
THE ATTITUDES OF SLOVAK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS FOREIGN STUDENTS: THE CASE OF NITRA REGION

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Abstract

The main aim of this article was to explore the attitudes of Slovak students towards their foreign classmates and then compare them with the perceived attitudes of foreign students. The research was based on an analysis of a questionnaire carried out at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. The results show the tendency to interpret one's own behaviour more positively than it is perceived by others. Moreover, the analysis revealed some of the causes of a negative attitude towards foreigners. Variables as age and language barrier were confirmed to be significant when forming an attitude towards foreigners.

Key words: attitude, prejudice, migration, perception, students

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Foreign students at Slovak universities are an important group of foreigners in Slovakia, their number has increased especially in the last two years due to the ongoing war conflict in Ukraine, therefore we considered it necessary to study the attitudes of Slovak university students towards their classmates. According to the Centre for Scientific and Technical Information of the Slovak Republic, in the academic year 2022/23, 16,590 foreign students studied in Slovakia at the first or

second level of university studies and 384 foreign students at the doctoral level of study. ¹Foreign students make up almost 20% of the total number of students. The number of foreign students at the University of Constantine the Philosopher from 31st October 2023 was as follows: 743 foreign students in full-time study and external study out of a total number of 7010 students. ²As we can see foreign students at the University of Constantine the Philosopher make up approximately 10.5 % of the total number of students.

The main objective of our research was to explore the attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign students in Slovakia and then compare them with the perceived acceptance of foreign students by their Slovak classmates. We conducted the research at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra in the academic year 2023/24 on a sample of 107 of Slovak students and 117 of foreign students.

1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The research of the attitudes of the Slovak population towards foreigners was carried out by several authors. A large part of the research is devoted to attitudes towards migrants and refugees, given that this issue has become topical in our territory, especially during the period of the so-called “migration crisis” and later during the ongoing war conflict in Ukraine.

The research carried out in 2009 by the International Organization for Migration in Slovakia was a large-scale research that took place at the national level and was entitled "Public attitudes towards foreigners and foreign migration in the Slovak Republic". The results of this research were processed and published by Michal Vašečka [Vašečka 2009]. According to the authors, the attitudes of Slovaks towards foreigners are influenced by negative attitudes and stereotypes and they are largely determined by economic factors. The attitude of Slovaks towards foreigners is mainly determined by the age, gender and education of the respondents. The author considers women and younger people to be more open to foreigners. As for education, people with secondary and university education are generally more open to foreigners and are willing to accept them as their friends. A higher degree of acceptance of foreigners was expressed by religious people and also by those who had previous personal experience with foreigners.

¹ Available at: https://www.cvtisr.sk/cvti-sr-vedecka-kniznica/informacie-o-skolstve/statistiky/statisticka-rocenka-publikacia/statisticka-rocenka-vysoke-skoly.html?page_id=9596

² Available at: <https://www.ukf.sk/media-a-marketing/dianie-na-univerzite/kalendar-udalosti/205-tvorive-prekladatelske-reflexie-6-idealy-vs-prax>

Another research was carried out by Ondrej Filipec and Nina Vargová in 2018. They studied the attitude of Slovaks towards migrants from non-EU countries [Filipec et al. 2019]. They found out that variables such as sex, age and the level of education influence the attitude toward immigrants. Migration is perceived as a threat mainly by people with primary education and lower income. Students and young people associate migrants from non-EU countries with less negative feelings than retired or older people.

Martina Berišteřová, M. Bozogáňová and T. Pethö studied a perceived attitude of Slovaks towards migrants on the group of foreign students studying in Slovakia. [Berišteřová et al. 2023]. They found out that Slovaks see migrants as a threat to their physical health and safety rather than a threat in terms of economic opportunities and personal property. They have also found out that such variables as lower level of open-mindedness and lower socioeconomic status were associated with more negative perceptions of Slovaks' attitudes towards migrants.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. DATA COLLECTION

The information necessary for our research was obtained through a questionnaire survey. We carried out the research in the form of an online questionnaire between November 2023 – February 2024. The form contained 24 questions: 20 closed-ended questions and 4 open-ended questions, which provided a lot of significant facts explaining the reasons of either positive or negative attitudes of the students. We subjected the research material to quantitative analysis (close-ended questions) as well as qualitative analysis, where we focused on the content of the open-ended answers and their meaning. We consider this research method to be an effective tool to reach a large number of respondents to provide quantitative data and at the same time the answers to open-ended questions were the rich source of information for further qualitative analysis, thus providing a lot of data to be analysed and processed.

