

FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, PERSONALITY TRAITS AND INTEGRATIVENESS OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The movement and integration of foreign people in a foreign country have always been important issues for shaping modern and prosperous societies, economies, and higher education. Since an increasing number of young people are moving to study in foreign higher education institutions, the examination of the factors determining the integration of foreign students such as foreign language proficiency, openness, and how better learning outcomes can be supported and achieved are important research areas.

Therefore, the aim of our research was to investigate the extent to which foreign language proficiency and personality traits such as adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to the host culture determine the integration of foreign students in higher education institutions (Hungarian University of Life Sciences and Agriculture (MATE), University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN)) in two countries (England, Hungary).

According to our research results, language proficiency of foreign students positively correlated with extrovert personality traits such as adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to the host culture in the academic environment. However, personality traits of introverted personality types (passivity, introversion) restrict inclusion and integration in the academic environment, even if these traits were combined with very good English language proficiency.

To sum up, our research has found that although foreign language proficiency is essential and vital for the integration and inclusion of foreign students in a higher education institution in a foreign country, personality traits such as adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to the host culture determine the success of the integration and inclusion of foreign students in the academic environment. Consequently, extroverted foreign students who are more adaptive, integrative and open to the new culture integrate more successfully at university than introverted foreign students, regardless of their foreign language proficiency. Therefore, trainings and coaching sessions are recommended to help the inclusion of foreign students, focusing on the development of skills of coping strategies and social networking tools.

Keywords: *inclusion, integration, foreign language proficiency, personality types, adaptiveness, openness to the host culture*

JEL: M12, M53, M54

IDEGENNYELVTUDÁS, SZEMÉLYISÉG-JELLEMZŐK ÉS KÜLFÖLDI HALLGATÓK INTEGRÁCIÓJA FELSŐOKTATÁSI KÖRNYEZETBEN

Összefoglalás

A külföldi hallgatók integrációja egy idegen országban mindig is fontos kérdés volt a modern és prosperáló társadalmakban, gazdaságokban és a felsőoktatásban egyaránt. Mivel egyre több fiatal kezd külföldi felsőoktatási intézményekben tanulni, ezért a külföldi hallgatók integrációját meghatározó tényezők, például az idegennyelv-ismeret, a nyitottság, a hallgatók minél jobb eredményeinek a elősegítése fontos kutatási terület. Kutatásunk célja annak vizsgálata volt, hogy az idegen nyelv ismerete és az olyan személyiségjegyek, mint az alkalmazkodóképesség, az integrálódás, az aktív társadalmi élet és a befogadó kultúra iránti nyitottság milyen mértékben határozzák meg a külföldi hallgatók integrációját a felsőoktatási intézményekben (Magyar Agrártudományi Egyetem (MATE), Magyarországon, University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), Anglia).

A kutatásban a külföldi hallgatók nyelvtudása pozitív korrelációt mutatott az extrovertált személyiségjegyekkel, mint például az alkalmazkodóképességgel, az integrálódási képességgel, az aktív társadalmi élettel és a fogadó kultúra iránti nyitottsággal a felsőoktatásban. Az introvertált személyiségtípusok személyiségjegyei (passzivitás, befelefordulás) azonban korlátozzák az integrációt felsőoktatási környezetben, még akkor is, ha ezek a jegyek nagyon jó angol nyelvtudással párosulnak.

Összefoglalva, kutatásunk megállapította, hogy bár a nyelvtudás elengedhetetlen és létfontosságú a külföldi hallgatók integrációja és befogadása szempontjából külföldi felsőoktatási intézményekben, az olyan személyiségjegyek, mint az alkalmazkodóképesség, az integrálódási hajlandóság, az aktív társadalmi élet és a befogadó kultúra iránti nyitottság határozzák meg a külföldi hallgatók integrációjának és beilleszkedésének sikerességét a felsőoktatásban, amely valószínűsíthetően jobb tanulmányi eredményekkel is jár. Ebből az következik, hogy az extrovertált külföldi hallgatók, akik alkalmazkodóbbak, könnyebben integrálódnak és nyitottabbak az új kultúrára, sikeresebben illeszkednek be az egyetemi életbe, jobb eredményeket érnek el, mint az introvertált külföldi hallgatók, függetlenül idegennyelv-tudásuk szintjétől. Ezért a külföldi hallgatók számára trainingeket és coaching foglalkozásokat érdemes tartani, ahol megtanítjuk a megküzdési stratégiákat, fejlesztjük a társadalmi networking készségeiket, ezáltal segítjük őket, hogy minél könnyebben beilleszkedjenek.

