Future Academy®'s Multidisciplinary Conference

Multicultural Competence of Helping Profession Students: Cross-cultural Comparison between Europe and Africa

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Abstract

The research study is focused on the multicultural competence of helping profession students. We were interested in a cross-cultural comparison between Czech (European) and Gambian (African) students. The main purpose was to discover the level of multicultural competence of Czech and Gambian helping profession students; to discover potential differences in multicultural components between these two groups; to discover if there is an interactive effect of the variable state and university on multicultural competence. The sample consisted of 516 helping profession students from Czech and Gambian universities. The research tool was the Multicultural Competence Scale of Helping Profession Students (MCSHPS). MCSHPS is a 20 item questionnaire containing five factors: multicultural knowledge, multicultural activity, multicultural awareness, understanding of terms and multicultural communication skills. MCSHPS shows the general level and the level of the five factors of multicultural competence. There are differences in the general level of multicultural competence between the Czech and the Gambian students. Czech students have a higher value of multicultural competence than Gambian students. The analysis of the multicultural competence components shows that we can find more important differences among universities rather than between states. The two-way ANOVA shows a significant interactive effect of the state and university on multicultural competence. Although we found significant differences in the general level of multicultural competence between Czech and Gambian students, we consider the differences among universities as more important. The university factor (R squared = 10 %) proved more important than the state factor (R squared = 1%). The effect of the university (e.g. teaching methods, motivation, teacher's character etc.) is stronger than cultural determination.

Keywords: Multicultural competence, university students, cross-cultural comparison

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1. Introduction

In the research study, we aimed to compare the level of multicultural competence of helping profession students. We were interested in whether there is a difference between students from the Czech Republic and Gambia. Czech students represent the European cultural context, which is completely different from the West African cultural context for many reasons. The primary research question was what the differences in the level of multicultural competence between European and African students are, and if such differences exist, what can they be caused by. The Czech Republic is included among developed countries and is part of the European Union (GDP = 19,554 USD per capita. The World Bank 2014a). University education there has a centuries-old tradition (the first university in the territory of today's Czech Republic was founded in 1348). Gambia has been an independent state since 1965 and is ranked among developing countries (GDP = 423 USD per capita. The World Bank, 2014b). University education there has a shorter tradition (the first university was founded in Gambia in 1999). Despite the considerable historical, social and cultural differences between the two states, we find one important similarity. In the Czech Republic as well as in Gambia the coexistence of the majority with ethnic and national minorities is not a central and fundamental socio-political issue. Conflicts related to racism and xenophobia are rather rare and are clearly condemned by the official political representation in both countries. The political discourse in both countries emphasizes tolerance, including ethnic tolerance.

2. Multicultural competence of helping profession students

Multicultural competence in the helping professions is the expression of a certain ethical standard. The research shows that cultural competence is related to the efficiency of working with clients in the helping professions (Sue, Zane, Hall & Berger, 2009). We classify those whose performance is focused on helping people in difficult life situations (e.g. social work) on human development in the area of physical health (e.g. health sciences) and mental areas (e.g. psychology) among the helping professions. We also include educational disciplines whose center of interest lies mainly in educational activities in this classification. The common feature of these professions is working with people and for people. Students who study disciplines aimed at the helping professions at universities, will meet with culturally, ethnically, nationally, racially and religiously diverse individuals and groups during the exercise of their profession. Many disciplines at universities in this area also take this fact into consideration in their study plans.

The American Psychological Association (APA) began to systematically and continuously pursue multicultural competence in the 1970s. Based on its recommendations, multicultural training should be included in the teaching of psychology at universities. This recommendation led to the formulation of the basic principles for research on multicultural competence and multicultural training itself. The model called the *Cross-Cultural Counseling Competency Model*, which was published by D. W. Sue et al. in the year 1982, had the biggest influence on the creation of the model of multicultural competency. It defined 11 competencies within three components: belief/attitude, knowledge and skills. The APA later expanded these competencies to 31 while maintaining the listed three components. In 1998, D. W. Sue et al. then expanded the number of competencies in the model to the final 34. The APA itself labels these competencies as the fundamental guideline for multicultural research and practice in psychological counseling. The original model from 1982 laid the foundation for many definitions and models of multicultural competence (Gamst, Liang & Der-Karabetian, 2011).

