

Students' Perceptions of National Culture Along Four Dimensions

Robin REID

Abstract

The ability to understand and respond to the communication styles and cultural values of various countries has become an increasingly necessary skill as the modern world becomes more and more interconnected through trade and technology. While businesses seek to train managers and other members of the workforce in the nuances of cultural differences, foreign language learners are another group who interface with another culture on a regular basis via the language they study. However, as many language learners in a country like Japan study the language of English itself extensively, concentration on the culture of those who speak English and how they communicate would seem to be notably lacking in comparison. If students can naturally develop a good sense of how cultures differ through other means in their daily lives, then perhaps such an added concentration on culture is unnecessary. The current study investigates the piloting of a short survey designed to gauge students' ability to receive brief explanations of certain dimensions in which cultures differ and then use that information, and their intuition, to evaluate their own country and a selection of other countries and place them along the given dimensions. The results of this pilot study show that some of the students' perceptions align with existing models, while others are far less conclusive.

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen many modern societies ride the waves of 'globalization', increasing the connectivity between cultures of the world through rapidly developing communication and transportation technologies. The realities of geography that had once been a major hindrance are now easily overcome, and the economies of individual nations and regions are increasingly open and accessible to a far greater number of clients and collaborators than ever before. All of this recent surge has created a situation where organizations operate with offices and clients around the world and many have recruited multinational workforces. In this new world of the 'global economy', it has become necessary to maximize efficiency in communication given the varied cultural and linguistic heritages that can be present in a single company or single project between collaborators. In the world of business, this makes sense as many businesses are usually focused on finding any means of increasing the speed and efficiency in which they operate. For this purpose, it would be natural to include instruction about

cultural tendencies and values in company training and, if possible, in any foreign language classes that potential employees might select for study. Doing so could help employees, present and future, anticipate and react appropriately to differences in culture that arise in the process of working for a company with an international presence.

What about students who study English in a country like Japan or Korea that is largely monocultural and where English is not a native language? Many of them may go on to work in an office with an overseas branch, or work with a company whose workforce is complemented with a number of proficient speakers of English. Perhaps that same company handles numerous accounts for English speaking clients. It would likely be valuable if those students learning English, with this future as a possibility, were to learn a good deal about the cultures that natively speak that language as well. After all, most schools in Japan do make use of Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) through programs such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching program (JET), and one purpose of such professionals is to promote cultural exchange. At the same time, the availability of media via the internet has given the same young people in Japan who learn from those ALTs the ability to access information and explore the popular culture of other countries easily. This being the reality, is it reasonable to assume that students today might have a good grasp of what other prominent cultures around the world are like and that they might be familiar, perhaps intuitively, with how their own cultural values compare with other cultures, even if only on an occasionally superficial level? Are they thus already primed to begin addressing the challenges of an intercultural context? The current study came into being from this thread of inquiry.

2. Intercultural communication and national culture

Diversity is a fact of modern life. Besides technology, geo-political affairs have also moved a vast number of people around the world and brought many cultures together. Central to intercultural communication are the values and beliefs of a given culture, and these are expressed and sustained through cultural activities and cultural institutions as well as one's individual identity (Liu, Volcic & Gallois, 2019). These values are the means in which people in a society judge what is right and wrong, and by extension, these cultural judgments inform conventions and protocols of behavior between members of that culture. Therefore, these values play a considerably important role in communication since, as Dutch researcher Hofstede (1991) observes, everyone carries with them the ways of interacting with others that they have learned and accumulated throughout their lives.

Hofstede was particularly interested in how cultural attitudes influenced behavior at work, and his book *Culture's Consequences* (Hofstede, 1980) was a culmination of years of research he had carried out while working with IBM. The surveys on attitudes he collected from the multicultural workforce of that company eventually gave rise to his idea of *dimensions* of cultural difference. His original list had four dimensions, but thanks to his own further research (Hofstede, 1991, 2011) as well as that of others who motivated him to add to his list (Hofstede and Bond, 1998; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), two additional dimensions were added later, bringing the current total to six: individualism - collectivism,

