

UKRAINIANS STUDYING IN SLOVAKIA. HOW DO THEY PERCEIVE THE ATTITUDES OF SLOVAKS TOWARDS MIGRANTS?

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Abstract

The war conflict in Ukraine has brought about the migration of Ukrainians to other European countries. This also applies to Slovakia, as a neighbouring country of Ukraine. People come for work, but also for study. However, Slovak society is set negatively towards migrants. The aim of the paper is to observe to what extent a sample of young people studying in Slovakia perceive that Slovaks see migrants as a threat. At the same time, however, we investigated to what extent the given perception of Slovaks is associated with social and personality variables: bullshitting, life orientation, Big Five traits.

The sample consisted of 136 foreign students from Ukraine studying in Slovakia (69% of women, $M_{age}=18.91$, $SD=1.91$). Data were collected in the second half of 2022 through the scale of prejudice among migrants, Bullshitting Frequency Scale, BFI-2 XS, Life orientation test, Scale of habitual subjective well-being. Biological sex and perceived socioeconomic status were observed as control variables. Results were processed in SPSS.20 using descriptive statistics and linear regression.

According to the results, students from Ukraine perceive that Slovaks are most worried about threats to their physical health and safety related to migration. At the same time, the perceived negative attitudes of Ukrainians towards Slovaks were predicted by the bullshitting level ($\beta=.326$; $S.E.=2.599$; $p<.05$) openness to experience ($\beta=-.260$; $S.E.=2.152$; $p<.05$), as well as by their own socioeconomic status ($\beta=-.275$; $S.E.=2.308$; $p<.025$)

The results indicate the importance of subjective embellishment of reality due to the need to show oneself in a better light when subjectively evaluating the attitudes of others. Coping with the migration crisis will also require diverse care in the development of social competence and critical thinking.

Keywords: *Social perception, students from Ukraine in Slovakia, bullshitting, open-mindedness.*

1. Introduction and objectives

The number of foreign students from Ukraine studying in Slovakia has been increasing in recent years. In 2018 there were 1822 students studying at Slovak universities, in 2022 there will be 5393. Their difference compared to other students in Slovakia is also that they can start their higher education at the age of 16, while students in Slovakia start their university studies when they are 18-19 years old. A minimum of research is devoted to foreign students from Ukraine who study in Slovakia. Mičko (2018) examined the reasons for studying in Slovakia, and the vision of a higher standard of living, better quality of education received, as well as the kinship relationships that young Ukrainians have with Slovakia emerged as significant reasons. Bosá et al. (2017) describe problematic situations experienced by students from Ukraine in Slovakia. Most often, it appears that they are considered less cultured, civilized, decent, orderly, and the Eastern European environment is associated with corruption and criminality. These beliefs and preconceptions of Slovaks may reduce their adaptation and quality of life. Fears that they will become victims of fraud and crime because of their age also emerged.

Slovakia is a country that has significantly negative attitudes towards migrants (Bozogáňová, 2020). At the same time, the research showed that Slovaks consider education and job-seeking abilities to be the most important factors for integration of migrants (Bozogáňová & Pethö, 2020) which should result in acceptance and positive attitudes towards foreign students. The aim of the paper is to observe to what extent a sample of young people studying in Slovakia perceive that Slovaks see migrants as a threat. This perception may be a result of experience, but it may also be influenced by cognitive, personality and

social-personality variables of perceiver (Hehman, 2017; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Operario, Fiske, 2001). Therefore, we investigated to what extent the given perception of Slovaks is associated with social and personality variables: bullshitting, life orientation, subjective habitual well-being and personality traits.

Bullshitting is the producing of pseudo-truthful or otherwise misleading information (Littrell, Risko, Fugelsang, 2020). It can be an exaggeration of perceived accurate information or avoidance of a response that could bring negative consequences. Instrumental functions of bullshitting as a strategy for managing impressions and attitude change across a broad range of social interactions (Petrocelli, 2018)

Explanation of how life orientation (optimism/pessimism) can influence social perception relates to, e.g., a self-fulfilling prophecy, or an expectation of an outcome that shapes our behavior subsequently yielding an effect in anticipated direction of events (Jussim, 2012). Optimism and pessimism is also associated with the style of forming social relationships (Smith et al., 2013). Optimism is associated with warm-dominant interpersonal style, pessimism with hostility-submissive interpersonal style.

Well-being impacts on multiple aspects of life, including cognitive function, health and social relationships (Huppert, 2009). At the same time, our subjective well-being has been found to be influenced not only by close and strong ties (family, close friendships), but the quality of all relationships in our social network (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014), including those of classmates, teachers, or the wider environment, has an impact on well-being.