2.2. SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 234 students. The research was conducted at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, between November 2023 – February 2024. Out of 234 students more than 50% were foreign students (117). As far as the nationality is concerned 72.6 % of foreign students were from Ukraine, 16.2 % were from Russia, 4.3 % from Kazakhstan, 4.3 % were from Belarus and

there was a small group of students from Hungary and Serbia (about 1 % each). As we can see majority of the respondents came from post-Soviet states.

Table 1

Country of origin of foreign students

Ukraine	Russia	Kazakhstan	Belarus	Serbia	Hungary	Other country
85	19	5	5	1	1	1

Source: Author, own research.

As far as the age of respondents is concerned there were differences between the two groups of the respondents. Majority of foreign students (68 %) were from the age group 17–19 years, while most of Slovak students (54 %) were 20–21 years old. An average age of Slovak respondents was 21 years while the average age of foreign students was only 18.9 years. So generally Slovak respondents were older, this is caused by the fact that in post-Soviet countries students finish their secondary education at the age of 16 and thus are able to start university education earlier than in Slovakia. The length of stay of foreign students in Slovakia varied from a few months to 5 years. The majority of foreign respondents were in Slovakia for only 1 or 2 years.

The main aim of this study was to reveal attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign students with the focus on Nitra region. We chose the town of Nitra and the Constantine the Philosopher University due to the fact that there are a lot of immigrants living in Nitra region. Moreover, foreign students studying at the Constantine the Philosopher University make up almost 20 % of the total number of students, thus making it quite a representative sample for the purposes of our study. From the methodological perspective our research presents an exploratory case study aimed at exploring attitudes of Nitra university students.

2.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

There were several research questions behind the research. In the first part of the study we focused on Slovak students and we explored their attitudes towards their foreign classmates. The second part of the research studied how the foreign students perceive their acceptance by their Slovak classmates. In this part of the research we used similar questionnaire so that we can compare the results later. In the last part of the research we compared the results, trying to find out, if

the attitudes of Slovak students correspond with the perceived acceptance from the point of view of foreign students.

At the beginning of our research we formulated five hypotheses. When formulating hypotheses, we focused on these variables:

- Positive attitude towards foreign students
- The length of time spent together at school
- Country of origin
- Command of Slovak language

Hypothesis no. 1: There is a positive relationship between positive attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign students and the length of time they have known each other.

Hypothesis no. 2: There is a positive relationship between positive attitudes of Slovak students towards their foreign classmates and the ability of foreign students to speak Slovak or English language.

Hypothesis no. 3: There is not a relationship between attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign students and the country of their origin.

Hypothesis no. 5: We assume there is difference in the degree of positive attitude of Slovak students towards foreign students and perceptions of acceptance made by foreign students.

3. RESULTS

3.1. ATTITUDES OF SLOVAK STUDENTS TOWARDS THEIR FOREIGN CLASSMATES

In the first part of our research we examined the attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign students. We used a questionnaire with 24 questions. The first two questions of a questionnaire, which followed the introductory demographic part, were aimed at evaluating the attitude of Slovak university students towards their foreign classmates. We asked whether their attitude is friendly or hostile and also whether they treat foreign students in an open or distant way. In the first question the students were asked to rate their attitude to their foreign classmates on a ten-point scale from very hostile to very friendly. 72 % of students marked the attitude as friendly on a scale from 6–10, while up to 46.7 % of the answers chose option 8–10, which represents the highest degree of friendliness. 19.6 % of answers marked 5, which expressed indecision or that they consider their attitude neither friendly nor hostile. 8.4 % of all respondents marked their attitude as more or less hostile, while options 0 and 1, which represented the greatest degree of hostility, were not marked even once. The fifth question examined the conative side of an

attitude and was aimed at their behaviour towards classmates. Again, there was a range of responses from distrustful to open-minded. Up to 85 % of Slovak students claimed that they behave very openly towards their foreign classmates, 10 % indicated a lower level of openness, only 3 % indicated a neutral attitude, that is, 0 and only 0.9 % of responses expressed a distant and mistrustful attitude.