Many definitions of multicultural competence are joined with efficiency in communication between cultures (ethnicities or races). A. E. Fantini (2007) talks about the fact that intercultural competence is a complex of skills necessary for effective and appropriate interaction with linguistically and culturally distinct individuals. (Fantini and many other authors use the term "intercultural". For better orientation in the issues in this article we work with both the term "multicultural" and "intercultural", while perceiving them to be very similar or identical). R. L. Pope and A. L. Reynolds (1997) similarly provide a clear description, saying that multicultural competence is the awareness, knowledge and skills necessary for effective work across ethnic and cultural differences of various groups. The concept of multicultural competence as a construct aimed at effective communication is also evident with D. K. Deardorff (2006), who understands intercultural competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. Multicultural

competence always represents complex capabilities (which are often divided into components), whose acquisition by an individual should be a guarantee of non-conflictual negotiations in intercultural contact. In the prevention of conflicts we clearly identify the preventive function of multicultural competencies. The preventive concept is evident for example with J. Martincová & M. Lukešová (2015), who consider critical thinking as a tool for intercultural conflict resolution in relation to the development of multicultural competence. The model of multicultural competence represents a functional shift of components (individual subcompetencies) into more general units (components). It is believed that the individual components of the model interact with each other and create the structure of relationships. The manifestation of this may be that the acquisition of one component requires the prior acquisition of another component. The above-mentioned concept of multicultural competence can be classified in the communication paradigm (Hladík, 2014a). In this paradigm, multicultural competence plays a dominant role in the communication process. Multicultural competence is seen as a general framework for effective and non-conflictual communication between representatives of different cultures. B. H. Spitzberg and G. Changon (2009) divide multicultural competency into five groups of models: compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptational, and causal process. In terms of the research, whose results we present in this article, the most important models are included in the causal process group. Causal process models reflect the specific relationships between the components of the model. Their advantage is that they are not complicated and relationships between model components can be relatively easily tested. These models are usually the product of modeling e.g. using structural equation modeling. Their development is more based on empirical research than just theoretical conceptualization. A typical representative of this type of model is the *Process Model of Intercultural Competence* (Deardorff, 2006).

2.1. Model of the multicultural competence of helping profession students

The tool that we used to measure the multicultural competence of Czech and Gambian students, reflects the *Model of the multicultural competence of helping profession students*, which was created in 2014. In the countries of Central Europe (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary) sufficient attention has so far not been paid to the issues of the multicultural competence of university students who are preparing for the performance of helping professions (teachers, social workers, psychologists). A tool by which it would be possible to determine the level of multicultural competence (for more details on the development of the tool see Hladik, 2014b) was also missing. The three-year research inquiry focused on the determinants of the development of the multicultural competence of helping profession students was finished by modeling the structural relationships between the components of multicultural competence. (Path analysis was used for modeling the relationships between components. The results of the analysis showed a good fit model with these monitored indicators of compliance: p value = .044; GFI = .993; AGFI = .964; CFI = .990; RMSE = .062; RMR = .018. The development of the model is described in detail in Hladík, 2014a.). The *Model of the multicultural competence of helping profession students*, which consists of five components, was created. The base model (the primary determinant) consists of **multicultural activity.** It is connected with the inner motivation of the student to reflect on multicultural issues. Multicultural activity directly interacts with all other components. It is a degree of willingness to accept and deal with a culturally diversified environment. The higher the rate of multicultural activity the student shows, the higher the levels recorded for them for the other components, which are multicultural knowledge, understanding of terms, multicultural awareness and communication skills. This is a stepping stone on the path to acquiring the other components of multicultural competence. Multicultural activity can be defined as an expression of openness of students to cultural, national or ethnic differences. The degree of this openness is individual. We estimate that education in the family, the social environment and peers affect it. This is related to the student's worldview, which is often mentioned as an important element in developing multicultural competence (see Bennett, 1986). D. K. Deardorff (2009) considers openness and curiosity as the basis for her Process model. We include multicultural activity in the non-cognitive area of the *Model of multicultural competence of helping profession students.* **Multicultural knowledge** is included in the cognitive area of the model. It is a component that often occurs in models of multicultural competence (e.g. Sue, Bernier, Durran, Feinberg, Pedersen, Smith, & Vazquez-Nutall, 1982; Deardorff, 2006; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). In our model it is a component which significantly affects the form of multicultural communication skills.