Kulcsszavak: befogadás, integráció, idegennyelvtudás, személyiségtípusok, alkalmazkodóképesség, nyitottság a befogadó kultúra iránt

Introduction

The movement and integration of foreign people in a foreign country have always been important issues for shaping modern and prosperous societies, economies, and higher education. An increasing number of young people are moving to study in foreign higher education institutions, and this mobility can be a transformative, albeit challenging experience for students (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; López-Duarte et al., 2021). One of the major difficulties and obstacles for international students is foreign language proficiency, which makes it difficult for foreign students to comprehend lectures, complete assignments, and take exams. This barrier also affects their ability to socialize and connect with the local community.

Apart from language difficulties, adapting to a new culture and understanding local customs and social norms can also be challenging, therefore foreign students might experience culture shock,

which may lead to the feeling of isolation, anxiety, or depression. Creating a social network can be tough for foreign students who might feel isolated or excluded from social activities, and forming friendships with peers from different cultural backgrounds may take a long time. In addition, educational systems vary globally, and foreign students might find the teaching styles and grading systems in the host university unfamiliar, which may make it hard for them to do coursework and achieve high grades. Some foreign students might face discrimination or prejudice based on their nationality or ethnicity, which may negatively impact their overall experience, integration and studies. Also, foreign students often face various practical and operational challenges, such as financial, legal and administrative hurdles, housing difficulties, and access to healthcare. To sum up, the extent to which foreign students cope with these difficulties and how well they adapt and integrate depends on several factors.

Literature review

The importance of foreign language skills in participation, adaptation and integration in the labour market and education

Horn et al. (2015) claim that language proficiency positively influences the integration of foreign people in the labour market, their cultural assimilation and social interaction. According to Kónya (2007), integration, participation and cultural assimilation are the results of a rational decision and go hand in hand with language proficiency. Rocca et al. (2020) found that language proficiency positively impacts social integration, access to education, employment opportunities, and overall well-being. Shorma (2021) investigated the social integration of immigrants in Sweden focusing on foreign language proficiency as an essential element in social integration. Shorma found that the role of foreign language proficiency in social integration and inclusion is crucial, however, not exclusive, confirming similar research findings in Sweden (Wiesbrock, 2011), in the Netherlands (Van Tubergen et al., 2008), in Germany (Hochmann et al., 2014) and in Poland (Bojar, 2007).

Attitude to the host country

Attitude to the host country is a decisive factor in integration according to Schumann's Acculturation Model (1978, 1986). Schumann claims that acculturation is influenced by social factors (social dominance, integration pattern, enclosure, cohesiveness, size factor, cultural congruence, attitude factor, and intended length of residence) and psychological factors (motivation, attitude and flexible orientation to the host country and culture, and culture shock). Chiswick et al. (2015), Suhajda et al. (2020), Gardner & Lambert (1959, 1972), Gardner (1985, 2001), Gardner et al. (1992), Dörnyei & Csizér (2002), Dörnyei et al. (2004, 2005), and Sonnenberg et al. (2012) have found that positive attitude towards the culture and the language of the host country is crucial in integration and acculturation. Bosswick and Heckmann's (2006) Integration Model supports Schumann's Acculturation Model and emphasizes that identification with and integration (structural, economic, social, cultural, interactive) into the host culture are interactive processes, which are based on mutual intention, adaptive and integrative communication between foreigners and the host society. Angelini et al. (2015) have found a positive and significant correlation between cultural assimilation, integration in a host culture and immigrants' subjective well-being.

Extroversion and introversion in Jungian typology

The terms introversion and extraversion as attitude types and psychological modes of adaptation were introduced by Carl Jung (1971). Extroverted people tend to be adaptive, integrative, outgoing, talkative, energetic, enthusiastic, assertive and gregarious. They are open to and enjoy human interaction and activities, social events, such as parties, and community activities. Whereas introverted people are more reserved, less adaptive, and do not derive energy from social interaction. Personality types influence the success of higher educational studies (Offire et al., 2007; Codish & Ravid, 2014; Arip et al., 2017; Kubacheva, 2017; Thi Chung & Thi Tram Anh, 2022).

Research gap

As seen in the Literature review, there is substantial scientific research highlighting the importance of factors such as language skills, attitude to the host country, personality types and traits in the inclusion and integration of foreign people in a host country. Research (Horn et al., 2015; Kónya, 2007; Rocca et al., 2020; Shorma, 2021; Wiesbrock, 2011; Van Tubergen et al., 2008; Hochmann et al., 2014; Bojar, 2007) confirmed the importance of foreign language proficiency in the labour market and in the assimilation of immigrants, and also the influence of personality types on the success of higher educational studies (Offire et al., 2007; Codish & Ravid, 2014; Arip et al., 2017; Kubacheva, 2017; Thi Chung & Thi Tram Anh, 2022), however, no research has been carried out to investigate the correlation between language proficiency and personality traits of foreign students in their integration into a host university. This research aims to fill this research gap and examine the importance and correlation of language proficiency and personality traits in the adaptation and integration of foreign students into university life in Hungary and England.