The next two questions were aimed at finding out what affects the positive or negative attitude towards foreign students. As many as 93.5 % of respondents maintained that their attitude towards their classmates does not depend on which country they come from. Question no. 7 was an open question and examined in more detail the reasons and causes of positive or negative attitude. Most of the students responded that they treat everyone the same regardless of their country of origin. Others claimed that their attitude depends more on the character traits of their classmates than on the country they come from. Some expressed that their negative attitude towards their foreign classmates is mainly due to the fact that some of them are unreliable, irresponsible and do not take their studies seriously. They treat responsible and reliable students the same way they treat Slovaks. Some stated that the reason for their partially distant attitude is also the language barrier. Another question we investigated was the extent to which Slovak students are willing to help or advise the foreign student if he needs it. Unequivocal willingness to help was indicated by 73.8 % of students. The answer: "I will help, but only if he asks me to", was chosen by 25.2 % of students. Answers "no" or "mostly no" was chosen by only 1 student (1 %). Questions no. 9 and 10 in the questionnaire survey examined the extent to which foreign students spend their free time together with Slovak students, and then we evaluated whether the results in this part of the questionnaire corresponded with the attitudes in the previous part of the questionnaire. 63.6 % of students stated that they spend their free time mostly with Slovak classmates and 36.4 % claimed that they spend their free time with Slovaks as well as with foreign students. Question no. 9 was to confirm the results from the previous question. We were trying to find out whether Slovaks are willing to invite foreign classmates to parties. Up to 59.8 % gave a positive answer. The remaining 40.2 % represented a negative answer. Based on this question, the rate of spending free time with foreign classmates is lower compared to the results from the previous question. By comparing the results of questions no. 6–8 and questions no. 9–10 we found out that the overall attitude and behaviour of Slovak students towards foreign students is perceived relatively positively, but the rate of

spending free time of foreign students with Slovaks does not reflect the same level of positive attitude. By comparing the results of the last two questions, we can make the assumption that spending free time with foreign students can be influenced by a lower willingness of Slovaks to actively seek out the company of foreign students. Questions no. 11–13 were focused on the quality and quantity of communication between Slovak students and foreign university students. We used various questions to examine the level of interest in communication and distance. As many as 62.6 % of Slovak students claimed that they are happy to have classmates from other countries and that they are interested in the country they come from, 22.4 % expressed a neutral attitude by choosing the answer “I don't know” and only 14.9 % of respondents expressed that they are not interested in their foreign classmates. The next question investigated the degree of willingness to communicate, or avoiding communication and its results correspond with the previous question, i.e. the majority (up to 70 %) of students talk to foreign classmates and do not avoid them. In the open question, the respondents had the opportunity to express possible reasons for reluctance to communicate. They most often cited the fact that foreign students are a closed group, do not show initiative in communicating with Slovaks and mostly communicate only among themselves.

Following questions revealed the reasons why Slovaks communicate less with their foreign classmates. We assumed that one of the reasons would be the language barrier, but the answers to this question in the questionnaire did not confirm this fact. As many as 63.1 % of students expressed that language is not a problem in mutual communication, 26.1 % stated that it is easier to communicate with Slovaks and only the remaining 10.8 % maintained that language is an obstacle to communication and the reason why they communicate less with foreign students.

