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Title of the Bachelor's Thesis:

Social Adaptation of International Students in the Czech Republic

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D e c l a r a t i o n o f A u t h e n t i c i t y

I, Elizaveta Ambrozevich, hereby declare that the Bachelor's Thesis titled
"Social Adaptation of International Students" is entirely my own
work. All referenced sources in this thesis have been acknowledged and cited.
The data, findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this thesis are
based on my original research and analysis.

Prague, June 28th, 2024

Signature

Title of the Bachelor's Thesis:

Social Adaptation of International Students in the Czech Republic

Abstract:

The object of the paper is to become familiar with and discuss the challenges that international students in the Czech Republic face. Thousands of students come to the Czech Republic from abroad to pursue higher education every year. Adapting to university life in a foreign country can be difficult for many of them. Understanding the factors that contribute to students' successful adaptation in a new cultural environment is important because students' adaptation influences their mental well-being, study efficiency, and lifestyle.

The thesis has a high value due to its uniqueness; very little work was conducted in the Czech Republic on this topic. Moreover, there are going to be some recommendations on how to face the challenges of social adaptation during studies abroad.

Keywords:

Social adaptation, international students, acculturation, culture shock, quantitative research.

Acknowledgment:

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Introduction

We are living in the era of globalization, and many spheres of life are undergoing transformations. Higher education is one of them. A lot of students worldwide apply and get enrolled in universities abroad. The year 2017 witnessed how over six and a half million students decided to pursue a degree in another country, a number increased to over eight million in 2021 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.). This undeniable trend shows that there is a dynamic evolution of academic mobility, and it demands a thorough exploration of the many-sided challenges and experiences that international students go through.

“International students’ identity of being ‘the Other’, defined as someone not from the receiving cultures”(Liu & Qian, 2023), is exposed to an educational system full of uncertainties and stressors. The process of adapting to a new environment involves a range of obstacles, some of them are: language and cultural differences, academic and financial challenges, interpersonal issues, experiences of racial discrimination, diminished social support networks, feelings of alienation, and homesickness. (Yeh & Inose, 2003) The first year in a foreign university becomes a critical moment for many students and it is thought to be particularly challenging and stressful (Anderson, 1994). This stress takes many forms, including depressive disorders, anxiety, physical ailments, changes in appetite, sleep disturbances, identity crises, and potential substance abuse. (Yeh & Inose, 2003) The consequences of insufficient support during this crucial period are significant. These issues arise en masse every year and it is crucial to solve them, or they will cause a decrease in international students’ performance. That is why the development of comprehensive frameworks and strategies that include social, financial, academic, and psychological support is not only beneficial but necessary.

The Czech Republic is a host country for many international students, it offers a unique sociocultural context that shapes their adaptation experiences. In 2024 there are more than fifty thousand international students enrolled, with more than half of them living and studying in Prague. Other popular cities for moving are Brno, Olomouc, Hradec, and Zlin (Erudera, 2024). While existing literature provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by international students in Western educational settings, there is a notable research gap, particularly in understanding the experiences of non-EU students, whose visa and housing concerns, along with homesickness, compile and create even more stress.

The aim of this work is to research and analyze through the survey method the challenges faced by international students and how they affect their performance in the context of Czech society and the Czech higher education system. Additionally, the work aims to provide relevant recommendations to students and institution employees.

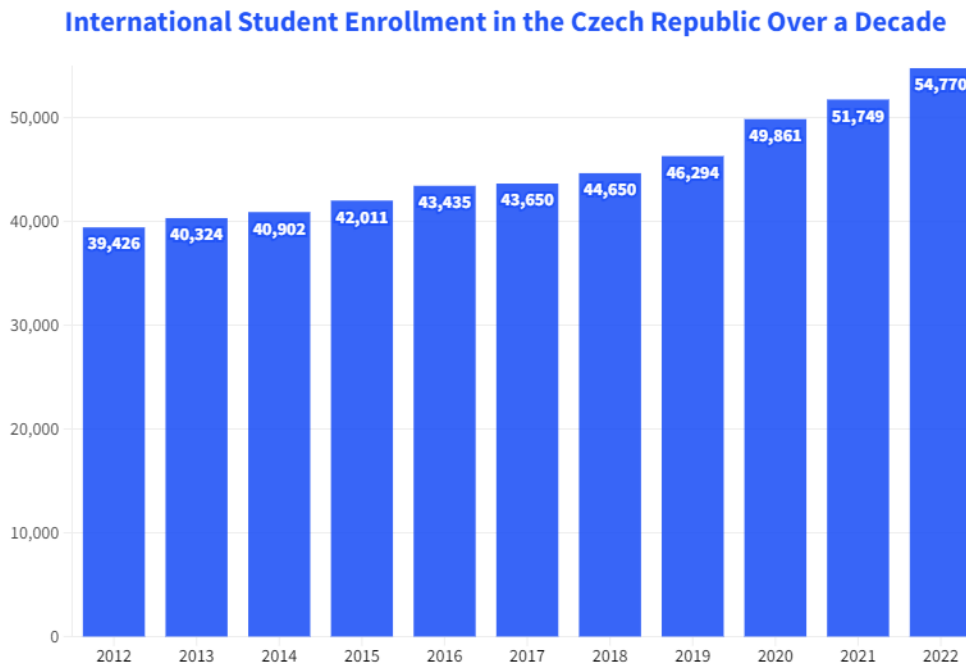
To achieve these results, the following methods were used: online survey, analysis, and data description.

I. Theoretical part

1. International Students in the Czech Republic

As stated in the Introduction, The Czech Republic has become an increasingly popular destination for international students seeking quality education in Europe. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, the number of international students in the country has been steadily increasing over the past decade. According to data released by the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) and Erudera News in 2023, around 55,000 foreigners studied in the country in 2022 (Figure 1). This number means that almost one-fifth of all students in the Czech Republic come from abroad. Among these, the largest groups come from neighboring countries such as Slovakia and Germany, followed by non-European countries like China, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Vietnam. The diversity of the international student body enriches the cultural landscape of Czech higher education institutions.

Figure 1: International Student Enrollment in the Czech Republic Over a Decade



Source: Erudera

Source: Erudera, 2023

The Czech Republic offers various scholarship opportunities to support international students pursuing higher education in the country. One of the most prominent scholarship programs is the Government Scholarships for Developing Countries, which provides financial assistance to students from eligible countries to study bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs at Czech universities. Additionally, individual universities may offer their own scholarships or tuition waivers to attract talented international students. These scholarships often cover tuition fees, living expenses, and other related costs, easing the financial burden for students.

Despite such support provided to international students in the Czech Republic by the institutions, they still undergo various challenges in adapting to the new life abroad.

2. Social Adaptation

The concept of adaptation, as the person's adaptive function to changing environmental conditions, was adopted from the biological sciences into the sphere of humanities due to the existing challenges associated with optimizing human life within society. Term Social adaptation is the process through which individuals or groups adjust their behaviors, attitudes, and values to improve their interactions and functioning in a certain social environment. In the process of social adaptation people acquire the necessary skills, norms, and customs to meet the expectations of society.

People begin the process of social adaptation because of their realization that previously acquired social norms no longer ensure the achievement of success in the new social conditions or they are just no longer relevant or acceptable in the new social environment.

Social adaptation means gradually learning the culture, norms, and roles of society, as well as mastering the activities that go along with them. It's an ongoing process where individuals adjust

to their social environment. The way someone adapts depends on their goals, values, and what's possible in their social setting.

Reviewing the modern methodology, A.A. Rean proposes a classification of adaptation types according to the direction of activity: either outward (changing the surrounding environment) or inward (self-transformation involving the adjustment of one's own social attitudes and behaviors).