Research questions and hypotheses

According to our assumptions, English language proficiency and personality traits of foreign students correlate with adaptiveness, integrativeness, and openness in the academic environment.

It is assumed (1) that language proficiency is the most important indicator of integrativeness, adaptiveness, socialisation and openness in the academic environment, these variables positively correlate.

It is also assumed (2) that personality traits (introversion and extroversion) correlate with adaptiveness, integrativeness, socialisation and openness in the academic environment.

Based on our prior assumptions, the following research questions have been formed:

RQ1. Does language proficiency positively affect adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life, and openness to the host culture of foreign students in the academic environment?

RQ2. Does a high level of English language proficiency of foreign students combined with extrovert personality facilitate adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life, and openness to host culture in the academic environment?

RQ3. Does an introvert personality restrict adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to host culture in the academic environment, even if it is combined with high level English language proficiency?

The following hypotheses have been set up and examined:

Hypothesis 1.

It has been hypothesized that language proficiency positively affects adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life, and openness to the host culture of foreign students in the academic environment.

Hypothesis 2.

A high level of English language proficiency of foreign students combined with extrovert personality facilitates adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life, and openness to host culture in the academic environment,

Hypothesis 3.

Introvert personality restricts adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life, and openness to host culture in academic environment, even if it is combined with a high level of English language proficiency.

Methods

The population of the research

The survey was carried out among 320 current and former foreign students studying at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, MATE, Gödöllő, Hungary (77%) and the University of Central Lancashire, UCLAN, Preston, UK (33%).

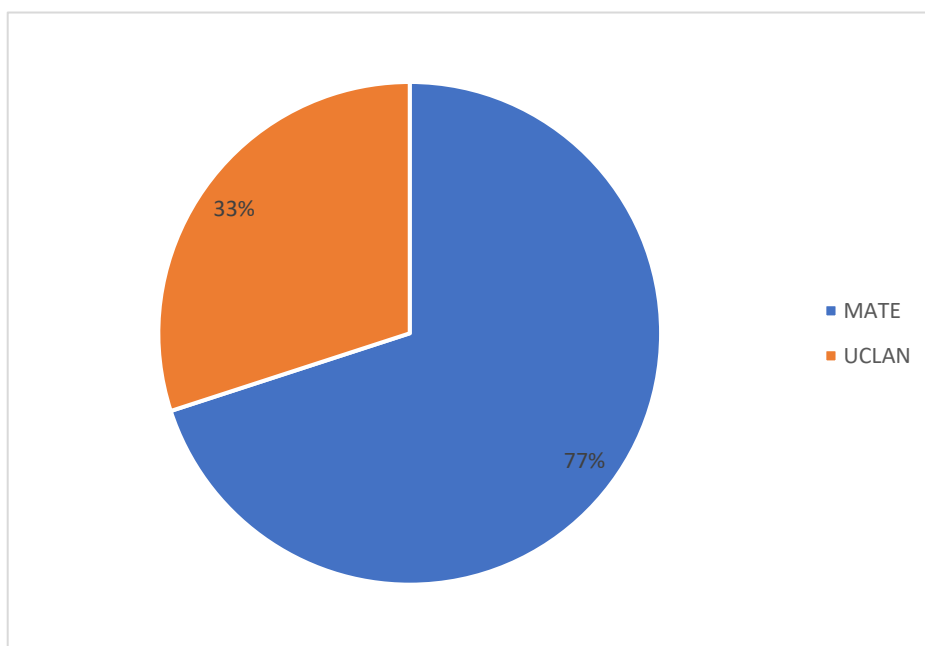


Figure 1. Respondents by university (own data) N=320

Source: Authors' own editing

In our research, we had 320 students of whom 53% were male and 46% were female respondents, 1% refused to say their gender (Figure 2).