With another group of questions, we tried to find out if their attitude towards their classmates had changed. We hypothesized that if students spend more time together and get to know each other better, their mutual relationships will also improve. However, according to the results, this assumption was not confirmed. 63.6 % of respondents denied that their relationship with their classmates had changed, and 29 % said that their relationship had changed for the better, and 7.5 % said it had changed for the worse. However, the open question partially confirmed our hypothesis, because a large number of Slovak students stated that the reason why their mutual relations have improved is that they spend more time with their classmates and thus know each other better, and they no longer have prejudices against them as before. Another group of answers indicated that their

mutual relations have changed for the better due to the fact that foreign students have a better command of the Slovak language. Those who wrote that their relationship had not changed meant that their relationship had been positive from the beginning. Some justified the negative attitude towards foreign students by the fact that foreign students have an irresponsible and superficial approach to studies. One of the students expressed the reason why he has no prejudices against foreign students like this: "Foreign students are people like us, we are united by the fact that we are students and that we are in this together".

With another group of questions, we investigated the attitude of Slovaks towards foreigners in general. So we asked not about the personal attitude of the student, but how Slovak students perceive the attitude of other Slovaks towards foreigners. As many as 72.9 % of the answers expressed that Slovaks have a more or less negative attitude towards foreigners if they meet them on the street or in a shop. 58.8 % of students stated that Slovaks are generally closed towards foreigners, 13 % expressed their neutral attitude and only 28.2 % consider Slovaks to be open towards foreigners. When asked whether Slovaks are warm or rather cold towards foreigners, most of the answers were towards the cold answer, while the percentage distribution of the answers corresponded to the previous question measuring positive or negative attitude. Up to 75 % of respondents expressed that Slovaks have a rather negative attitude towards foreigners, of which 15 % of responses expressed the degree of negative attitude by choosing the highest values of 4 and 5. Willingness or reluctance to help in the question no. 22 was manifested in the ratio of 51 % (reluctance) vs. 33 % (willingness), 16 % marked the answer "I don't know". We found out that overall, this part of the questionnaire brought more negative answers, which expressed the closedness of Slovaks, reluctance to help and negative attitude towards foreigners. We believe that the reason for this evaluation is the fact that a person has a tendency to interpret his own behaviour more positively and see himself in a better light than when he evaluates other people. For this reason, students consider themselves to be more positive towards foreigners compared to other residents of Slovakia. Table 2 shows the mentioned differences in the perception of one's own attitudes compared with the perceived attitudes of other Slovaks.

The last open question examined the reasons of either positive or negative attitude of respondents towards foreign students. The positive attitude towards foreign students was justified by several reasons. The reason that often appeared in the answers was that the young generation is more open to the unknown and does not

have as many prejudices as e.g. their parents. One of the answers expressed a great degree of empathy by writing that it is difficult for foreign students to study in a foreign country without family and background, so we should help them and make the situation easier for them. The most common cause of the negative attitude was the irresponsible approach of some foreign students to their studies, their indifference to the rules and inappropriate behaviour in the dormitories.

Table 2

Perceived openness of Slovak respondents compared with their perceived attitude of Slovaks towards foreigners

	Distant = 0 points	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Open = 10 points
Attitudes of Slovak students (% of responses)	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	6	21	21	43
Perceived attitudes of Slovaks in general (% of responses)	0	0	1	2	2	15	1	21	21	21	15

Source: Author, own research.

3.2. PERCEIVED ACCEPTANCE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS BY THEIR SLOVAK CLASSMATES

In the following part of our article, we will focus on the second part of our research group, which were foreign students. Our task was to find out how they perceive the attitudes from their Slovak classmates. 86.2 % of our research sample consisted of 1st and 2nd year students, i.e. the majority of our sample were students who have been in Slovakia for several months or not more than a year. As we mentioned earlier, out of the total number of 117 students, up to 85 students came from Ukraine. In the initial questions, we tried to find out their level of command of Slovak language, because we believe that language knowledge has an important role in the integration of a foreigner into the society. As many as 55.6 % of respondents stated that they speak Slovak well, 37.6 % partially speak Slovak, and only 6.8 % said that they speak very little Slovak. According to these data, the language barrier might not play such a significant role in integration of our research sample.