The relationship between personality traits and social perceptions partly explains the negative association found between agreeableness and generalized prejudice (Crawford & Brandt, 2019) and positive associations of accuracy of assessment of social motives and personality traits in relation to quality of interpersonal relationship (Huelsenitz, Neel & Human, 2020).

All these personality and social-personality variables may have an impact on the accuracy of social perception. Therefore, we want to test their impact on perceived attitudes of Slovaks towards migrants when the perceivers are foreign students from Ukraine.

2. Methods

Sample and data collection

The sample consisted of 136 foreign students from Ukraine studying in Slovakia (69% of women, $M_{age}=18.91$, $SD=1.91$). Data were collected in the second half of 2022. Data collection took place during the classes via an anonymous online questionnaire. The purpose of the research was adequately explained to the respondents and the anonymity of the answers was guaranteed. All respondents were in their first year of study and had at least 3 months of contact with the Slovak population.

Research variables and questionnaires

- The scale of prejudice among migrants (Golec de Zavala, Guerra, & Simão, 2017).
- Bullshitting Frequency Scale, (Littrell, Risko, & Fugelsang, 2020)
- BFI-2 XS (Soto & John, 2017): five personality traits (Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Open-mindedness and Negative emotionality)
- Life orientation test (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994)
- Scale of subjective habitual well-being (Džuka, & Dalbert, 2002)
- Biological sex (man – woman)
- Perceived socioeconomic status was observed as control variables, by single item measure:
In terms of financial resources, you are in a better position compared to other students - Ukrainians: 1: much worse – 10: much better

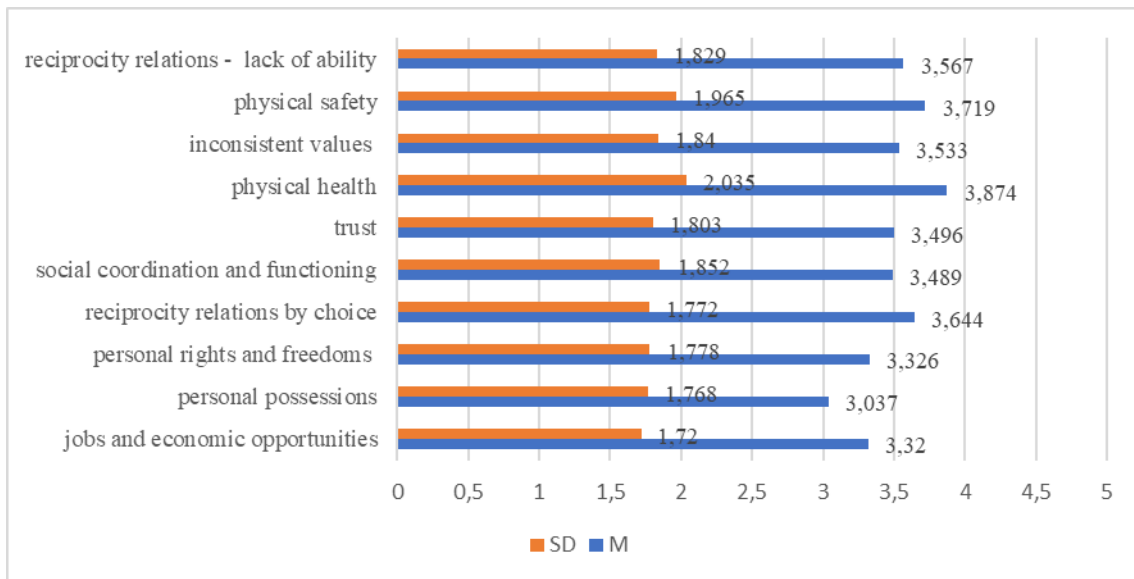
Statistical processing

Data were processed in SPSS.20 using descriptive statistics and linear regression.

3. Results

First, the results of descriptive data, how Ukrainian students perceive the attitudes of Slovaks towards migrants will be presented. Graph 1 shows, that students from Ukraine perceive that Slovaks are most worried about threats to their physical health and safety related to migration, followed by threats to reciprocal relations, inconsistent values, violation of trust, threats to social coordination and functioning, personal rights and freedoms. From the perspective of Ukrainian students, Slovaks feel the least threatened by migrants in terms of economic opportunities and personal property.

Graph 1. Perception of attitudes of Slovaks towards migrants from the point of view of Ukrainian students.