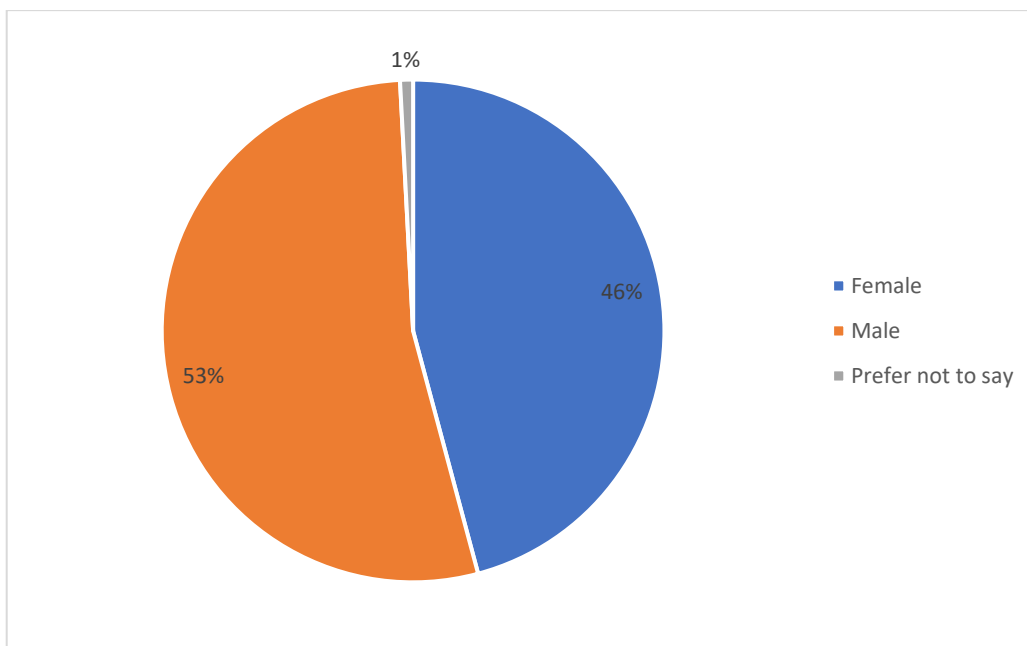


Figure 2. Respondents by gender (own data) N=320

Source: Authors' own editing

The age of respondents was between 19 and 43 years, representing the age of foreign students at the universities.