masculinity - femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long term - short term orientation, and indulgence - restraint. The brief summaries that follow are based on information from the Hofstede Insights website (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Individualism is concerned with the extent to which people are expected and/or inclined to look after themselves as opposed to their greater community and society. Masculinity describes the value given to (perhaps stereotypically) masculine traits such as competition, achievement, and assertiveness. Power distance deals with the distribution of power and the acceptance of a hierarchical order to society. Uncertainty avoidance addresses how nations deal with the unknown and how they seek to control their behavior in the face of potential risk. Long-term and short term orientation deal with a culture's tendency to preserve the past as part of how they handle challenges and decisions. Finally, indulgence - restraint deals with the degree to which a country's culture is permissive of gratification. Using these dimensions, Hofstede has assigned values between one and a hundred for a large number of countries and a comparison of countries allows one to see how two nations values may differ relative to one another.

Hofstede's approach seems attractive for businesses because it was born from the extensive study of workplace attitudes at a large global company. The orientation to dimensions where cultural values have strong influence can help companies properly train their own multicultural workforces and provide insight on how to plan for future interactions with other cultures. Another business communication researcher, Erin Meyer (2015), focuses on leadership and international business and proposes her own set of eight 'scales' that are representative of broad task types within business, such as leading, evaluating, and persuading, though the underlying forces at work here are still the same values orientation found in Hofstede. In truth, one of Meyer's scales differs in quality from the others: communicating. This scale, as the first one introduced in her book, can be said to further influence the tasks considered in the other seven scales, as how a culture communicates is logically going to have an effect on how other types of tasks that largely require communication to complete are carried out. Meyer makes use of the concept of low- and high-context communication discussed by Edward Hall (1976). In brief, context in communication carries greater weight for some cultures as these people value relationships that are built over time and depend on mutual familiarity, that is to say the context that they share, when they communicate. Hall's example of a married couple, referenced by Meyer in her discussion, imagines the growing familiarity of two people who are married for many years. The longer they know each other, the more they can understand each other's feelings and thoughts with the merest of gesture or speech. On a more holistic level, then, the higher the context within which a culture communicates, the more they will rely on indirect and implied meaning in communication.

The above concepts, whether envisioned as dimensions or scales, find a lot of application in business, but are they concepts that can easily be understood outside of that realm of human activity? Furthermore, are normal individuals, such as students in Japan and South Korea studying English in university, capable and informed enough to intuitively place cultures relative to one another in a manner similar to Hofstede? If culture is such an influential force in how communication happens in intercultural business settings, certainly students should be aware of these broad cultural differences as they learn a foreign

language, as they will need to heed this pragmatic knowledge just as much as their linguistic knowledge if they want to communicate effectively with people from other countries. If they do not have a natural sense from their own daily interactions with internet communication technology and global media, nor from their experiences in school with native-speaker educators, it would seem paramount to ensure that whatever English they learn includes adequate training in the basics of dimensions of national culture.

Within the field of education, one can find a few studies such as Yoo (2014) who uses the dimensions of national culture to explore student-teacher relationships in South Korea. More recently, Murzi et al (2020) discuss how students in Ecuador perceive Hofstede's dimensions in the specific context of engineering education at a university. While this latter study is insightful in that their results differed from Hofstede's classification of Ecuador for the four dimensions they considered (power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance), the study was limited to classification of just the students' home country. The current study has an interest in how students also perceive other countries. Research regarding Japan and these dimensions of cultural difference is less forthcoming, and this is a gap in the research that this study aims to help fill. To be sure, there are numerous studies that look at student opinions of foreign language learning, be it their perception of American English (Fukuda, 2009) or learning from a native-speakers (Yazawa, 2017) to name just a couple. One can also find discussions of students' values and the influence of culture when Japanese students go overseas to study (for example, Kapoor and Wolf, 1995). However, none of these studies provide a focus on dimensions of national culture and how other countries are viewed in terms of them. In response to this, the current study aims to pilot a type of online survey to investigate how university students studying English in East Asia (Japan and South Korea) perceive other cultures in terms of a selection of dimensions of culture.