Rean identifies the following adaptation strategies:

- Active alteration of the situation.
- Active modification of one's own personality traits.
- Active search for a new social environment with higher adaptation potential for the individual and their development.
- Combined type (incorporating components of the types mentioned above).
- Passive disadaptation (passively accepting the demands, norms, attitudes, and values of the social environment without engaging in self-change, self-correction, or self-development)

The strategies of the adaptation process are shaped by the needs, motives, subjective position, psychophysiological, and individual-personal characteristics, which largely determine a person's ability to integrate or not integrate into the social environment. A person who cannot find their place in society and function fully within it is more likely to become a client of social work. This is because conformist behavior, passive acceptance of the values, norms, and attitudes of the social environment

without self-transformation, self-correction, and self-development, leads to maladaptation, i.e., to the failure of external activities and a state of psycho-emotional tension and discomfort.

The desired outcomes of the adaptation process in social work include adaptation, integration, achieving an optimal state, and self-actualization. When discussing categories like migrants, including international students, integration takes the forefront.

R. Merton distinguished several models of social adaptation (Figure 2). If an individual shares the goals of the culture in which they live and pursues them through legal and recommended means, then the *conformity* model of adaptation is realized. The *innovation* model of adaptation is characterized by the individual accepting the goals of the community but pursuing them through non-traditional methods. If the individual does not recognize the goals and values of their own society but adheres to the "rules of the game" and norms of behavior accepted by that society, then this is referred to as the *ritualism* model of social adaptation. *Retreatism* (withdrawal, detachment from social reality) is the model of social adaptation in which the individual does not accept the goals and values of society and the socially approved means of achieving them. In this case, it involves the "parallel existence" of the individual and society. If the individual does not recognize society, and its culture, and actively opposes them, then it is referred to as *rebellion*, as a model of social adaptation. Many international students experience conformist adaptation (Merton, 1938).

Figure 2: Five types of cultural adaptation

Adaptation methods	Culture goals	Institutionalised means
conformity	+	+
innovation	+	-
ritualism	-	+
retreatism	-	-
rebellion	+/-	+/-

Source: Merton, 1938

The interaction between an individual and their environment follows certain patterns. The first pattern is as follows: the more stable the environment, the deeper and more enduring the changes that occur within the individual during the process of adaptation. The second pattern is expressed in the fact that higher levels of the social environment, due to their rigidity, are less influenced by the individual.

In real life, people simultaneously interact with various levels of the social environment: with their work team, study group, family, new social organization, and new culture. In each case, individuals strive to establish optimal interaction. However, the measure of adaptability varies; a person may adapt well and quickly within a study team but struggle with cultural adaptation.

A.A. Nalchadzhyan explored the perspectives of scholars from different sociological paradigms on the process of individual social adaptation. Specifically, Nalchadzhyan investigated the viewpoints of scholars within the schools of interactionism and behaviorism.

Supporters of interactionism theory assert that the process of adaptation is influenced by both internal psychological factors and external environmental factors. According to this view, adaptability hinges on two key principles. Firstly, individuals conform to the social norms and expectations prevalent in their society. Secondly, individuals possess the capacity to adapt to new environments while retaining

the ability to influence events according to their desires. Interactionists identify interpersonal adaptation as a primary form, which involves acquiring professional knowledge and skills through personal relationships. Emotional connections between individuals play a fundamental role in this process.

On the other hand, behaviorists view social adaptation as changes (physical, social, or organizational) in group behavior, social interactions, or culture. Neo-behaviorists believe that adaptation takes place when an individual's needs match their environment and see it as an ongoing process of achieving this balance. (Rubchevskiy, 2002)

3. International Students' Sociocultural Adaptation

International students' sociocultural adaptation is a complex process that is proceeded by all the students differently. While certain international students undergo a seamless process of adapting to a new culture, others encounter a spectrum of challenges, such as feelings of depression, loneliness, homesickness, anxiety, isolation, frustration, and more, as they navigate the transition between cultures. These difficulties often contribute to worsened mental well-being and academic achievement.

Acculturation theory, developed by John. W. Berry offers a framework of how people from different cultural backgrounds adapt to a new cultural environment. It suggests that the acculturation process is influenced by many factors, such as individual characteristics (age, language proficiency, motivation, and goals), cultural context (such as the attitudes of the dominant culture toward immigrants), and situational factors (such as the length of time spent in the new culture).

3.1. Factors

The rate of adaptation is notably influenced by age. Children below the age of 7 adapt to novel environments the most easily. However, during the stages of schooling and adolescence, the adaptation process becomes markedly more difficult, which can be connected to the necessity of adaptation to new societal rules and norms. According to various research, the elderly face the most challenges in adaptation, for many of them it is a struggle to acclimate to unfamiliar surroundings.

Education also plays a pivotal role in the adaptation process. People with higher levels of education are less likely to experience symptoms of culture shock. More educated individuals possess broader horizons, thereby they adjust to the dynamics of societies more seamlessly and integrate faster.

Another crucial aspect of successfully fitting into a new culture is being able to speak the language and understanding local customs. Knowing the language of the country helps build trust and connections with the locals. For instance, in some countries, locals prefer speaking only their state language. Plus, having a basic grasp of the culture, traditions, and lifestyle helps smoothen the adaptation process a lot.

Personal characteristics also play a crucial role in the social adaptation of international students. Thus, Mariusz Zięba, Monika Surawska, and Anna Maria Zalewska have identified that extraversion and neuroticism are linked to both cognitive and affective aspects of well-being, while agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively correlated with satisfaction with life and positive affect. Moreover, beliefs about oneself (self-esteem, self-efficacy) also influence social adaptation. (Zięba, Surawska & Zalewska, 2018)

All of the adaptation factors discussed above can be classified as individual. There are also group factors that influence the social adaptation process including the characteristics of the home country and a new country.

The more the new culture is similar to the home culture, the faster the adaptation process of the student is. However, there can be such situations when such similarity may, on the contrary, slow down the adaptation process. For example, in the case when a person finds himself in a culture very similar to his native one, but their actions and behavior are not accepted by the locals, this may lead the person to confusion. When international students come to a new country, they often find themselves in a situation where their behavior is misunderstood. As a result, they may face difficulties with adapting to a new environment.

Other factors that influence successful adaptation are the conditions of the host country, including friendliness and openness of the residents to international students. It is also important to consider such factors as the economic and political stability of the host country, the level of security, and the media influence, which creates a general emotional state and public opinion concerning representatives of other ethnocultural groups.

3.2. Challenges

When students step into a new cultural setting, even with the best circumstances for building international connections, they often encounter a range of challenges and obstacles in communication and adapting to the daily environment. Experience demonstrates that individuals from diverse countries and cultures typically possess limited knowledge about each other, often relying on stereotypes and lacking accurate information. Misguided or negative perceptions of another culture inevitably impact the duration and intricacy of foreign students' social adaptation to a distinct sociocultural milieu (Shibutani, 2012).

According to studies on this topic, one of the key issues that international students face is language discrimination. Accent or lack of language proficiency can make international students feel excluded from the society they live in which can even lead to depression. S.Dovchin discusses that international students may face such a phenomenon that the author called 'linguistic racism' which appears in ways of accent bullying or stereotyping in the classrooms (Dovchin, 2020).

Another research conducted by Iorga M., Soponaru C., Muraru I. D., Socolov S., and Petrariu F. D. revealed that international students have high levels of acculturative stress. Moreover, the negative correlation between the year of studies and homesickness and stress was identified. This means first-year students are exposed to stress the most. This may be caused by a fast change and cultural shock (Iorga, Soponaru, Muraru, Socolov & Petrariu, 2020).