Multicultural knowledge can be defined as the result of individual cognitive processes that take place in a multicultural environment or are determined by the multicultural reality. In practice, it concerns knowledge, which the student acquires intentionally during study. Neither the contents of this knowledge nor their level are standardized by any means in tertiary education. For graduates of courses preparing students for helping professions, we expect more frequent contact with members of different cultures. Multicultural skills are associated with exploring different cultural specifics of ethnic and national groups with whom students can usually come into more frequent contact. It turned out that the higher the level of knowledge related to the cultural specifics of minorities and the multicultural reality of the given country, the higher the level of multicultural communication skills (Hladík, 2014a). The third component, which plays a part in the model, is the **understanding of terms.** When creating the model, this group of items that are related to how students understand some terms, was always displayed in a very clearly defined manner towards the others. This component belongs to the cognitive area of multicultural competence. It differs from multicultural knowledge in that it is not directly related to specific cultural, ethnic or national groups, but to general concepts (racism, prejudice, egocentrism and culture) that relate to understanding the processes taking place in a multicultural society. Understanding these terms is related to multicultural activity (the higher the rate of multicultural activity, the higher the level of the understanding of terms). Through multicultural awareness, the component of understanding terms influences multicultural communication skills. For orientation in the multicultural reality, especially from a professional point of view, it is not only important to be aware of cultural differences, but also to understand the situations, processes, relationships and consequences that arise from intercultural contact. This component of the model of the multicultural competence of helping profession students represents this requirement, albeit with the knowledge of the necessary reduction of issues to the four stated indicators.
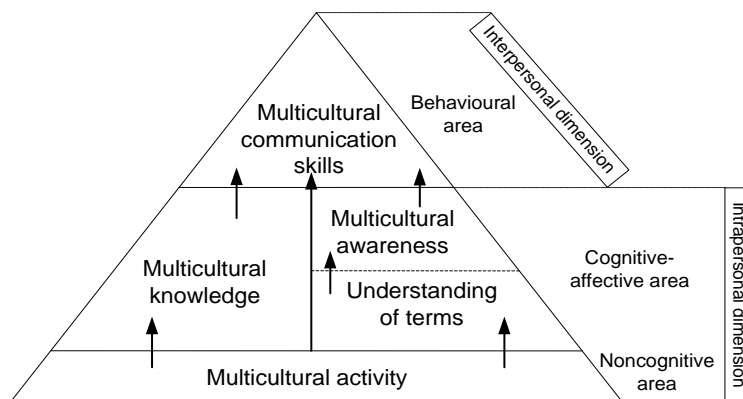

Fig. 1. The hierarchical structure of the model of the multicultural competence of helping profession students (Hladík, 2014a).

