. In this case, there was no specific cross-cultural focused exercise in the general business course, while the class of students was highly international.

It was possible to compare students' answers to questions 1–4 only in 21 cases, so all indications below are out of 21. In the case of level of knowledge about other national cultures, 12 students indicated that it increased (in two cases by 2 points). Five students did not indicate any increase while four students indicated a decrease of knowledge. When asked about the level of experience in dealing with representatives of other national cultures, 12 students declared an increase (in two cases, it was an increase by 3 points, in another case by 2 points). Six students did not indicate any increase in their experience, and three students' responses indicated a lower value than at the beginning of the course. Concerning the ability to communicate with representatives of other national cultures, five

students declared an increase (in one case by 3 points). Thirteen students did not indicate any increase in their ability to communicate, while in 3 cases the value was lower than at the beginning of the course. As for the level of cultural awareness, nine students indicated its increase (in three cases it was the increase by 2 points). Eleven students did not indicate any increase, while one student indicated a decrease of cultural awareness.

Results from the total number of points increased indicated that the level of students' experience in dealing with representatives of other national cultures improved the most. Their level of knowledge about other national cultures and their cultural awareness showed less increase, while the improvement in students' ability to communicate with representatives of other national cultures was shown to be much less, compared to the other three aspects. Results from the compound measure revealed that almost approximately 60% of the total improvement came from moderate development (increase by only 1 point) in our Hungarian sample. For all the detailed results see Table 5.

Table 5. Corvinus survey results—questions 1–4.

Increase in Increase	the Level of Knowledge about Other National Cultures	the Level of Experience in Dealing with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Ability to Communicate with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Level of Cultural Awareness	Compound Measure
by 1 point	10	9	4	6	**7.25**
by 2 points	2	1	0	3	**1.5**
by 3 points	0	2	1	0	**0.75**
by 4 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
by 5 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
by 6 points	0	0	0	0	**0**
overall increase in points	**14**	**17**	**7**	**12**	**12.5**
decrease	4	3	3	1	n/a
neutral	5	6	13	11	n/a

All of the 21 students benefited from the exercise, as 18 of them reported a high, very high and extremally high increase of their cross-cultural competences when the project was finished—see the detailed answers in Table 6. Three students indicated only a moderate increase. Out of this group, nine students did not work in an intercultural team before. Five of them reported a very high, three of them high and one of them only moderate increase in their cross-cultural competences.

Table 6. Increase in the level of cross-cultural competences—Corvinus students.

Increase Description	Earlier Work in a Intercultural Team	No Earlier Work in a Intercultural Team	Overall
Extremely high	4	0	4
Very high	2	5	7
High	4	3	7
Moderate	2	1	3
Little	0	0	0
Very little	0	0	0
None at all	0	0	0

Similarly, as in the case of SGH and KTU, some of the Corvinus students declared a decrease in each category. The reasons for such declarations might have been similar as those of the SGH and KTU students.

4.3. Comparison of Findings from the Explicit and Implicit Methods

In case of the Hungarian survey, students did not receive specific instructions and learning activities focused on understanding or improving cross-cultural competences. The course was about applying general economic theories to practical cases provided by the students of the class. Hence the context of the cases provided for learning, and the team members working on the cases were culturally diverse. When forming the teams, the course instructor asked students not to team up with students from their own nation, or from their own profession (business professionals, engineers, artists etc.), whenever possible. This was in an effort to stimulate higher level of learning through diversity, in terms of culture and experience.

From an analytical point of view, in order to allow for the comparison of the explicit and implicit methods, first we calculated the results for the combined Polish and Lithuanian data, by the weighted average of their individual scores. The weights were the sample size in each country. This calculated result reflected the score for the "explicit method" in our analysis and could be compared against the Hungarian results that represented the "implicit method". A simple deduction of the results of the implicit method from the results of the explicit method provides a revealing response to our research question as follows (see Table 7 for details).

Table 7. Comparison of results from explicit and implicit methods—questions 1–4.

Total Increase in Points	the Level of Knowledge about Other National Cultures	the Level of Experience in Dealing with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Ability to Communicate with Representatives of Other National Cultures	the Level of Cultural Awareness	Compound Measure
Explicit method	12.91	12.29	7.74	12.74	**11.42**
Implicit method	14.00	17.00	7.00	12.00	**12.50**
Difference	**(1.09)**	**(4.71)**	**0.74**	**0.74**	**(1.08)**

Overall, the implicit method provided similar, somewhat even more positive results than the explicit method. If we break down the results and see the different survey questions one by one, two of them provided more positive results for the explicit method, while the other two were more positive for the implicit method. The differences in three out of the total four questions were minimal. The only case which provided relatively major difference was related to the students' level of experience in dealing with representatives of other culture. From those aspects, the improvement indicated for the implicit method was 4.71 times greater than in the case of the explicit method.