Newsome L. K. and Cooper P. discussed cultural shock in their research as well. It was revealed that many international students had higher expectations of their studies abroad which turned out to be unrealistic. The key aspects that did not meet students' expectations were living costs, local lifestyles, social behaviors, and rules (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

Besides language and lifestyle differences, feelings of loneliness and homesickness negatively impact the social adaptation of international students. Another critical barrier to the success and well-being of students is racial discrimination.

For instance, international students in Britain admit that, even though local people were not openly racist towards them, they felt discriminated against based on their skin color or religion.

So, although difficult to identify, racism was one of the main challenges to interacting with British people (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

Similarly, Ge et al. examine the challenges encountered by international students from China. Apart from language barriers, academic struggles, and cultural disparities, female students face additional hurdles due to traditional gender roles and family obligations. Chinese students encounter difficulties in both verbal and non-verbal communication, struggle with adapting to Western teaching methods, and find it challenging to integrate socially with local peers.

3.3. Cultural Differences

The reason for such obstacles discussed earlier can be the difference in cultures. One popular theory describing differences between cultures is Edward T. Hall's theory of high- and low-context cultures. In high-context cultures, there is a large number of contextual elements that help people understand the rules of the culture. In such cultures, a lot of information is transmitted in a non-verbal way. In such cultures traditions, hierarchy, status, a person's appearance, and manner of behavior play a critical role in transmitting the meaning. Often many things are not said directly, as they are taken for granted, or by hints, subtexts, and figurative expressions. On the other hand, in low-context cultures, communication is more straightforward. People in such cultures share clear, direct, and unambiguous messages. Words are used instead of context and signs (Nishimura, Nevgi & Tella, 2008).

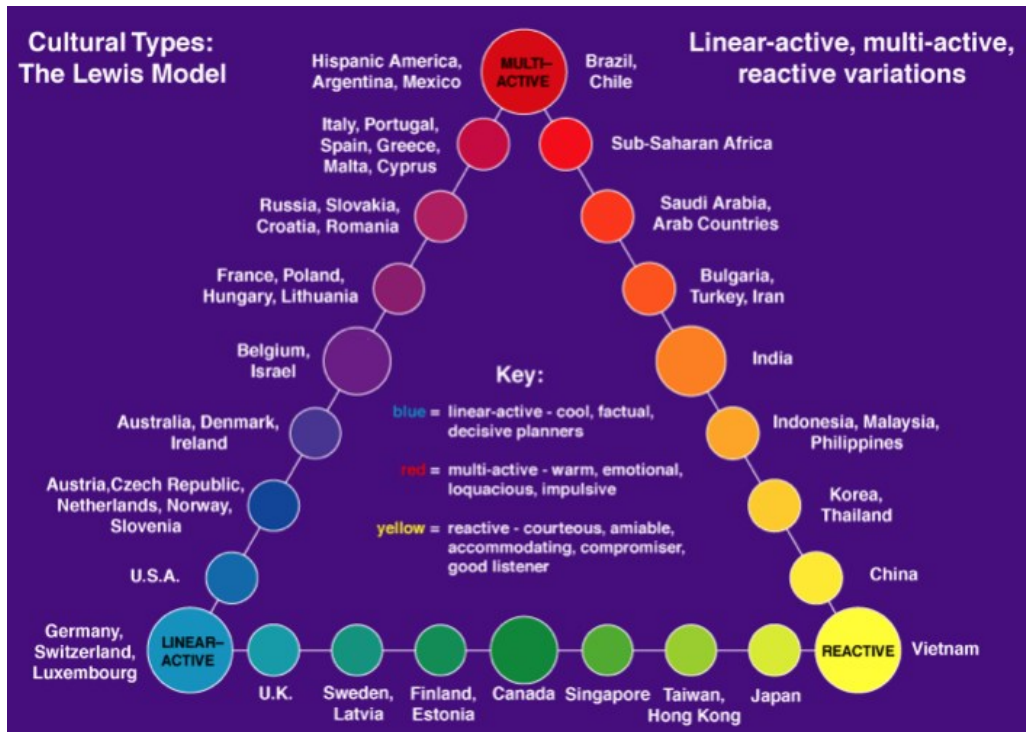
Misunderstandings can be common when a person from a low-context country comes to a high-context country and vice versa. Thus, international students need to understand if the country they are moving to is high- or low-context. It will help students adapt to the communication style in the new country and avoid misunderstandings.

The Czech Republic can be identified as a low-context country. Ideas are usually expressed directly, many things require additional explanation, written instructions and contracts are of great value, especially in business settings. Speech is of great importance, as well as the discussion of details; a direct and open style of communication is preferred. This type includes cultures from some Western countries such as Germany and the USA. However, as it was revealed earlier in this work, many students come to the Czech Republic from Eastern countries, where people do not always communicate directly, and judge how things are said, and not what is said. They often use a large number of non-verbal signals and symbols, and lack details and detailed information, since all participants are assumed to know from context or nonverbal cues. There is also a preference to avoid conflicts and a lack of open expression of protest or dissatisfaction. Thus, to better assimilate in a low-context country like the Czech Republic, people from the low-context country should try the following recommendations:

- lead a conversation or presentation of material in a simple language;
- speak more directly;
- use a smaller number of non-verbal forms of communication in speech;
- avoid ambiguity and reticence;
- openly express dissatisfaction.

Another model was developed by R. Lewis, who classified cultures as linear-active, multi-active, and reactive (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Cultural Types: The Lewis Model



Source: The Lewis Model of Dimensions of Behaviors, 2006

From the diagram, it is visible that the Czech Republic is classified as a linear-active country.

A *linear-active culture* is characterized by work- and result-orientation. People belonging to this culture are calm and rational, they systematically plan their future and carefully organize their activities. A distinctive feature of people from a linear-active culture is that they complete tasks in order, not jumping from one to another. Since representatives of a linear-active culture are result-oriented, the leading place is given to career growth. Also, in this culture, great importance is attached to the principle of equality of all people. Representatives of linear-active cultures have the following distinctive characteristics:

- low level of sociability;
- performing tasks in order;

- systematic planning for the future;
- rarely interrupt the interlocutor;
- restrained gestures and facial expressions;
- differentiation between personal and professional spheres;
- polite but straightforward;
- greater emotional restraint.

A *multi-active culture* is a culture of people who are more focused on building relationships with coworkers rather than on job performance. People from multi-active cultures prefer multitasking to planning and focusing on one thing at a time. Representatives of such cultures are extremely unpunctual. In a multi-active culture, great importance is attached to hierarchy, which creates comfortable conditions for interaction and proper communication. Summarizing the above information, the following characteristics of such culture can be identified:

- high level of sociability;
- performing several tasks simultaneously;
- emotional and free expression of feelings;
- planning only in general terms;
- impatience;
- no separation between personal and professional space;
- presence of emotional non-verbal communication.

Representatives of a *reactive culture* carefully plan their daily routines and treat their business partners and colleagues very tactfully. Representatives of this culture are always focused on fulfilling their obligations. In this culture, people treat their classmates and colleagues with great respect and try to avoid unpleasant situations. As it is visible from the diagram, the most reactive cultures include Asian countries. Reactive culture is distinguished from others by the following features of its representatives:

- prefer to listen rather than talk;
- polite and indirect;
- prefer to hide feelings;
- do not interrupt the dialogue;
- avoid any conflicts;
- restrained gestures and facial expressions (Lewis, 2006).

Thus, there are several different cultural classifications existing. Each culture may contain different characteristics, with the dominant position of some of them. Such differences between the home country and the foreign country may cause misunderstandings, and dissatisfaction and may slow down the adaptation process. Cross-cultural management may help international students overcome those challenges. Cross-cultural management may be defined as a system of navigating cultural differences within the multicultural world.