Multicultural awareness together with multicultural knowledge is often a part of models of multicultural competence (e.g. Sue, Bernier, Durran, Feinberg, Pedersen, Smith, & Vazquez-Nutall, 1982; Deardorff, 2006; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). We include this component in the affective area of the model. It is more related to emotions and attitudes than to cognitive functions. Multicultural awareness represents respect for others and for diversity and awareness of the need for cooperation. From previous studies we know (see Hladík, 2011) that the cognitive component of multicultural competence influences the affective component. In our model, we find this influence in relation to the component of understanding terms. It can be expected that students who tend not to respect different cultures and do not realize the necessity of cooperation between cultural groups or reject it, will show a lower rate of multicultural communication skills. The rate of multicultural awareness is also directly related to the degree of multicultural activity. Students internally motivated to reflect the multicultural reality show a higher level of multicultural awareness. **Multicultural communication skills** stand at the top in the model. If we define multicultural competence as the knowledge and skills that enable us to communicate in an effective and conflict-free

manner in a multicultural society, than it is precisely in that effective and conflict-free communication that the last component of the model of the multicultural competence of helping profession students is reflected. We include this component in the behavioural area. It actually indicates to us what kind of conduct and behavior in relation to multicultural environments we can expect from a student. Multicultural communication skills are the ability to respond adequately in communication with minorities and to select appropriate procedures to negotiate constructively and in a conflict-free manner. This includes both verbal and nonverbal manifestations of communication during contact with culturally diverse groups. The level of multicultural communication skills is determined by all the other components of multicultural competence. From this multicultural activity, knowledge and awareness directly influence it, while the understanding of terms influences it indirectly through multicultural awareness (Hladík, 2014a).

2.2. Multicultural competence in cross-cultural research

Research inquiries concerning an intercultural or international comparison of the level of multicultural competence are not very common. Tools that are designed to measure multicultural competence are mostly related to a specific cultural context and their adaptation to a different cultural context is not easy. During the validation of adapted tools these creators must actually adapt the meaning of the items to the given cultural environment (Padila & Borsato, 2008). An intercultural comparison focused on rhetorical sensitivity was published by T. J. Knutson, R. Komolsevin, P. Chatiketu & V. R. Smith (2003). The study employs the notion of rhetorical sensitivity as a potential tool for the investigation of intercultural communication effectiveness. Rhetorical sensitivity emphasizes relational over pragmatic goal-seeking, a potentially useful feature for studying high-context, collective cultures. The compared groups were students from Thailand (n = 316) and from the USA (n = 182). US Americans displayed significantly higher levels of rhetorical sensitivity than the Thais. Consistent with the hypotheses, the Thais exhibited significantly higher levels of rhetorical reflection than US Americans did, and US Americans presented significantly higher levels of noble self than the Thai (Knutson, Komolsevin, Chatiketu & Smith, 2003). Some results yielded unexpected findings, and forced the authors to reassess some stereotypical views of both cultures. The differences in domestic multicultural competence (i.e. The Netherlands) and foreign students was studied by J. P. Van Oudenhoven & K.I. Van der Zee (2002). We register very little cross-cultural research on multicultural competence. Intercultural studies in education are more likely to focus on the results or the effectiveness of the educational process (e.g. Chiu, 1972; Purdie, Hattie, Douglas & Graham, 1996; Marsh & Hau, 2003). The research presented here can be considered as one of the few that deals with cross-cultural comparisons in the area of the multicultural competence of students.

3. Method

The primary objective was to compare the level of multicultural competence of helping professions students in the Czech Republic and Gambia. We compared the level of scores of the components of multicultural competence not only according to nationality but also according to individual universities: multicultural activity, multicultural knowledge, understanding of terms, multicultural awareness and multicultural communication skills. We were also interested whether the level of multicultural competence affects the interaction between factors, which are the state and the university.

The sample consisted of students of educational, social and health fields of six universities (three Czech and three Gambian universities). In total, we conducted research with 516 students. It was about 320 students from these three Czech universities: Palacky University in Olomouc, Masaryk University in Brno and Tomas Bata University in Zlín. The research group from Gambia consisted of 196 students from three universities: Gambia College for Teacher Training, Gambia College School of Nursing & Midwifery and the University of the Gambia. The distribution between genders shows a predominance of females n = 375; 73% to men n = 141; 27%. This ratio is usual in the case of the study fields that we rank among the helping professions.