The first group of questions was aimed at finding out whether Slovak students have a friendly or hostile attitude towards the respondents, whether they show trust or distrust in their behaviour. Up to 94 % of respondents wrote that the attitude of their classmates towards them is friendly, of which up to 75 % indicated the highest degree of friendliness on a scale from 8–10. We also noticed a very similar distribution of answers in the case of the question: whether Slovak students treat them with trust or distrust.

Another question studied whether Slovaks are willing to help foreign students if they need something. 70.9 % of students perceive that their Slovak classmates are always willing to help them, 25.6 % said that their classmates will help them only if they ask for it, the remaining 3.5 % wrote that others are not willing to help them.

Questions no. 9 and 10 in the questionnaire survey investigated to what extent foreign students spend their free time together with Slovak students. 50.8 % of students responded that they spend their free time mostly with students of the same nationality, 21.2 % stated that they spend their free time with Slovaks as well as with foreign students, 20.5 % maintained that they spend time with other foreign students but not with Slovaks and 7.6 % of them spend time with Slovaks. By the question no. 9 we wanted to confirm the results from the previous question. We wanted to find out whether Slovaks are willing to invite foreign classmates to parties. 28.2 % gave a positive answer, 42.7 % expressed that they are not usually invited to a joint party. Both of these questions have roughly corresponding percentages of positive and negative answers and reflect the relatively low rate of foreign students spending their free time with Slovaks.

Questions no. 12–14 were focused on the quality and quantity of communication between foreign students and Slovak students. We used various questions to examine the level of interest in communication and distance. 36.8 % of foreign students maintained that they perceive that their Slovak classmates are happy to have classmates from other countries and that they are interested in the country they come from, 34.2 % expressed a neutral attitude by choosing the answer “I don't know” and 29 % of respondents stated that their Slovak classmates are not interested in them and their country. The next question investigated the degree of willingness to communicate, or avoiding communication and its results correspond to the previous question, i.e. 45.3 % of foreign students perceive that Slovaks talk to them in exactly the same way as to each other, 27.3 % think that Slovaks avoid them and do not communicate with them to the same extent as with others, and the remaining 27.4 % expressed their indecisive answer by choosing “I don't know”.

With another group of questions, we tried to find out whether they perceive that the attitude of Slovaks towards them has changed since the beginning of their studies. 36.8 % of students said that they noticed an improvement in the attitude of Slovak classmates, 57.3 % wrote that the attitude of Slovaks has not changed, neither for the better nor for the worse, and the remaining 6 % wrote that the attitude of Slovak students towards them has changed for the worse. With another open question, we tried to find out the causes of these changes. As we assumed, the majority of students report a change for the better as a result of the fact that they communicate more with their classmates, either during schoolwork or in their free time, and therefore know each other better. Some said that their relations with each other did not improve and they still did not become friends. A relatively large group of responses mentions the improvement of their language skills as a factor in the improvement of mutual relations. One of the students responded that his classmates “began to communicate more with him, because they understood that a foreign student is just an ordinary person”.

With the following questions, we found out how foreign students perceive the attitude of Slovaks towards foreigners in general. We asked whether the students perceive that the attitude of Slovaks towards them in shops, offices or on the street is rather negative or positive. 23 % of students expressed that they perceive a negative attitude of Slovaks towards them, 19.7 % chose the answer “I don't know” and up to 57.3 % of students expressed that the attitude of Slovaks towards them is generally rather positive. The question about an open or closed attitude of Slovaks towards foreigners, only 9.4 % of students stated that they consider Slovaks to be closed towards foreigners, 5.1 % marked the answer “I don't know” and up to 68.3 % of foreign students maintained that Slovaks are open towards foreign immigrants. The question that examined the cordiality or Slovaks' reservedness towards them showed more negative responses. Only 4.2 % of students consider Slovaks warm-hearted towards foreigners, 15.3 % expressed a neutral and undecided opinion, and up to 80.3 % of students consider Slovaks cold and reserved. However, when we asked whether Slovaks are willing to help foreigners, up to 72.6 % of students perceive that Slovaks are generally willing to help foreigners, 10.2 % expressed a neutral opinion and only 17 % of respondents expressed that Slovaks have a low willingness to help foreigners.