Currently, much attention is being paid to developing mechanisms that would allow, while preserving the national and cultural identity of specific population groups, to ensure sustainable management control. Thus, modern cross-cultural management has several tasks:

- development and management of cross-cultural technologies;
- implementation of the interaction of cultures in the international arena;
- formation and development of intercultural skills of employees and managers.

To ensure this, it is important to understand the differences between the cultures.

The basic method of cross-cultural management is cross-cultural training. It allows students to develop practical skills in intercultural interaction and helps overcome or mitigate culture shock.

There are three main goals of cross-cultural training:

- Cultural self-awareness: recognizing and understanding one's own cultural background, values, beliefs, and biases;
- Cultural other awareness: understanding and appreciating the assumptions, values, and norms of other cultures;
- Learning and conceptualizing skill: learning about cultural differences through observations and conceptualizations.

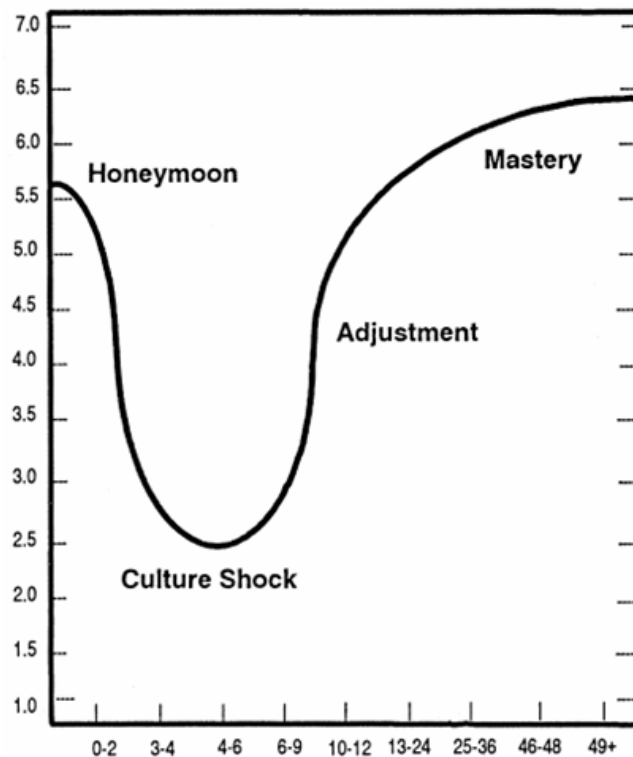
This method of cross-cultural management is suitable for students going to study in other countries.

3.4. Culture Shock

The adaptation process often intersects with the phenomenon known as culture shock. When students travel abroad to study, they're frequently exposed to differences in social norms and behaviors. While becoming a part of a new culture can generally be seen as a positive experience, allowing students to expand their perspectives and acquire invaluable experiences,

many also face culture shock. Firstly discussed by the American anthropologist K. Oberg, culture shock refers to the emotional or physical discomfort and disorientation that individuals experience when exposed to a different culture or unfamiliar setting. Typically, culture shock is analyzed using the adaptation process curve, which was also introduced by K. Oberg. He identified four main stages of culture shock (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Depiction of Oberg's U-Curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment



Source: K.Oberg, 1960

The first stage, also called the honeymoon, is characterized by a student's high spirits and enthusiasm. During this phase, they are eager to learn about and explore the new culture, society, and language. However, their immersion may feel incomplete, as the students may perceive themselves more as travelers rather than as fully integrated members of the community.

Typically, foreign students receive extra support during the initial days of their stay in a new

country. The duration of this stage varies, spanning from several weeks to several months, contingent upon the student's overall sensitivity and prior travel experiences.

After some time, the differences in customs, language, values, and behaviors become more noticeable. This leads to the second stage, called culture shock. It's a critical moment when many people start thinking about going back home. During this stage, people may start feeling overwhelmed and even have serious health problems. Students might start complaining about local norms and feel frustrated, anxious, or depressed. They might also feel like they don't fit in or struggle to adjust to the new culture.

However, if students manage to get through the culture shock phase, they enter the third stage, called Adjustment. This is when individuals begin to adapt to the new culture. They start figuring out how to deal with challenges and learn to appreciate the differences. They might also find support from other expats or locals, which makes the adaptation easier. Gradually, they start feeling more confident and satisfied. The student begins to see both the positive and negative sides of living in the new country more clearly and objectively.

Next up is the fourth stage of complete or long-term adaptation known as Mastery. At this point, a student is nearly fully integrated into their new environment. They start feeling equally comfortable in both their new environment and the old one.

However, numerous studies challenge the adaptation curve theory. A more contemporary perspective is offered by the Canadian psychologist J. Berry. He proposed a different term instead, known as 'acculturative stress'. According to his theory, when people adapt to a new culture, they cannot easily change their behavior and habits. As a result, they experience conflicts during the process of acculturation. In simpler terms, the main issue is not just the culture itself,

but the interaction of cultures. As a result, the acculturation process is connected to two main challenges: how much someone wants to integrate into the new culture and how much they want to hold onto their own culture. Based on these challenges, J. Berry identified four adaptation strategies:

1. Integration: individuals maintain strong ties to their original culture while also actively trying to engage with and participate in the new culture;
2. Assimilation: individuals lose their own culture and prioritize contact with the new culture;
3. Separation: individuals maintain strong ties to their original culture and avoid contact with the new culture;
4. Marginalization: individuals lose their own culture and do not establish contact with the new culture. (Berry, 2007)

3.5. Influence of Social Media

In the modern world, most of the people use various social media platforms. For international students, social media has become an integral part of their social adaptation. A Case Study of the Use of Facebook at a South African University explored the ownership of cell phones and Facebook accounts among higher education students, highlighting the prevalence of digital technology among this "Digital Native" generation. Results indicated high ownership rates, with 99% possessing cell phones and 90% having Facebook accounts. These findings underscored the feasibility of integrating social media networks into teaching and learning practices. While the majority of students utilized Facebook for personal reasons, a significant portion engaged with it daily for educational purposes, facilitating interaction and communication with peers and

instructors. Student perceptions overwhelmingly favored the use of Facebook for learning, citing benefits such as information access, interaction, ease of communication, and engagement.

Overall, it was revealed that the use of social media, and Facebook in particular, has a positive impact on students (Mbodil, Isong, & Muhandji, 2014).

One of the first studies of social media use of Chinese students in the UK conducted by Kline and Liu has revealed its positive effect on students' social adaptation. Chinese students use social media to contact family members which helps them overcome acculturative stress and homesickness. The findings showed that such communication practices positively influence assimilation in a new environment mainly by receiving support from the family and lowering stress level. (Kline & Liu, 2005)

Another study by Park N., Song H., Lee K.M. investigated how ethnic social networking sites (SNSs) and Facebook influence Korean and Chinese college students' acculturative stress and psychological well-being in the U.S. Findings also suggest that social media use helps students adjust to U.S. culture and feel psychological comfort. However, individual differences like extraversion, years in the U.S., academic stress, and English proficiency play a more significant role (Park, Song & Lee, 2014).

However, social media does not only help overcome homesickness and stress but also increases engagement with classmates, and becomes the platform to form peer networks. Meghann R. Dragset found out that integrating social media into undergraduate and graduate courses enhances student engagement and builds peer and practitioner networks by illustrating real-world connections with course content. Activities such as weekly social media posts encourage formal-informal learning and increase student excitement about the material. This approach also helps

students develop professional skills and networks, making course content more relevant beyond the classroom. (Dragseth, 2020)

II. Empirical part

1. Hypotheses

For Czech universities international recognition is very important. International students not only act as an additional source of financing for the universities, but also they tend to increase their prestige and attractiveness. This determines the implementation of specific actions to attract more students from abroad and measures for improving the social adaptation of the students. In this regard, empirical research was organized to analyze the process of social adaptation of international students.