The research tool was the *Multicultural Competence Scale of Helping Profession Students (MCSHPS)* (the development of the tool is described in Hladik, 2014b). This tool was created in the years 2013 – 2014 with regard

to the need to measure the level of multicultural competence with specific groups of students, who are students in fields that we rank among the helping professions. It is a 20-item-questionnaire, in which answers are recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = minimum agreement; 5 = maximum agreement). MCSHPS detects both the overall rate of multicultural competence, but also scores of individual components: multicultural activity (n = 4 items), multicultural knowledge (n = 6 items) understanding of terms (n = 4 items), multicultural awareness (n = 3 items) and multicultural communication skills (n = 3 items). For data collection, two versions of MCSHPS were created that differed in the fifth item, which examined the knowledge of respondents on the most numerous ethnic minorities living in their country. In the Czech version this concerned the Roma, Vietnamese and Ukrainians. In Gambia this item included the following national minorities: Nigerians, Ghanians and Sierra Leoneans. The Czech version of the questionnaire was distributed in the Czech language and the Gambian version in English. Cronbach's alpha for the whole research sample for all items was estimated at the value α = .812. For the group of Czech students Cronbach's α = .869 and for the Gambian students α = .747. The lower internal consistency among Gambian students can be explained by the fact that MCSHPS was constructed in the Czech cultural environment. The T test, One-way ANOVA and Two-way ANOVA were used for data analysis.

4. Results

Czech students achieved higher average scores measured for the overall level of multicultural competence than students from Gambia (Czech Rep. /CZE / M = 3.530, SD = .548; Gambia /GM/ M = 3.404, SD = .551, p = .012). We found a significant difference in the level of multicultural competence in three of the five components that MCSHPS examines. It is multicultural knowledge, understanding of terms and multicultural activity. For the items multicultural awareness and multicultural communication skills, there is not a significant difference in the mean scores between Czech and Gambian students.

Table 1. The level of multicultural competence – cross-cultural comparison

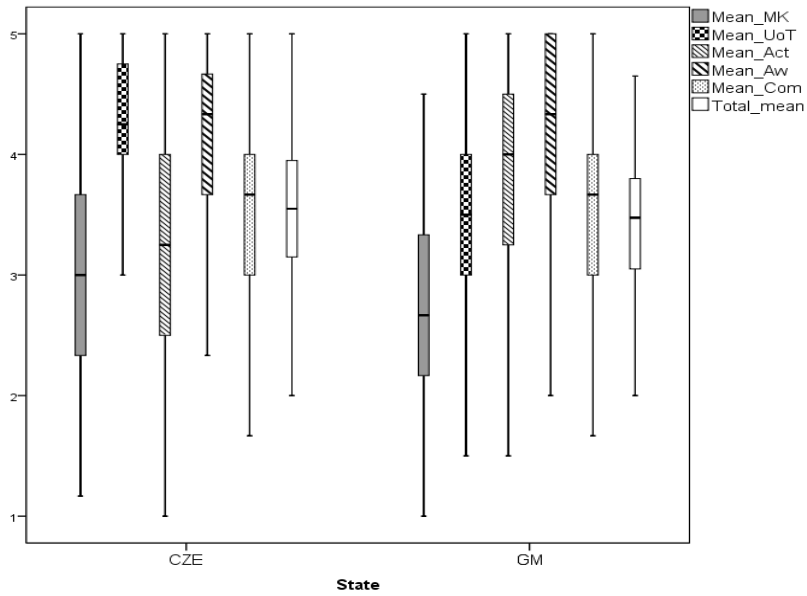| Item	State	Mean	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)
M. knowledge	CZE	2.987	887	< . 001
	GM	2.707	731	
Understanding of terms	CZE	4.188	692	< . 001
	GM	3.404	.817	
M. activity	CZE	3.222	.864	< . 001
	GM	3.799	.910	
M. awareness	CZE	4.140	.715	.730
	GM	4.165	.947	
M. communication skills	CZE	3.542	.891	.738
	GM	3.514	.975	
Total	CZE	3.530	.548	.012
	GM	3.404	.551	

Fig. 2. Data distribution according to the component of multicultural competence

Figure 2 shows the distribution of data in individual components in the overall level of multicultural competence compared according to the state (cultural context). Czech students achieved significantly higher scores than Gambian students in the components of multicultural knowledge and understanding of terms. Gambian students on the contrary show a higher rate in the multicultural activity component.