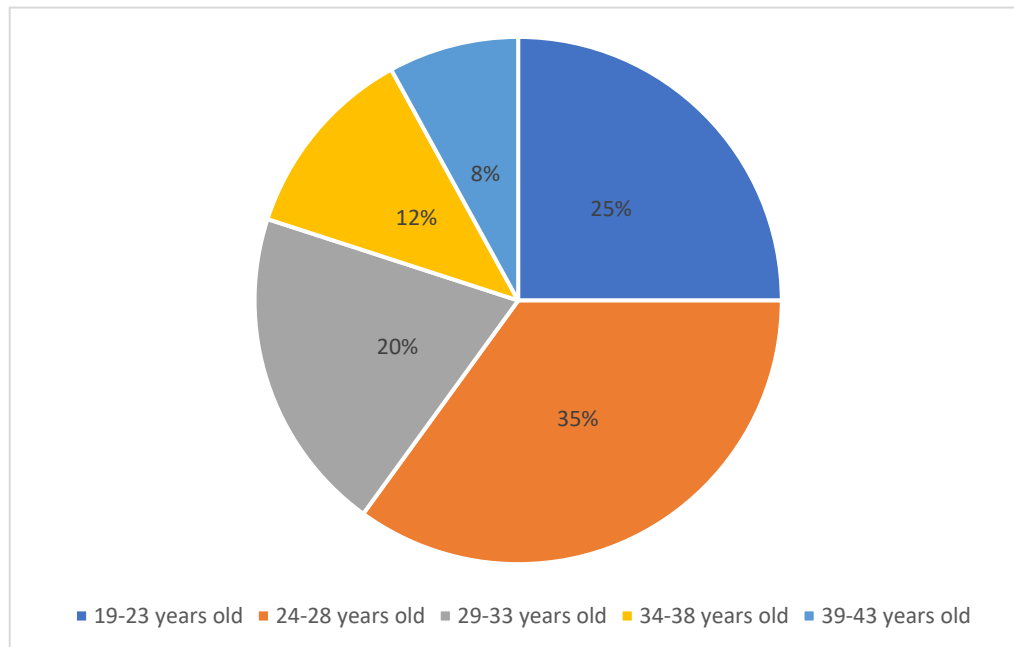


Figure 3. Respondents by age (own data) N=320

Source: Authors' own editing

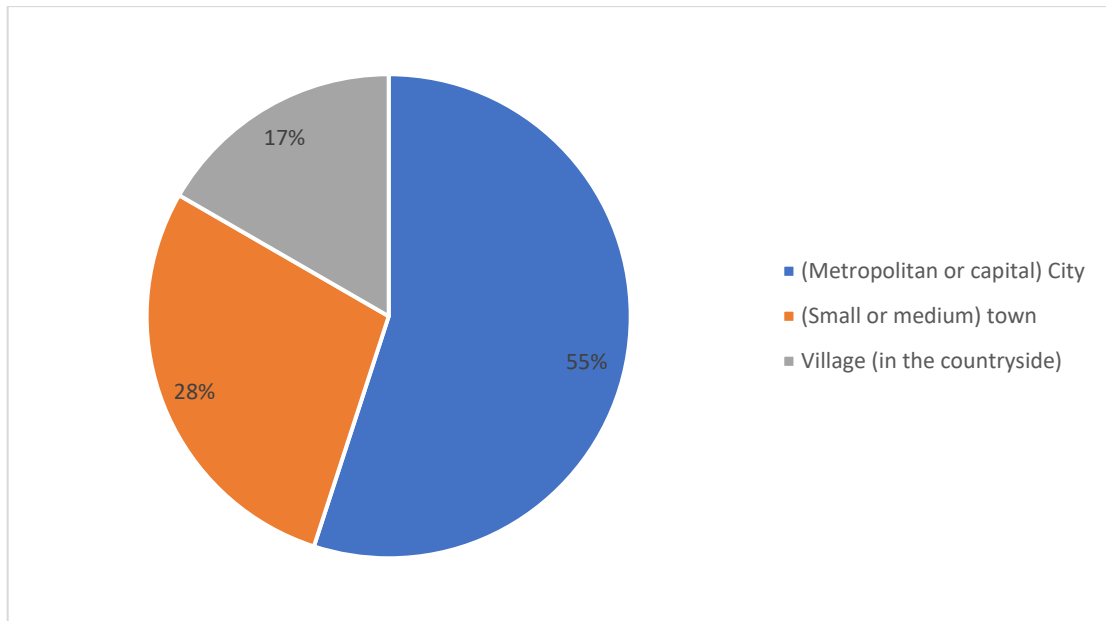


Figure 4. Respondents by place of residence in their own countries (own data) N=320

Source: Authors' own editing

Figure 4 shows that respondents came from different types of settlements (village, small town, big city, capital).

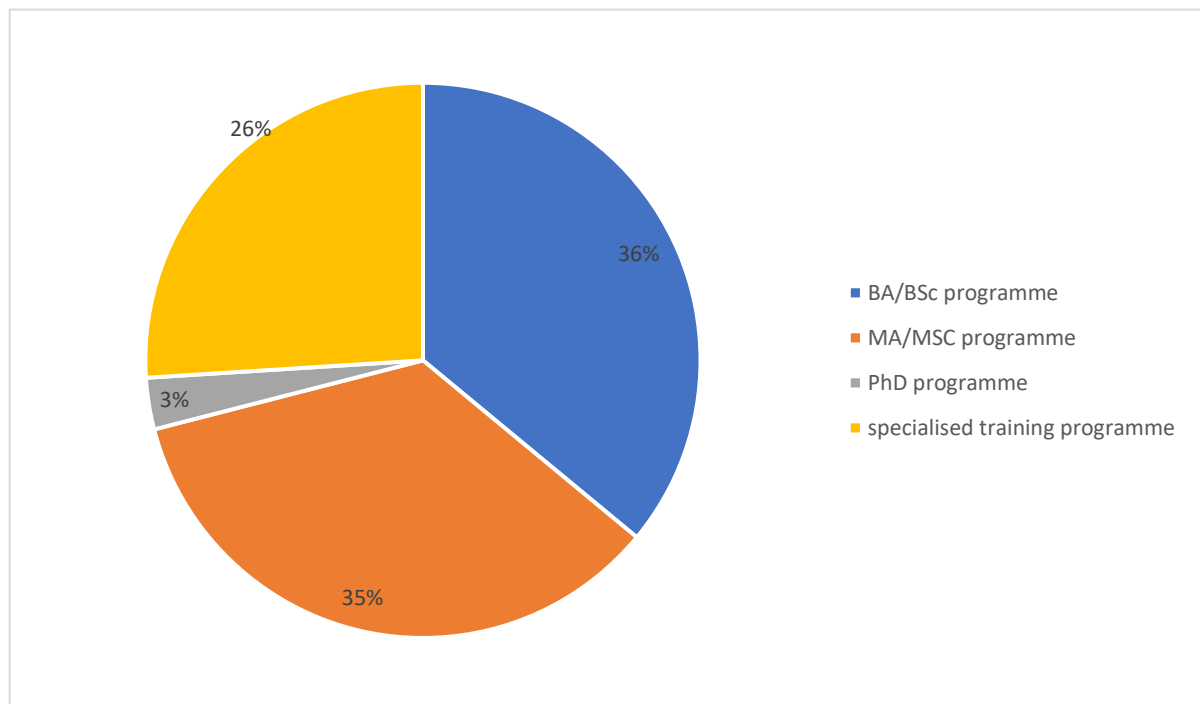


Figure 5. Respondents by academic programmes (own data) N=320

Source: Authors' own editing

Figure 5 shows that our respondents came from different types of academic programmes.

A questionnaire survey

A questionnaire survey (primary research) was carried out from the 1st of April to the 30th of June, 2023. The questionnaire had 5 groups of questions (see below).

Results

Correlations have been examined and analyzed by questions as indicated below using CrossTabs and Chi-Square Tests.

Examination of Hypothesis 1.

It has been hypothesized that language proficiency positively affects openness to the host culture of foreign students in an academic environment and with active social life at the host institution.

Examination method: *Correlation between Question 1. and Question 2.*

Q1. What level of language competencies did you have when you arrived in this country?

Q2. To what extent do the following statements apply to you? On a scale of five, please indicate the degree of relevance for you!