This work analyzed international students in the Czech Republic with disregard to their age, gender, and home country.

The research sample consisted of 56 responses from students of different nationalities and universities in the Czech Republic.

The return rate of the questionnaire was 16 %. It was calculated the following way: the number of respondents was divided by the approximate number of people who received the questionnaire and multiplied by 100%.

Based on the literature analyzed and conclusions made in the theoretical part, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: International students who are more proficient in the Czech language report better social adaptation

Accent or lack of language proficiency can make international students feel excluded from the society they live in. International students may face ‘linguistic racism’ which appears in ways of accent bullying or stereotyping in the classrooms (Dovchin, 2020).

Hypothesis 2: Older students report lower levels of academic adaptation compared to younger students

The rate of adaptation is notably influenced by age. Children below the age of 7 adapt to novel environments the most easily. With age, the adaptation process becomes markedly more difficult.

Hypothesis 3: Lower social adaptation of international students leads to feeling burned out

Adapting to a new environment may be stressful, especially when the adaptation is unsuccessful.

This stress takes many forms, including burnout.

2. Methodology

In this work, a quantitative research design was adopted to examine the level of social adaptation of international students in Czech universities. An existing questionnaire was used and adjusted to fit the research purpose. A link to the Microsoft Forms survey was spread electronically (via email, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) for more efficient data collection and inclusion of a wider range of participants from different Czech universities.

The Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions were used to gather information related to key factors of social adaptation of students in a foreign country, including language proficiency, cultural differences, social support, academic integration, and psychological well-being.

Participation was voluntary and the responses were anonymous to ensure confidentiality.

To be eligible for inclusion in the research, participants must have been enrolled in a Czech University which is foreign to them.

2.1. Questionnaire description

The research questionnaire consisted of two separate parts. The first part of the questionnaire included demographic questions to identify the participants’:

- International student status
- University
- Nationality
- Gender
- Age
- Level of Czech language

It was followed by the GASIS (General Adaptation Scale for International Students) questions.

The questionnaire was developed and validated by M. Polat and K. Arslan in 2022. It reflected the academic, socio-cultural, psychological, and daily life adaptation of international students.

The participants had to choose how much the following statements applied to them on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

1st Factor: Academic Adaptation

- I feel supported by my university.
- I am satisfied with my academic progress.
- My teachers provide the necessary support when I need.
- When I need help, my classmates are there for me.
- I am comfortable with the teaching styles of my new teachers.

- I collaborate with my classmates on school projects.

2nd Factor: Socio-Cultural Adaptation

- I am aware of national days and religious festivals of the host country.
- I enjoy the local food of the host country.
- I love the local music of the host country.
- I understand and tolerate jokes and humor.
- I respect the values and cultural norms of the host country.
- I am aware of culturally accepted manners in the host country.
- I believe that I have integrated myself into the host culture.

3rd Factor: Psychological Adaptation

- I feel like I don't fit in this country.
- I feel lonely in a social environment.
- I feel powerless in this country.
- Talking with locals makes me anxious.
- When I wake up, I don't feel motivated for a new day.
- I don't know how to cope with my anxieties.
- I want to give up everything because I feel lost here.
- I feel burned out here.

4th Factor: Daily Life Adaptation

- I know the basic legal regulations of this country.
- I know how to travel here.

- I know where to buy basic supplies.
- I know what to do in a state of emergency.
- I'm getting used to my new lifestyle in this country.
- I know how to survive on my budget in this country.
- I can deal with everyday problems that I face.

3. Data analysis

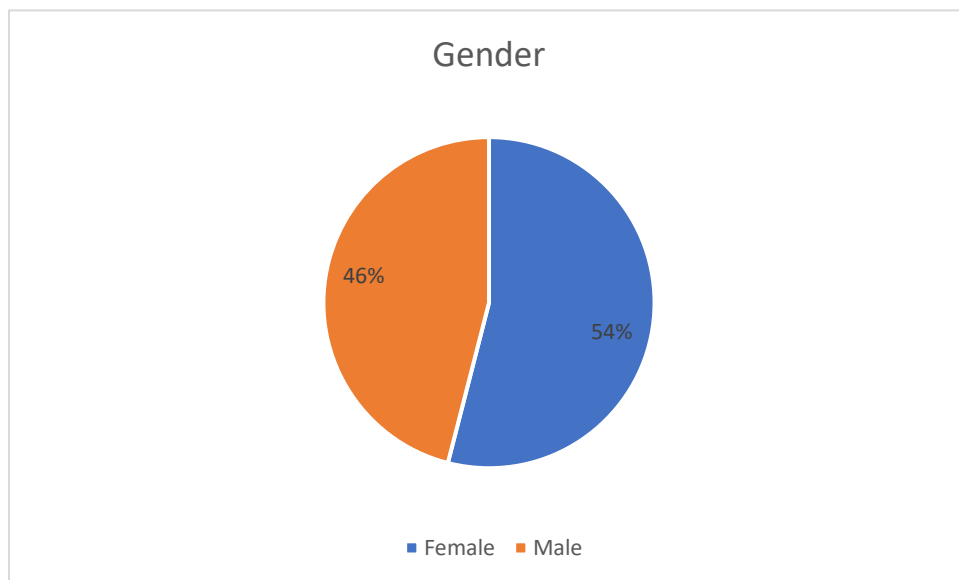
High scores on academic, socio-cultural, and daily life adaptation scales indicated better adaptability of international students. A score interval elaborated by the authors of the questionnaire was used:

Mean score	Classification
1.00 - 1.80	Not adapted
1.81 - 2.60	Partly adapted
2.61 - 3.40	Moderately adapted
3.41 - 4.20	Fairly adapted
4.21 - 5.00	Totally adapted

Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength and the direction of the relationship between variables. If $r > 0$, then the correlation was positive. If $r < 0$, then the correlation was negative. If $r = 0$, then there was no correlation. For the analysis, a correlation value less than 0.1 indicated that there was no significant correlation between the variables.

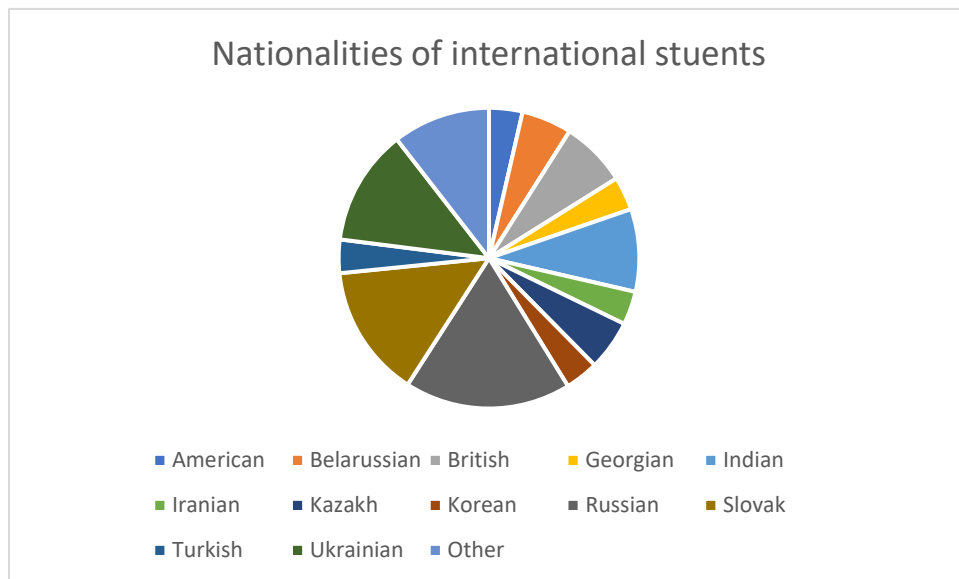
For a basic understanding of the sample, descriptive statistics were calculated. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 37 years. The average age was 24.3 years. Gender distribution included 54% of females and 46% of males (Figure 5). Students of 20 different nationalities participated in the questionnaire, with the largest groups of Russians (17.9%), Ukrainians (12.5%), and Slovaks (14.3%) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Gender distribution