Additionally, we looked at the comparison of multicultural competence by individual universities. It was shown that, the differences in the level of multicultural competence between states are not as obvious as those among the universities themselves. Table 2 shows the ranking of universities by the overall level of multicultural competence of helping profession students.

Table 2. The overall level of multicultural competence of university students

Ranking	University	Mean	SD
1.	CZE I	3.969	.330
2.	CZE II	3.763	.550
3	GM IV	3.467	.486
4.	GM V	3.441	.560
5.	CZE III	3.397	.522
6.	GM VI	3.357	.558

Note: Universities are marked with Roman numerals. From an ethical standpoint we deliberately do not link the results to specific universities.

The analysis of variance and Tukey's test showed significant differences in the level of multicultural competence among some universities.

Table 3. Differences in the total level of multicultural competence among universities

	CZE I	CZE II	CZE III	GM IV	GM V	GM VI
CZE I	-					
CZE II	.410	-				
CZE III	**< . 001**	**< . 001**	-			
GM IV	**< . 001**	.064	.961	-		
GM V	**< . 001**	**.026**	.994	.991	-	
GM VI	**< . 001**	**< . 001**	.989	.845	.940	-

Note: The values in the table represent the significance of p (2-tailed).

Two groups were clearly displayed. In the first group there are students of two Czech universities who have higher average scores of multicultural competence M = 3.969 and M = 3.763. The second group consists of one Czech and three Gambian universities with an average score in the interval from 3.467 to 3.357. However, when looking at the individual components of multicultural competence (Table 4) the ranking of universities according to the average score is variable.

Table 4. The average score in the components of multicultural competence according to the university

M. knowledge		Underst. of terms		M. activity		M. awareness		M. com. skills	
University	Mean	University	Mean	University	Mean	University	Mean	University	Mean
CZE I	3.969	CZE III	4.248	GM IV	3.929	GM V	4.407	CZE II	4.320
CZE II	3.763	CZE II	4.108	GM V	3.905	GM IV	4.297	CZE I	4.318
GM VI	3.467	CZE I	3.958	CZE I	3.708	CZE III	4.194	GM V	3.660
GM IV	3.441	GM VI	3.455	GM VI	3. 685	CZE I	4.032	GM IV	3.573
CZE III	3.397	GM IV	3.429	CZE III	3.175	CZE II	3.987	GM VI	3.413
GM V	3.357	GM V	3.280	CZE II	3.034	GM VI	3.983	CZE III	3.223

We wondered to what extent the level of multicultural competence of helping profession students was affected by the above two factors: the state and the university. The two-way ANOVA showed that the interaction effect of both factors is $R^2 = .110$; $p < .001$. Both factors thus explain about 11% of the variability of the multicultural competence of students. If we look at the effect of the two factors separately, it shows that the proportion of both factors on the interaction is not uniform (state $\eta_p^2 = .014$; $p < .001$ and the university $\eta_p^2 = .099$; $p < .001$). The university must therefore be considered as a more significant factor influencing the level of multicultural competence of students than the state factor. This is an interesting signal for the measurement of multicultural competence. It is better to pay attention to the differences between schools (universities) than intercultural differences.