1. How often have you been engaged in a formal conversation with other (foreign) students?
2. How often have you been engaged in an informal conversation or chat or partying or shopping with other (foreign) students?
3. As a foreign student, how confidently do you socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to you?
4. Do you enjoy interacting with people from different cultures?
5. Do you enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to you?
6. How often do you study together with a foreign student?

List of research dimensions (scales)

1. Participation in the social life of the host university (Q2)
2. Integrative (non-integrative) communication (Q2)
3. Adaptive communication (Q2)

Table 1. Participation in the social life of the host university

	Participation in the social life of the host university
1. I often have formal conversation with other students.	0.851
2. I often have informal conversation with other students.	0.827
3. I often study with other foreign students.	0.752
4. I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	0.723

5. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	0.675
6. As a foreign student, I confidently socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.	0.799

Source: Authors' own editing

Table 1 shows the correlation values which have been found about participation in the social life of the host university.

It has been hypothesized that language proficiency positively affects adaptiveness (consciously adaptive communication) and integrativeness (consciously integrative communication).

Examination method: *Correlation between Question 1. and Question 3.*

Q1: What level of language competencies did you have when you arrived in this country? Choose from the list below!

Q3. To what extent do the following statements apply to you? On a scale of five, please indicate the degree of relevance for you!

1. I feel sympathy for foreign students.
2. I am conscious about my behaviour, attitude and knowledge in interactions with foreign students of different cultural backgrounds.
3. I change my verbal behaviour (e.g. accent, tone, pauses, silence, rhythm when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.
4. I change my nonverbal behaviour (facial expressions, body language) when cross-cultural interaction requires it.

List of research dimensions (scales)

1. Integrative (non-integrative) communication (Q3)
2. Adaptive communication (Q3)

Table 2. Correlation between openness to intercultural communication and willingness to adapt to a new culture

	Openness to intercultural communication (integrative communication)	Willingness to adapt to and change verbal and nonverbal behavior (adaptive communication)
1. I feel sympathy for foreign students	0.734	
2. I am conscious about my behaviour, attitude and knowledge in interactions with foreign students of different cultural backgrounds.	0.668	
3. I change my verbal behaviour (e.g. accent, tone, pauses, silence, rhythm when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.		0.901
4. I change my nonverbal behaviour (facial expressions, body language) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it		0.859

Table 2 shows the correlation values between openness to intercultural communication and willingness to adapt to a new culture.

It has been hypothesized that language proficiency negatively correlates with being home sick, and showing more respect for the home country and culture than for the host country.

Method: *Correlation between Question 1. and Question 4.*

Q1: What level of language competences did you have when you arrived in this country? Choose from the list below!

Q4: To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

1. I am homesick for my home in my country of origin.
2. I am proud of my country and culture.
3. I feel I have found a new home in the country in which I study
4. I feel sympathy for foreign students

List of research dimensions (scales)

1. Rejection of foreign culture (Q4)
2. Acceptance of foreign culture (Q4)
3. The strength of the relationship with the sending country (Q4)

The following correlation values have been found.

Table 3. Correlations between the strength of the relationship with the sending country and rejection/acceptance of the foreign culture

	The strength of the relationship with the sending country	Rejection/ acceptance of the foreign culture
1. I am homesick for my home in my country of origin.	0.810	
2. I am proud of my country and culture.	0.806	
3. I feel I have found a new home in the country in which I study.		0.979
4. I feel sympathy for foreign students	0.734	

Source: Authors' own editing

Table 3 shows the correlation values between the strength of the relationship with the sending country and rejection/acceptance of the foreign culture.

Hypothesis 2.

It has been hypothesized that a high level of English language proficiency of foreign students combined with extrovert personality facilitates adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to host culture in the academic environment.

Hypothesis 3.

It has been hypothesized that introverted personality restricts adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to host culture in academic environment, even if it is combined with high level English language proficiency.

Method: *Correlation between Question 1 and Question 5. (attitudes, personality traits)*

Q1: What level of language competencies did you have when you arrived in this country? Choose from the list below!

Q5: To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

1. I pay attention to the emotions of others.
2. I am a good listener.
3. I enjoy other people's stories.
4. I notice when someone is in trouble.
5. I sympathize with others.
6. I work according to strict rules.
7. I work according to plans.
8. I look for regularity in life.
9. I like routine.
10. I want predictability.
11. I take the initiative
12. I make contacts easily.
13. I am reserved.
14. I am looking for new ways to attain my goals.
15. I start a new life easily.
16. I have feeling for what is appropriate in culture.
17. I seek the company of people from different backgrounds.
18. I have a broad range of interests.

List of research dimensions (scales)

1. Extroverts (Q5)
2. Introverts (Q5)

The following correlation values have been found.