Source: Data collection

Figure 6: Nationalities of international students in the Czech Republic



Source: Data collection

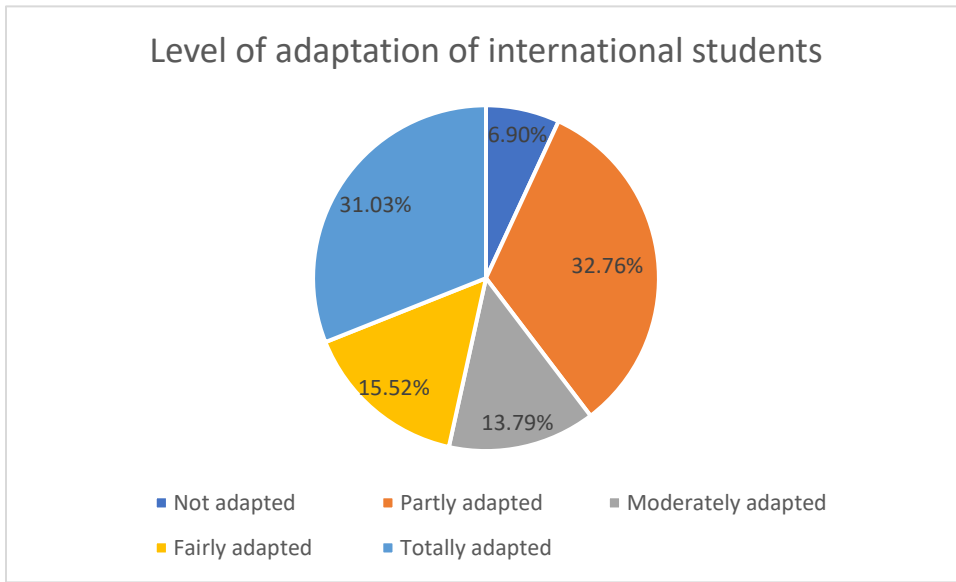
To understand the level of adaptation, a method described earlier was used. A mean was calculated for all responses, with a minimum value of 1.05 and a maximum value of 4.82.

After analyzing the means, the pie chart of the distribution of the levels of adaptation was prepared (Figure 7). It revealed that the biggest percentage of the participants were partly adapted (32.76%) or totally adapted (31.03%). The smallest number of students were not adapted at all (6.90%).

Then, using the Excel formula and scatter plots, the correlation analysis was performed to show whether the level of adaptation depends on age or level of the Czech language (Figures 8-9). It was revealed that the correlation between the age and the level of adaptation was -0.14, which means that the older was the participant, the lower the level of their social adaptation. The correlation between Czech language proficiency and the level of social adaptation was 0.52. This means the better the students' level of the Czech language, the more they were socially adapted in the Czech Republic.

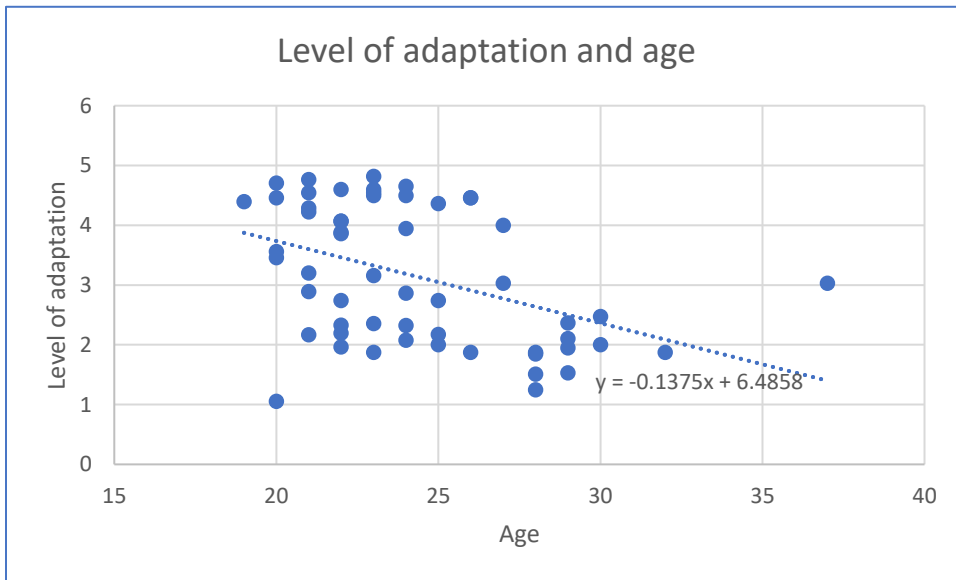
The last check that was performed aimed to reveal the difference between levels of social adaptation among males and females. The t-test was performed using the Excel formula. The obtained p-value was equal to 0.579768869. Since it was more than the significance level (0.05), the null hypothesis was not rejected. This indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female levels of social adaptation. The box and whisker plot was generated (Figure 10).