In the last open question, students had the opportunity to express and write what are the causes of the perceived positive or negative attitude of Slovaks towards them. The majority of students stated that they perceive a positive or neutral

attitude towards them as foreigners. Some of the answers admitted that they sometimes encountered a negative attitude from some people. One of the reasons was that Slovaks have a negative personal experience with some emigrants and this is the cause of their negative attitude. Others maintained that the older generation in particular is full of prejudices and their attitude towards foreigners is more influenced by their political views. Young people, on the other hand, are much more open and less biased towards foreigners. Another often mentioned reason for the reserved attitude of Slovaks was the language barrier, especially when communicating in offices and in shops, some Slovaks are not willing to communicate with foreigners if they do not understand them and do not have the time or the energy to explain something to them several times due to their heavy workload. If we were to summarize it, the positive attitude of Slovaks is perceived and accompanied with gratitude, and in the case of a negative attitude, the students gave logical reasons which they accept and only a very small part of the students condemns the Slovaks for their negative attitude, on the contrary, they are grateful for the acceptance and they realize that sometimes the negative attitude towards them has its own reasons (overload of the office worker, language barrier, negative experience with other foreigners from the same country).

3.3. COMPARISON OF THE ATTITUDES OF SLOVAK STUDENTS WITH PERCEIVED ACCEPTANCE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS

In the last part of the research, we compared the responses of the two groups of respondents. We have selected some of the studied factors as can be seen from table no. 3: friendliness, willingness to help, initiative in the relationship (invitation to spend free time together), interest in communication or avoidance of mutual communication. We also investigated other elements that reflected the attitude of Slovaks (not students) towards foreigners in general. There we decided to compare the degree of positive attitude, cordiality, openness, trust and willingness to help. We assigned an average point (on a scale of 1–10) to each of the examined categories, according to the answers of Slovak and foreign students. We then compared these data. Table no. 3 and graph no. 1 show the comparison of individual results.

When we compare the level of friendliness we can state that Slovak students consider their behaviour towards foreign students slightly more friendly than it is perceived by foreign students. As far as willingness to help is concerned the difference in the selected points is very small and thus perception of Slovak students is almost the same as those of foreign students. The question about being

invited to parties or other free time activities measured the initiative to build the relationship. The difference between the responses of the two groups is bigger than in previous questions (4,6 vs. 8). Slovak students expressed higher willingness to invite a foreign student to a party (an average of 8 points), while foreign students expressed the perceived willingness to be invited to a party by choosing lower points on a scale (an average 4,6). The following questions were aimed at measuring the interest in communication and not avoiding the communication with foreign students. In both cases the difference in answers between the two groups of respondents is approximately the same (1,4). We can state that there is a difference in perception of positive attitude perceived by Slovaks and foreign students. Slovaks tend to perceive their attitude and behaviour as more positive than how it is seen from the viewpoint of foreign students. All the studied aspects confirmed the same tendency. The differences between the two groups are smaller if we measure an attitude in general but they are more significant when we study a conative component of an attitude by asking about a particular behaviour.