Table 4. Features of extroverts

	Extroverts
1. I have a broad range of interests.	
2. I am looking for new ways to attain my goals.	0.825
3. I seek the company of people from different back-grounds	0.811
4. I make contacts easily.	0.804
5. I take the initiative.	0.800
6. I start a new life easily.	0.770
7. I enjoy other people's stories.	0.703

Source: Authors' own editing

Table 4 shows the features of extroverted people.

Table 5. Features of introverts

	Introverts
1. I sympathize with others.	
2. I am a good listener.	0.853
3. I notice when someone is in trouble.	0.818
4. I pay attention to the emotions of others.	0.804
5. I have a feeling for what is appropriate in a culture.	0.795
6. I like routine.	
7. I want predictability.	
8. I work according to strict rules.	
9. I work according to plans.	
10. I look for regularity in life.	
11. I am reserved.	

Source: Authors' own editing

Table 5 shows the features of introverted people.
The summary table below shows the variables as tested.

Table 6. A summary of the research dimensions

Cause (research dimensions)	→	Result (research dimensions)
1. Language Skills (H1) (H2) (H3)	→	Participation in social life of the host university (Q2) Openness to the host country (Q2) Adaptive communication (Q3) Integrative communication (Q3) Rejection of foreign culture (Q4) Acceptance of foreign culture (Q4) Extroverts (Q5) Introverts (Q5)
2. Openness to the host country (H1) (H2) (H3)	→	Participation in social life of the host university (Q2)
3. Adaptive/ integrative communication (H1) (H2) (H3)	→	Participation in social life of the host university (Q2) The strength of the relationship with the sending country (Q4) Rejection of foreign culture (Q4) Acceptance of foreign culture (Q4)
4. Extroverts (H2)	→	Participation in the social life of the host university (Q2) Openness to the host country (Q2) Extroverts (Q5)
5. Introverts (H3)	→	Restricted participation in the social life of the host university (Q2) Introverts (Q5)

Source: Authors' own editing

Table 6 is a summary of research dimensions and variables.