Figure 7: Distribution of levels of adaptation among international students



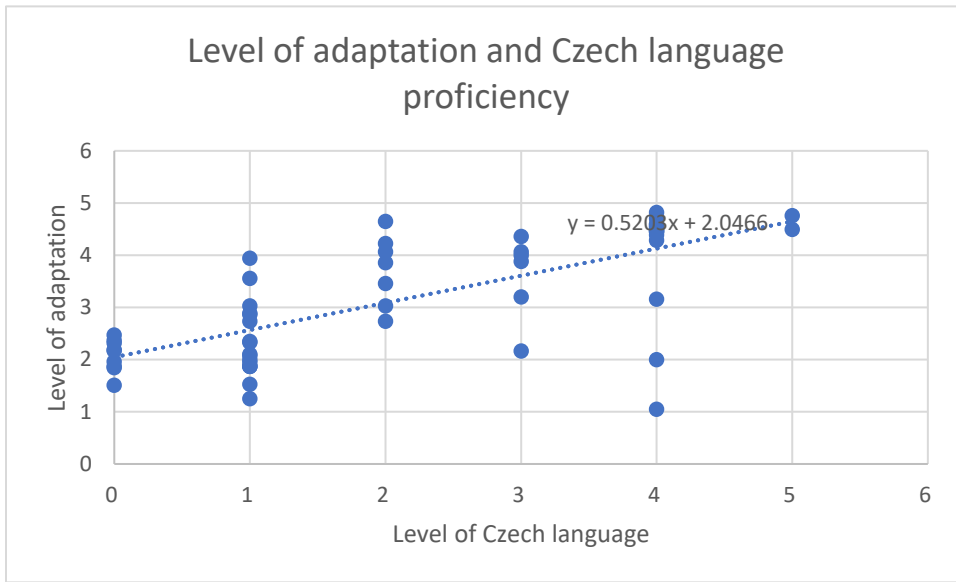
Source: Data collection

Figure 8: Relation between level of social adaptation and age



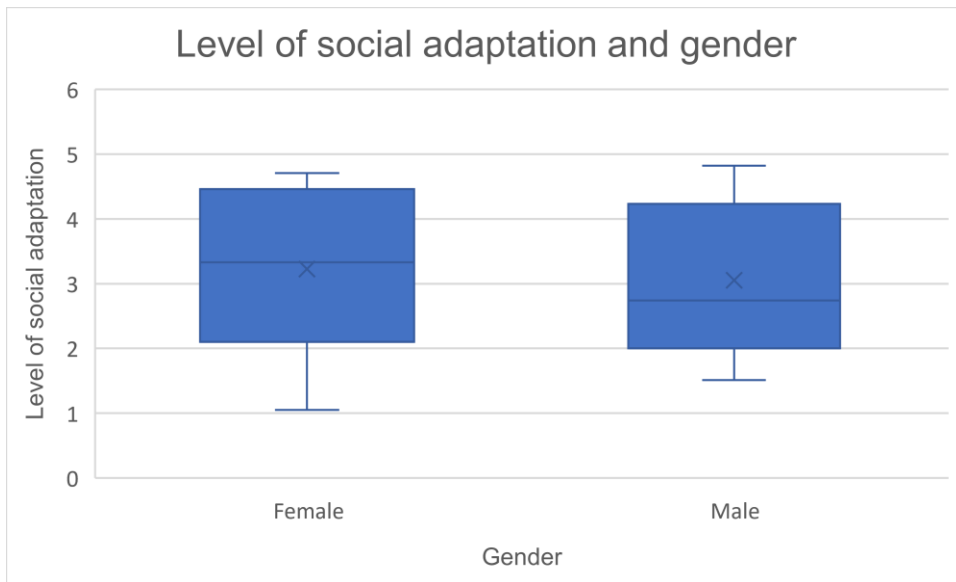
Source: Data collection

Figure 9: Relation between level of social adaptation and Czech language proficiency



Source: Data collection

Figure 10: Comparison of levels of social adaptation between males and females

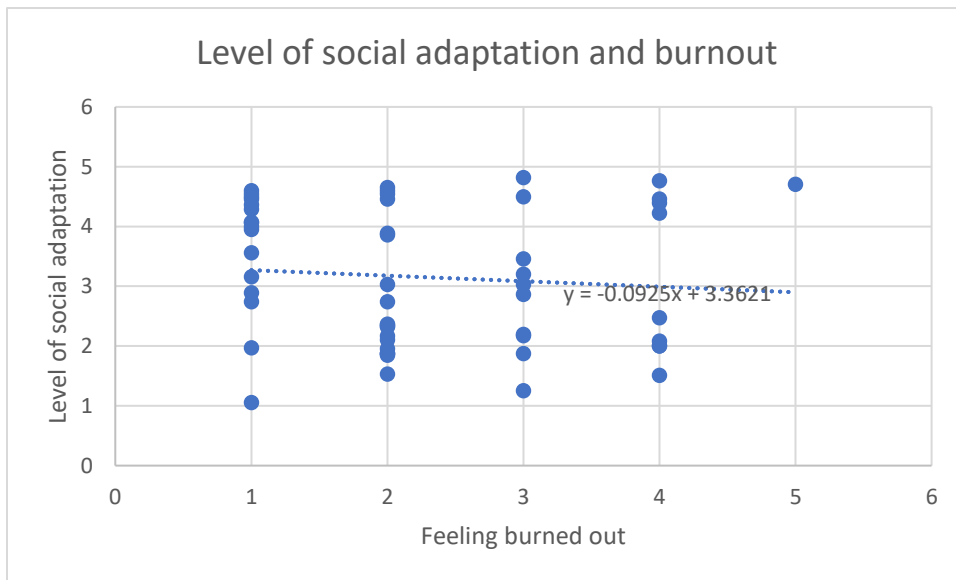


Source: Data collection

Further, the procedure of identifying the correlation between the level of social adaptation of international students and several psychological factors was conducted. No correlation was

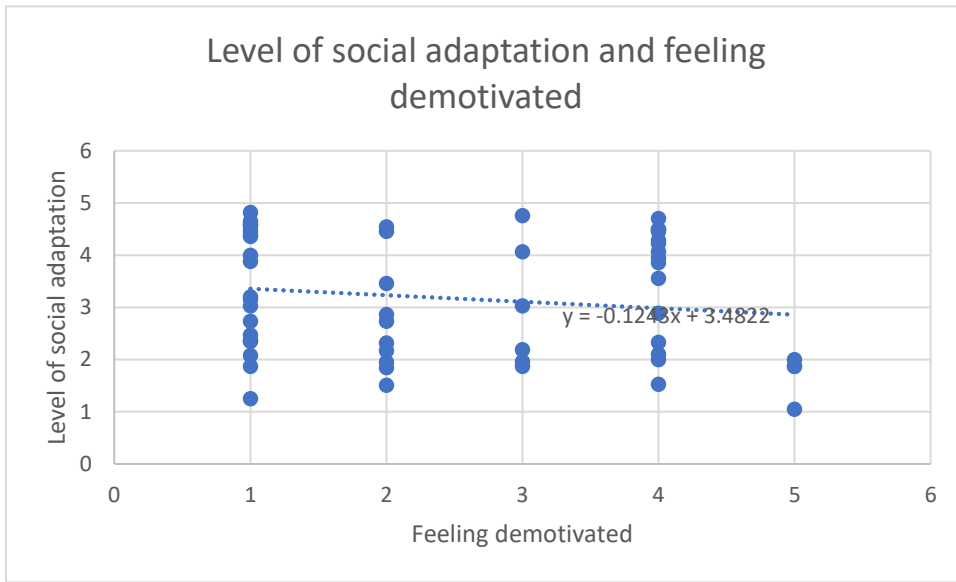
identified between the level of social adaptation among international students and feeling burned out. The correlation value was less than 0.1. However, there was a correlation between level of social adaptation of international students and feeling demotivated with the correlation value of -0.12. Another identified correlation was between the level of social adaptation and feeling lonely in a social environment with a correlation value of -0.11. The scatter plots were generated (Figures 11-13).

Figure 11: Relation between level of social adaptation and burnout



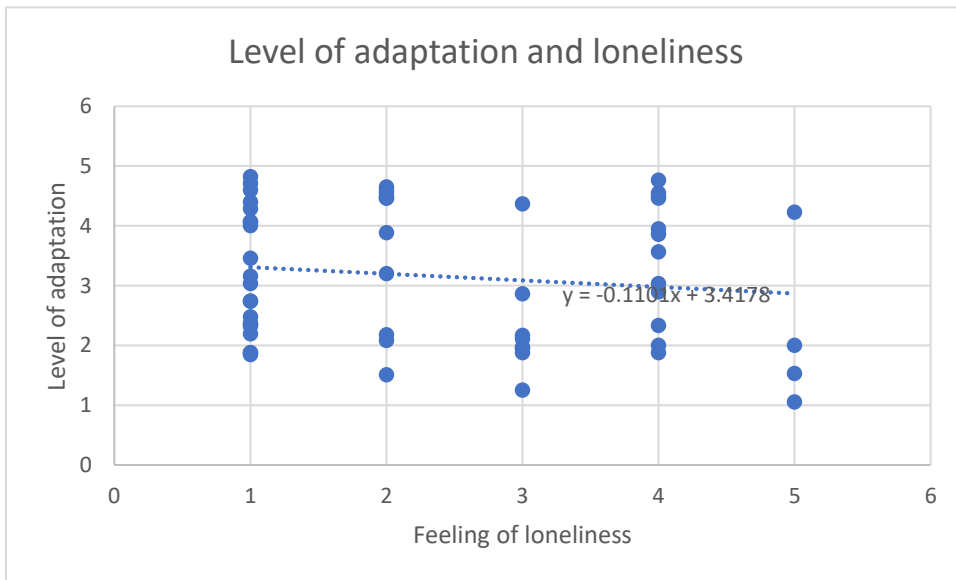
Source: Data collection

Figure 12: Relation between level of social adaptation and feeling demotivated



Source: Data collection

Figure 13: Relation between level of social adaptation and feeling lonely in a social environment



Source: Data collection

4. Discussion

The results of the conducted research align closely with the results of K. Arslan and M. Polat (2023) in their research on international students' adaptation to Turkish higher educational institutions. The GASIS questionnaire, formulated by the authors in 2022, was a foundation for both researches. Both studies underscored the impact of host country language proficiency and the level of adaptation among international students. In this research, it was revealed that international students with higher Czech language proficiency reported higher social adaptability. This mirrors the findings in the Turkish context, where A1-level students had significantly lower adaptation levels compared to their peers with higher Turkish language proficiency.