Table 3

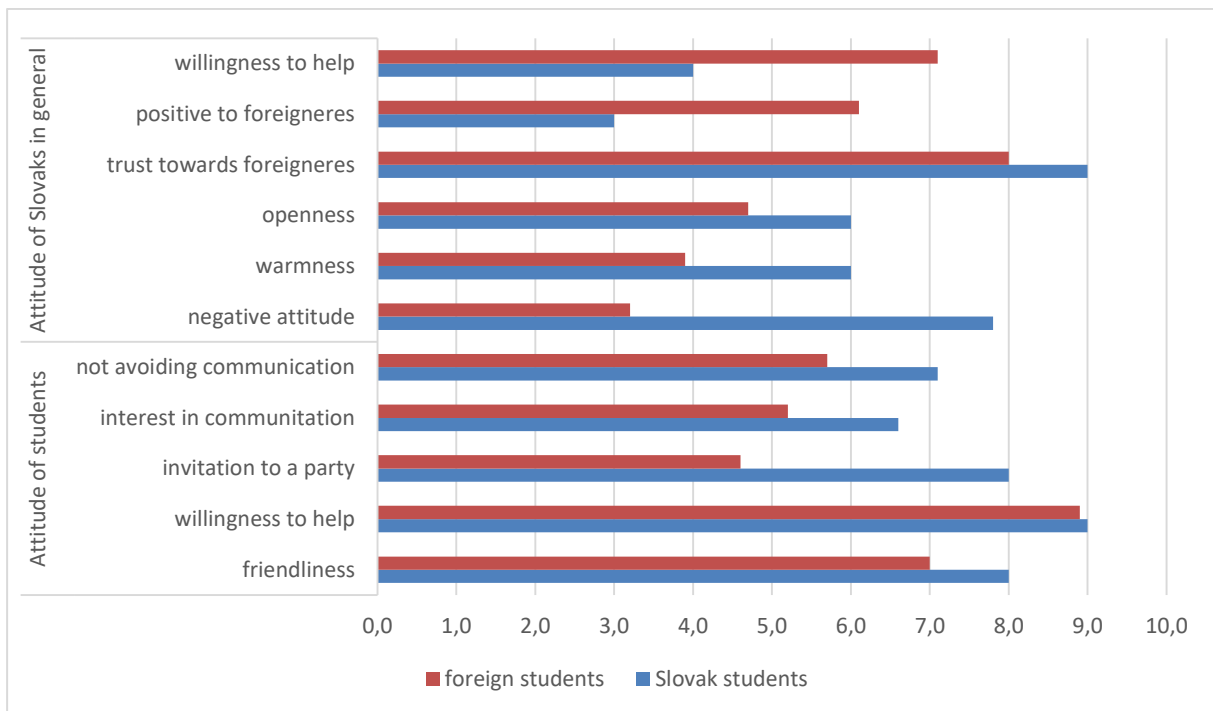
**Comparison of the selected attitudes of Slovak students
with perceived acceptance of foreign students**

	Attitude of students					Attitude of Slovaks in general				
	friendliness	willingness to help	invitation to a party	interest in communication	not avoiding communication	warmness	openness	trust towards foreigners	positive to foreigners	willingness to help
Slovak students	8,0	9,0	8,0	6,6	7,1	6,0	6,0	9,0	3,0	4,0
foreign students	7,0	8,9	4,6	5,2	5,7	3,9	4,7	8,0	6,1	7,1

Source: Author, own research.

Second part of our comparison study was aimed at the perceived attitudes of Slovaks to foreigners in general. We assumed that the differences between the two groups will be similar as in the first part of our comparison. It was not always the case. Characteristics like openness, warmness or trust of Slovaks towards foreigners displayed the similar differences as in the first part of the comparison. Slovak students consider Slovaks to have higher level of warmness, openness and trust than the level perceived by foreign students. The difference between the

groups ranged from 2,1 to 1 points. However, the questions about Slovaks having a positive attitude towards foreigners and being willing to help them showed different results. While Slovak students consider Slovaks to have less positive attitude to foreigners (an average point was 3), foreigners perceive that Slovaks have more positive attitude towards them (an average point 6,1). As far as the willingness to help is concerned the difference between the responses was similar, Slovak students expressed that Slovaks are less willing to help foreigners (an average point 4), while foreign students think that Slovaks are willing to help them (an average point 7,1).



Graph 1. Comparison of the selected attitudes of Slovak students with perceived acceptance of foreign students

Source: Author, own research.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this article was to explore the attitudes of Slovak students towards their foreign classmates and then compare them with the perceived attitudes of foreign students. The research was based on an analysis of 224 questionnaires, it was carried out between November 2023 – February 2024 at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia.