In our interpretation, compared to the Polish and Lithuanian cases, the Hungarian results positively confirm that the diversity of the students' body, as well as the teacher's intentional efforts to create mixed teams within the class could provide an environment that supports cross-cultural learning, even without specific culture-focused reflections or activities. This is all the more impressive in light of the fact that almost half of the students did not have earlier experience of working in multicultural teams.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

On the basis of our findings, we conclude that the international classroom provides a powerful and stimulating environment for latent cross-cultural learning even without specific exercises focused on cross-cultural learning itself. However, the specific exercise did induce additional learning, especially related to students' level of cross-cultural aware-

ness, so that they understood the differences between one another and their ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures was increased, even though the extent of that learning may be interpreted as underwhelming.

In comparison with extant findings in the literature, we noted that our implicit method, though it was implicit in terms of the lack of exercises focused on cross-cultural learning, included elements of experiential learning such as action-learning and role playing. Therefore, the powerful results, even without an explicit exercise, can be understood. The action learning element emphasised by Seaman et al. [1] was part of our implicit method, while the four steps explained as a powerful structure of experiential learning [2] was also part of what our students in the Hungarian sample experienced. The strength of bringing in real-life practice to the classroom, noted by Schaupp and Vitullo [10] as a contributing factor to experiential learning, was also naturally part of the MBA experience of our students who were subjected to the implicit method enjoyed. The extra effort these methods require from both teachers and students, as explained by Schaller [11], also partly explains why cross-cultural learning was enhanced above expectations in the Hungarian sample. The fact that the surveys were conducted created a situation for students to reflect on their learning, which, in itself, can have a powerful effect, as noted by the study of Deardorff [33]. In the Hungarian sample, students were quite motivated and enthusiastic about the course, hence the positive effect on cross-cultural learning could have been supported by that, in line with the findings of Figueira and Duarte [32].

The relative success of the explicit method in terms of increased cross-cultural awareness and improved communication skills confirms our expectations about the method, as explained by the study of Wals and Sriskandarajah [16], given the fact that our explicit method involved in-person interaction with peers, unlike in the case of our implicit method. The fact that the advantage of the explicit method in this regard was not profound can partly be explained by the findings of Wang and Kulich [18], who also found that at-home cultural diversity programmes and even online intercultural exchanges could have a comparable effect on in-person foreign experiences. Furthermore, as de Hei et al. [31] concluded in their comparable study, the quality of collaboration can be related to the increased development of intercultural competence, with or without the support of an explicit cross-cultural exercise.

6. Implications, Limitations and Perspectives for Future Research

The **theoretical implications** of our study are twofold. First, our results draw attention to the importance of the multicultural learning environment, even if in an online space, as opposed to thematic exercises addressing cross-cultural learning. Furthermore, enhanced engagement through experiential learning may have more powerful impact on actual skills development than any focused exercise. These exploratory findings may inspire future research of more analytical nature.

Managerial implications of our study include additional attention to the importance of creating a stimulating learning environment as opposed to the benefits of learning activities directly focused on cross-cultural learning. Programme managers may need to work more adamantly on providing the right environment for learning, while the dilemma of multiple focal points in contemporary business education may be eased. Cross-cultural learning may not be the key focus of specific courses and exercises in an education programme, nonetheless, significant improvement in skills development can be achieved if engagement is made in an international classroom.

The study has its **limitations** resulting from its exploratory purpose. It is based on a considerably small number of student responses and in a limited number of universities. It may be difficult to replicate it in larger classrooms, due to the difficulty in managing many student teams. However, the study can definitely be repeated in a bigger number of international universities. Furthermore, due to the pandemic shock affecting our research, we did not have the opportunity to perform the implicit exercise in an in-person environment, but in a fully online set-up. Potential moderating factors, which were not addressed by

our basic research approach, may have been at play. The general learning environment in the different schools, the teachers' personality, the overall cultural features of the classes in the samples and the characteristics of the nationalities involved could have influenced our results to an extent. More elaborated methods of analysis could not be used, due to limited data gathered in the surveys.

In terms of future research directions, results from our exploratory study are promising. The fact that relatively little differences have been identified between the implicit and explicit methods calls for more in-depth examination of the applied class exercises. Our investigation could be extended in its scope to cover more explicit aspects of the classroom environment, as well as in the focus and teaching methodology of the specific exercises to be performed. Larger data sets would also allow for more sophisticated statistical analysis of the focal phenomenon.

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