Moreover, neither of the studies found a correlation between gender and the overall level of adaptation of international students. Both studies suggest that males and females can reach the same adaptability.

Further, there is a discussion of the findings in relation to the stated earlier hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: International students who are more proficient in the Czech language report better social adaptation

The study has revealed a correlation between how well international students know the Czech language and the level of their social adaptation. Specifically, students who reported a higher level of Czech language were tested with a higher level of social adaptation. The highest social adaptation scores were among native/bilingual or proficient international students.

Hypothesis 2: Older students report lower levels of academic adaptation compared to younger students

The study has revealed a correlation between the age of international students and their level of social adaptation. For older students, it was more challenging to adapt to the new environment.

Hypothesis 3: Lower social adaptation of international students leads to feeling burned out

The study has shown no correlation between the level of social adaptation and feeling burned out. However, the study identified a correlation between the level of adaptation and feeling demotivated or lonely.

5. Recommendations for Supporting International Students

After analyzing the results of the conducted research, the following recommendations for students and educational institutions were developed:

Czech language courses: Since the level of social adaptation is directly linked to the Czech language proficiency, institutions should offer free language course to international students. Moreover, there is a necessity for courses in different languages, because the study revealed that students with elementary and intermediate levels still did not score highly on the social adaptation level test. If such courses exist, it is highly recommended for international students to take them.

Dormitory assignment: When assigning accommodation to international students, an intercultural language environment should be prioritized. Each dormitory room should house students of different nationalities who speak different languages, perfectly, one of the roommates should speak Czech. This approach prevents the formation of isolated cultural

communities. It may help students practice a new language and learn about a different culture. This will help students better integrate in a new environment.

Additional support for older students: Additional academic support and career counseling services can be provided to older international students, to help them balance their academic pursuits with other life responsibilities, such as work and family. Additionally, flexible study arrangements like part-time enrollment or online courses can be beneficial for them and help them adapt to a new environment more easily.

Organization of collaborative events: Universities should organize group activities outside of class hours, aimed at uniting the group, creating a comfortable psychological environment among international students, and thus facilitating the process of adaptation of students to new social conditions.

6. Limitations

The findings of this bachelor's thesis cannot be generalized and applied to the whole demographic group of international students because of the limitations. However, it still provides valuable insights into the social adaptation of international students in the Czech Republic.

The limitations include:

Sample size and response rate. The research included responses of 56 responses, with a return rate of 16%. The size of this sample is relatively small. This means that the responses may not fully represent the diverse range of international students studying in the Czech Republic.

Diversity of the participants. Despite the effort to include students from various nationalities, the study does not capture the full spectrum of diversity among international students in the

Czech Republic. Therefore, the findings do not fully reflect the experiences of all international students, especially those from less-represented regions or backgrounds.

Quantitative research. This study is based on the quantitative data. Questionnaires were used to collect data. This could lead to overlooking the deeper, qualitative aspects of students' experiences. Qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could provide more nuanced insights into the emotional and personal challenges faced by international students.

Self-reported data. The study was based on self-reported data, which can be influenced by biases such as social desirability or recall errors. Participants may have provided answers they thought were socially acceptable or they may not have accurately recalled their experiences. This potential bias could affect the reliability and accuracy of the data collected.

Future research may investigate this topic using larger and more diverse samples. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of international students' adaptation. Despite these limitations, the study underscores important areas for improvement in supporting international students' social adaptation and offers valuable insights for educational institutions to enhance their support systems.

7. Conclusion

This Bachelor's thesis analyzed the social adaptation of international students in the Czech Republic. The work consisted of theoretical and empirical parts.

The theoretical part included a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on the social adaptation of international students. According to existing research on this topic, the social adaptation of international students is influenced by age, level of education, language

proficiency, understanding of the host culture, as well as personal characteristics. Notions of cultural differences, culture shock, and social media influence were also discussed.

For the empirical part, 56 responses from students from different countries and universities were collected. The study provides valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by international students. Various factors influencing social adaptation were identified. Cultural differences and the notion of culture shock were also discussed.

In the empirical part three hypotheses were formulated based on the literature review and theoretical framework:

Hypothesis 1: International students more proficient in the Czech language report better social adaptation.

Hypothesis 2: Older students report lower levels of academic adaptation compared to younger students.

Hypothesis 3: Lower social adaptation of international students leads to feelings of burnout.

A quantitative research design was used to identify the level of social adaptation among international students at Czech universities. Data was collected using a modified version of the existing questionnaire, and distributed via various electronic means to ensure wide participation. The questionnaire employed Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions to gather information on key factors influencing social adaptation, including language proficiency, cultural differences, social support, academic integration, and psychological well-being.

Collected data can be put in a broader context by comparing it to similar research by the authors of the GASIS questionnaire, K. Arslan and M. Polat (2023), on the adaptation of international students in Turkish universities.

The results of both studies highlight a common conclusion: language proficiency plays a crucial role in the social adaptation of international students.

In a Czech study, international students with higher levels of Czech language proficiency reported better social adjustment. This suggests that language skills facilitate smoother integration into the social and academic structure of the host country, allowing students to navigate daily interactions and academic demands more effectively. Similarly, in the Turkish context, students with an A1 level of Turkish language proficiency showed significantly lower levels of adaptation compared to students with higher proficiency levels. This is consistent with findings from the Czech Republic, supporting the idea that language barriers can hinder social integration and academic achievement.

Additionally, both studies tried to identify differences between males and females in the adaptation process. However, no significant link was found. This means that gender as a factor is not as influential as language proficiency and possibly age or cultural background.

Based on the results of the study practical recommendations for students and universities were formulated. These recommendations focused on enhancing the language proficiency of international students, fostering intercultural interactions in the dormitories, providing additional support for older students, and organizing collaborative events.

The thesis is of high value because of its uniqueness. Very little work was conducted in the Czech Republic on the topic of international students and their social adaptation.

8. Summary

Social adaptation of international students is a complex process. It includes navigating numerous obstacles, including language barriers, cultural differences, academic pressures, financial constraints, interpersonal challenges, discrimination, lack of social support, feelings of alienation, and homesickness. The Czech Republic hosts thousands of international students, which makes the problem of their social adaptation so important.

This bachelor's thesis aimed to analyze the level of adaptation of international students in the Czech Republic and what influenced it. A survey was conducted and 56 international students from different Czech universities and cities participated in it. Even though there are limitations in this study due to sample size and response rate, diversity of the participants, quantitative research method, and self-reported data, the results offered useful insights and helped to answer 3 formulated hypotheses. It was revealed that the level of adaptation of international students is influenced by age and Czech language proficiency. Finally, practical recommendations for both students and institutions were formulated.

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