First we examined Slovak students. We found out that Slovak students perceive that they have rather positive and friendly attitude towards their foreign classmates, they are open and also willing to help. They also expressed that they

are glad they have foreign classmates and that they often initiate the communication with them. However, when Slovak students were asked about the behaviour of Slovaks in general towards foreigners they expressed less positive or friendly attitude. They stated that Slovaks are rather unfriendly, distant and not willing to help foreigners in general. We found out that this negative attitude of Slovaks is mostly associated with older generation and our respondents consider themselves to be more open and positive towards foreigners. This fact was found out by many authors who also connect variable of age as being very significant when forming an attitude towards immigrants [Vašečka 2009], [Filipec et al. 2019].

The second part of our research was aimed at foreign students. We asked about perceived attitudes of Slovak students and also Slovaks in general towards them. Finally, we compared the two research groups. We selected certain factors such as friendliness, willingness to help, initiative in the relationship, interest in communication or avoidance of mutual communication. We also investigated other elements that reflected the attitude of Slovaks (not students) towards foreigners in general. The results show that Slovak students perceive their attitudes to foreign students to be more positive, friendly and open when compared with level of friendliness, willingness to help or openness perceived by foreign students. On the other hand, when we asked about attitudes of Slovaks (not students) towards foreigners, Slovak students consider Slovaks to have less positive and friendly attitude to foreigners than it was expressed by foreign students. As we stated earlier the difference between the perception of one's own attitude with the attitude of others can be explained by a tendency to interpret one's own behaviour more positively and see oneself in a better light than when an individual evaluates other people. For this reason, students consider themselves to be more positive towards foreigners compared to other residents of Slovakia. It is connected with a phenomenon known in psychology as social desirability bias – a tendency to provide a socially desirable response rather than true opinions. Nevertheless, the negative perception of the attitudes of Slovaks in general from the point of view of Slovak students seems not to be in line with the reality (or at least with the perception of foreign students) as the foreign students assigned much higher points for willingness to help as well as to positive attitude of Slovaks.

When we look at the responses to open questions, where we examined the causes of negative attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign classmates, we found out that many of Slovak respondents see the root of a negative attitudes in the negative personal experience with other foreigners from the same country (e.g. an

irresponsible approach of a foreign student to their studies). Responses of foreign students revealed the similar fact, they acknowledged that some of the foreign students might cause a negative reputation and an unfriendly behaviour of Slovaks towards them. One of the often cited cause of a reserved attitude was a language barrier. As we can see the reasons of negative attitudes toward foreigners correspond in both groups of respondents. We suppose that this negative attitude has its veritable causes and cannot be explained simply by the term prejudice.

At the beginning of our study we formulated 5 hypotheses, which were tested during the research. Our research confirmed all the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the research.

Hypothesis no. 1: The assumption that there is a positive relationship between positive attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign students and the length of time they have known each other was confirmed.

Hypothesis no. 2: The assumption that there is a positive relationship between positive attitudes of Slovak students towards their foreign classmates and the ability of foreign students to speak Slovak or English language was confirmed by the research.

Hypothesis no. 3: We also predicted that there is not a relation between attitudes of Slovak students towards foreign students and the country of their origin, our assumption was confirmed by the research.

Hypothesis no. 5: The assumption that here is difference in the degree of positive attitude of Slovak students towards foreign students and perceptions of acceptance made by foreign students was confirmed.

The results of the hypotheses testing are based mainly on quantitative analysis, based on statistical processing of the collected data. Qualitative analyses of the open-ended questions provided deeper view into the causes of the researched issues and can be used to formulate further research questions in the following study.

As far as the practical value of our research is concerned we suggest that Universities with foreign students should focus on the adaptation process of foreign students and support it. We propose language courses for foreign students that would be offered by universities before the start of an academic year. Secondly, Universities should organize events that would encourage Slovak and foreign students to spend more time together thus supporting their mutual communication and relations.

Above research provided some view into a perception of acceptance of foreign students in Slovakia. The significance of the results might be reduced by selecting a

specific sample of foreign students who are in Slovakia for less than two years mostly and also by their possible language deficiency. Thus, repeated measurements would provide an opportunity to monitor the change of attitudes in the terms of time.

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