Subsequently, a linear regression was performed to investigate which selected personality variables and controlled variables significantly contribute to explaining the perception of Slovaks toward migrants by students from Ukraine (Table 2). The model was significant ($F=2,210$; $p<0,05$) and explore 27,6 % of variance of dependent variable. Social perception (in the negative direction) was predicted by the bullshitting level ($\beta=.326$; $S.E.=2.599$; $p<.05$) and negatively by openness to experience ($-\beta=.260$; $S.E.=2.152$; $p<.05$), as well as by their own perceived socioeconomic status ($\beta=-.275$; $S.E.=2.308$; $p<.025$).

Table 1. Regression model: variables that contribute to the perception of Slovaks towards migrants (foreign students from Ukraine as a perceivers).

	B	S.E.	β	t	p
Frequency of bullshitting	0.562	0.216	-0.326	-2.599	0.012
Optimism	0.769	0.418	0.250	1.841	0.071
Extroversion	-0.499	0.473	-0.136	-1.055	0.296
Agreeableness	0.513	0.671	0.104	0.765	0.448
Conscientiousness	-0.859	0.601	-0.192	-1.430	0.158
Open-mindedness	1.185	0.551	-0.260	-2.152	0.036
Negative emotionality	0.356	0.560	0.095	0.636	0.527
Habitual subjective well-being	0.438	0.266	0.273	1.645	0.105
socio-economic status	-1.565	0.678	-0.275	2.308	0.025
Sex (being a man)	-0.888	2.841	-0.039	-0.313	0.756

4. Discussion and conclusions

This research concerns social perception, where the perceivers are foreign students from Ukraine living in Slovakia. The aim was to explore to what extent a sample of young people studying in Slovakia perceive that Slovaks see migrants as a threat. According to the results, Slovaks are most worried about threats to their physical health and safety related to migration. From the perspective of Ukrainian students, Slovaks feel the least threatened by migrants in terms of economic opportunities and personal property. These results agree with the current research about negative attitudes of Slovaks towards migrants, (Bozogánová, 2020). Only a marginal number of migrants had lived in Slovakia in the past and foreign students are one of the few groups that Slovaks have experience with.

However, we can also consider that this result is related to the phenomenon of social projection (Robbins, Krueger, 2005), according to which people expect others to be similar to themselves and use their own dispositions or preferences to predict the behavior, traits, or preferences of others. At the same time, the activation of self-protective goals leads to the perception of more negative emotions in relation to groups of people of which we do not consider ourselves to be a part. Ukrainian students in situations where their country and loved ones are threatened may project their own sense of threat onto their perception of others and experience negative emotions in relation to the inhabitants of a foreign country.

(Maner et al., 2005).

Further, the variables involved in the formation of the social perception of the attitudes of Slovaks towards migrants can be discussed. Higher frequency of bullshitting, lower level of open-mindedness and lower socioeconomic status were associated with more negative perceptions of Slovaks' attitudes towards migrants. Those who exaggerate more, whereas this phenomenon is more socially accepted as a lie (Petrocelli, Silverman, & Shang, 2021) perceived the attitudes of Slovaks towards migrants as more negative. The mentioned research also discusses other individual characteristics such as ignorance and dishonesty as mediators of bullshitting. Other research suggests that sufficient self-regulatory resources were a defense against bullshitting (Petrocelli, Watson, & Hirt, 2020).

As foreign students often form a rather closed group in a foreign country, their social perceptions are easily transferred. The trait of open-mindedness is therefore relevant variable, as it has been shown to be a significant predictor of perceived attitudes towards Slovaks, but in a positive direction. The more open-minded the students were, the less they judged Slovaks as those for whom migrants are a threat. In this context, we can consider reflective open-mindedness (Baron, 2019), which represents the tendency to question one's own intuition, to reflect on the meaning and validity of one's own ideas and incoming information. It is in contrast to gullibility, i.e. reflexive open-mindedness (Pennycook et al., 2015), the uncritical acceptance of any information.

These results underline the need to support the adaptation of foreign students from Ukraine in Slovakia and to sensitize the university environment to their needs. Experts in the field of intercultural and intergroup communication, as well as crisis intervention, should be part of the support for students from country affected by military conflict.

Likewise, the results also claim the need to develop critical thinking and self-regulation in education in Slovakia, an area that is still less developed. Although the impact of personality traits as well as personal experiences, traumatic events is extensive, training in cognitive and social competencies provides the necessary range of functional ways of thinking and behaving, suitable for both foreign and Slovak students.

The significance of the results of this research is reduced by the size of the sample, the specifics of online data collection, and possible language deficiencies in the communication of students and researchers. In the same way, the adaptation of students in Slovakia, the level of relations with Slovaks was not monitored. More variables related to social interaction; social skills of students should be taken into account in further research. Repeated measurements would also provide an opportunity to observe the change in social perception in the terms of contact hypotheses.

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