5. Discussion

Czech students show higher rates of multicultural competence than students from Gambia. For all three groups of Czech students a course of multicultural education was held at the university during their studies. The aim of these courses is to acquire a degree of multicultural competence so that students can effectively and in a conflict-free manner perform their helping profession in contact with people from other cultures, ethnicities and nationalities. Gambian students do not have multicultural education included in the curriculum of their study field. However, is this a major factor causing the difference between Czech and Gambian students in their multicultural competence? If the completion of multicultural courses played an important role, we would expect significant differences between Czech and Gambian students in all five components of multicultural competence. We would especially expect a difference in the component of multicultural communication skills, which forms the top of the hierarchical model of multicultural competence. Higher average scores for Czech students were recorded only in the components of

multicultural knowledge and understanding of terms. We rank these components in the model of multicultural competence of helping profession students in the cognitive dimension. This is essentially knowledge concerning immigrants, foreigners, nationalities and ethnic minorities in the given country. It is also about understanding the concepts of racism, prejudice, ethnocentrism and culture. We assume that in the case of the cognitive dimension, the completion of a multicultural education course can play a role with Czech students. Excessive academia and acquiring theoretical knowledge at the expense of skills is often criticized in the framework of the Czech educational system (e.g. Maňák, 2006; Skalková, 2007). Gambian students show higher scores than Czech students in the component of multicultural awareness. This component represents the non-cognitive dimension of the model. This is the motivation to deal with different cultures and elements of metacognitive strategies (correction of their own behaviour and thinking about their multicultural learning). In the stated model, this component represents a springboard, the basis for the acquisition of additional components. We know that the acquisition of intercultural competence is not a race. If we try, however, to express the above findings in metaphoric sports terminology, we can say that Gambian students have a better start (multicultural activity), Czech students catch up in the middle of the track (multicultural knowledge and understanding of terms) and they run to the finish together (multicultural communication skills).

The aim of our research was to determine whether there are differences in the level of multicultural competence among Czech students representing the European cultural context and Gambian students representing the African cultural context. Despite the fact that these are two culturally and socially completely different areas, it turned out that the cultural context in the level of multicultural competence does not play a very significant role. It means that the university is a stronger predictor of the level of multicultural competence of helping profession students. Indeed we find significant differences between groups of students of individual universities regardless of the cultural context. Students of two of the Czech universities differ in the overall level of intercultural competence from the groups of students consisting of one Czech and three Gambian universities. Belonging to the university represents about 10% of the total variability of the multicultural competence of helping profession students. While the impact of this factor cannot be considered as essential, we can say that the level of multicultural competence of students depends more on attending a specific university than the cultural context itself. Universities may differ from each other with a series of factors, that can affect the level of multicultural competence (e.g. teaching methods, student motivation, teacher personality etc.). However, this has not been the subject of research. Nevertheless, it opens the door for us for further investigation, which should focus on identifying factors of multicultural learning in universities.

6. Conclusion

We are not born with multicultural competence nor does "it" just come by itself. We acquire multicultural competence in the process of learning (Kohls & Knight, 1994). At the tertiary level of education there is no standard or rule that we could or have to follow during multicultural education in the Czech Republic or in Gambia. Neither the objective nor educational content is governed by norms. The advantage is that the teacher has a relatively free hand, unbound by any regulations. The downside is the risk of substantial open-endedness and unclear boundaries. It has been shown that the conditions of universities influence the effectiveness of multicultural education more than mere nationality. This finding is surprising, namely in regard to other studies that confirm some cross-cultural differences. (e.g. Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002; Knutson, Komolsevin, Chatiketu & Smith, 2003). *The Model of multicultural competence of helping profession students* shows that the development of multicultural competence leads to communication skills. The ability to communicate effectively and in a conflict-free manner with culturally different individuals and groups and the skill to flexibly respond to the specifics of the communication is the primary objective of developing multicultural competence among students of helping professions. The condition is a deeper understanding and comprehension of the cultural specificities of different groups (primarily those for which more frequent contact is expected). The effort to prevent conflict situations from arising during contact with different individuals leads to the acquisition of consensual negotiation strategies. It is obvious that students of both countries examined are acquiring these skills and knowledge, whether explicit

multicultural educating (training) – students from the Czech Republic, or more implicit (non-academic) – students from Gambia.

Acknowledgements

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