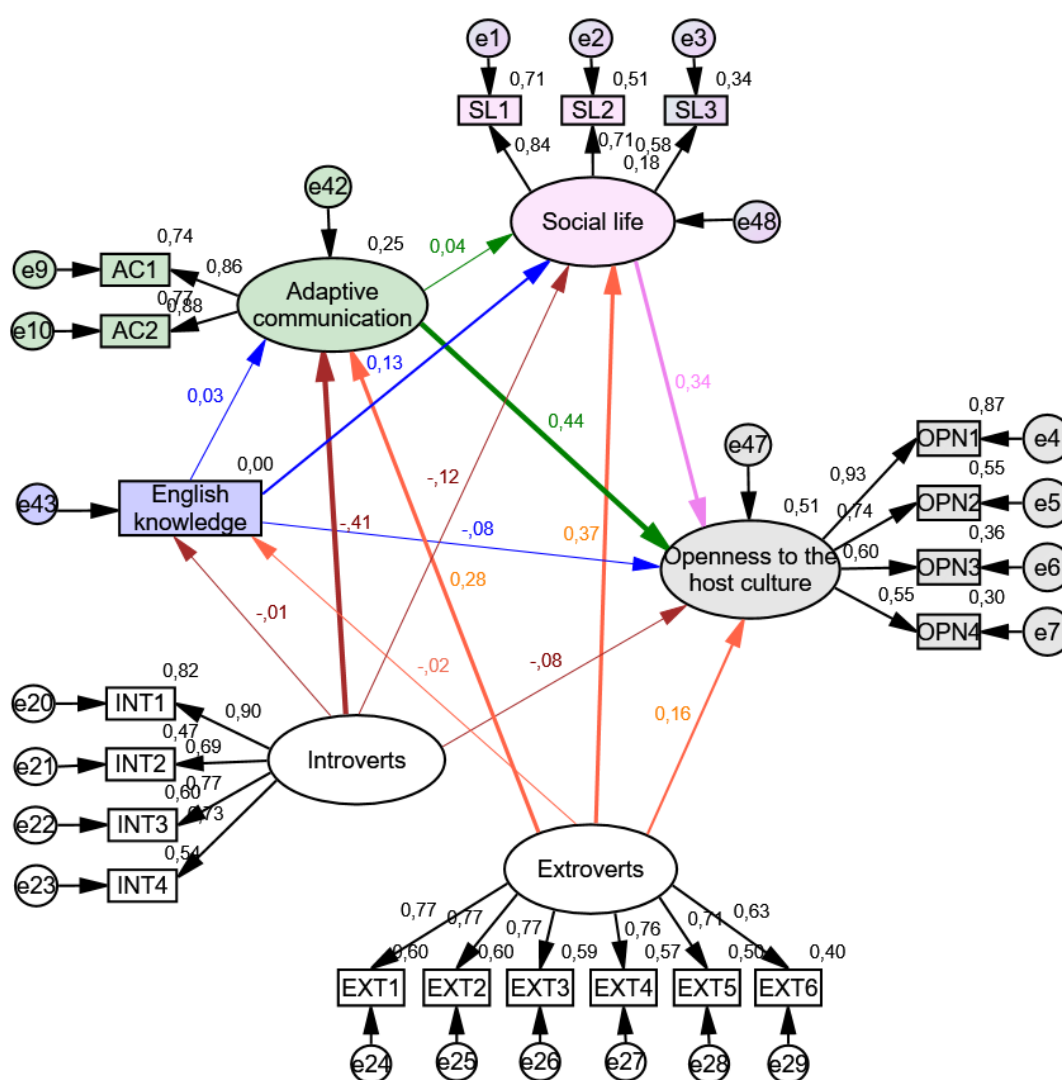
Summary and Discussion

H1 (language proficiency positively affects openness to the host culture of foreign students in an academic environment and with active social life at the host institution) was refuted.

H2 (a high level of English language proficiency of foreign students combined with extrovert personality facilitates adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to host culture in the academic environment) was confirmed.

H3 (introverted personality restricts adaptiveness, integrativeness, active social life and openness to host culture in the academic environment, even if it is combined with high level English language proficiency) was also confirmed.

Based on research findings the following theoretical model has been set up.



$\chi^2/df = 4.458$; CFI = 0.908; TLI = 0.904; RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.048 (0.045–0.052)

Figure 6. A theoretical model of the relationship between social life, adaptive communication, English knowledge, openness to the host culture, introverted and extroverted personality traits.

Source: Authors' own editing

Figure 6 shows an empirical model of the relationship between social life, adaptive communication, English knowledge, openness to the host culture, and introverted and extroverted personality traits. In the model, a thick arrow indicates a stronger relationship. The model summarizes the results of the research as follows:

1. Introvert traits have a moderately strong negative effect ($\beta=-0.41$, $p<0.001$) on the adaptive communication dimension, while the dimensions of social life and openness to the host culture are not significantly affected by introvert traits (Introverts \rightarrow Social life: $\beta=-0.12$, $p=0.075$; Introverts \rightarrow openness to the host culture: $\beta=-0.08$, $p=0.147$).
2. Extrovert traits have a weak positive effect on adaptive communication ($\beta=0.28$, $p<0.001$) and openness to the host culture ($\beta=0.16$, $p=0.005$), and a medium positive effect on social life ($\beta=0.37$, $p<0.001$).
3. English proficiency has a weak positive effect on the social life of the students (English knowledge \rightarrow Social life: $\beta=0.13$, $p=0.024$). There is no significant effect on adaptive communications or openness to the host culture (English knowledge \rightarrow Adaptive communication: $\beta=-0.01$, $p=0.613$; English knowledge \rightarrow openness to the host culture: $\beta=-0.08$, $p=0.067$).
4. Adaptive communication ($\beta=0.44$, $p<0.001$) and participation in social life ($\beta=0.34$, $p<0.001$) are the main determinants of openness to the host culture.

Conclusions

Our research findings supported the importance of personality traits (H2, H3, extroverted versus introverted personalities) in the adaptation and integration of foreign students in the academic environment, which came against our prior assumptions concerning the omnipotence and importance of foreign language skills (H1). Study findings support Wang and Ching's findings (2015) that both academic and social activities during study abroad are highly dependent on the students' personalities and intercultural skills. Our results are also in line with the results of Rings and Allehyani (2020), who found that openness and conscientiousness had a positive correlation with intercultural communication competence. The model of Mak and Tran (2001) predicts that Vietnamese students' intercultural social self-efficacy in Western societies is influenced by three personality traits (higher extraversion, openness, and lower neuroticism), three cultural relocation factors (weaker ethnic identification, greater fluency in the host language, and longer residence in the host country), and their co-ethnic social self-efficacy. Although foreign language skills have been found to be important, more emphasis should be placed on the development of personality traits by introducing personality development and orientation programs for foreign students, together with training, mentoring and coaching programs. Chen and Zhang (2023) also recommend that higher institutional organisations should organize trainings and coaching sessions to enhance students' skills in utilizing effective coping strategies and social networking tools. Our conclusion has also been supported by Liu and Huang's (2015) findings who found that contextualized personality and, more significantly, within-person changes display cross-cultural adjustment. To summarise and conclude our research, we have concluded that foreign language skills are necessary in the higher education environment, but equally important are the student's personality, openness and adaptability. In the future, we aim to extend our research as follows: Foreign students arriving at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences attend an orientation week at the beginning of their study programme, during which they participate in intercultural and personality development training. In our research, we will use a questionnaire before and after the orientation

week to measure how students' attitudes changed as a result of the training. Of course, there are limitations to our current and future research, for example, we are not investigating how religion and culture influence the personality and attitudes of students from different cultures towards their new environment. In the future, we will also look at this in an international context.

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