3. Methods

3.0 Aim of the study

This study was designed to pilot a type of survey that can assess students existing perception of their own country, as well as other selected nations, through a comparison of underlying cultural values. These values were assessed by means of four pairs of opposing cultural value orientations found in the literature discussed in the previous section. The survey was intended to assess students' perception of these dimensions of national culture without any particular training in the concepts involved in order to assess their current awareness, knowledge, and assumptions of the countries selected for comparison. Therefore, with only the sufficient minimum of information provided to them, this study aimed to see how students ranked the selected countries relative to one another. The nine countries selected were chosen so that the predominantly Japanese participants would have choices that represented familiar countries from multiple regions of the world that currently have regular relations with Japan, or that represent prominent examples of one side of a given dimension of national culture. In this way, students evaluated countries that should produce salient gaps between certain countries, depending on the dimension in question.

3.1 Participants

All participants were currently enrolled university students, in Japan or South Korea either undergraduate or graduate level. There were fifty-two students who participated and took the survey. Among these participants, forty-five were from Japan, four were from South Korea, two were from China, and one was from Bangladesh. Of the forty-five students who responded to the question about overseas experience, only twelve (roughly one quarter) had not spent at least one week studying in or living in another country.

3.2 Data Collection

Those students who consented to participate after I explained the study and the anonymity of their participation were directed to access an online survey through a link generated with Google Forms which they could complete on a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Some optional questions about a student's experience with language learning and other cultures were included with four questions about selected dimensions of cultural difference. Most of these optional questions were ultimately removed from the analysis as they were unnecessary and are not included in this study. Only the four dimension-themed questions and a question asking for the participant's home country were required to complete the survey. A full text of the survey used is included at the end of this paper as Appendix A.

3.3 Survey Questions

Student participants were asked to read short descriptions about four dimensions of cultural difference, each one presented as a spectrum between two opposing but related concepts evaluated discretely with a 9-point scale, with a score of 5 representing a neutral position between the two concepts:

- Dimension 1. individualism versus collectivism
- Dimension 2. feminine versus masculine
- Dimension 3. avoid uncertainty versus accept uncertainty
- Dimension 4. low-context versus high-context

Dimensions 1-3 were selected from Hofstede's six available dimensions because they were anticipated to be easier for students to comprehend and apply within the narrow constraints of the survey and they also happen to be dimensions for which Japan (the primary context for the current study) scores markedly towards one side of each dimension. Similarly, the decision to include Dimension 4 in place of another Hofstede dimension is also due to Japan's positioning near one end of that dimension and because, as Meyer implies in one of her stories, the Japanese are quite known for and likely aware of their high context style of communication.

Within the questions about the dimensions, each dimension's description was streamlined as much as

possible to reduce reading time, presenting just the key points of each concept. Students were allowed to use dictionaries to look up individual words, but as this study wanted to gauge students' current, intuitive leanings, they were discouraged from using the internet to look up information so as to avoid inadvertently finding an explanation of a concept that includes exemplar countries that could include those countries selected for this study or other countries that participants might know well and use as a reference point. This could bias their evaluation towards placing countries in line with what they read rather than following their intuition.

For each of the four dimensions, students were given two prompts, which divided each question into an (a) and (b) prompt. Prompt (a) asked for the student to place their own home country along the spectrum's 9-point scale, and prompt (b) asked the student to select at least two countries, other than their home country featured in the previous prompt, and evaluate them in the same way and place along on the spectrum as well. There were no restrictions on how many additional countries a participant chose, so they could answer for every country if that is what they wanted to do. As a result, the frequency in which countries were selected varied to some degree. This frequency is discussed at the end of section 4.5.

3.4 Analysis

Once the surveys were collected, the data was entered into a spread sheet for analysis. As the format of the survey split each question about dimensions into two prompts, a transfer of points needed to be made. As explained above, participants were first asked to score their own home country in the first prompt and then score other countries in the second prompt. As a consequence, the results for the first prompt were transferred to the results for the second prompt and tallied as one of the available nine countries if possible. When a participant's home country was not one of the nine selected countries in this study, such a transfer was not made.

To populate a data set for comparison, dimensional values were retrieved for each country from the Hofstede Insights website homepage (Hofstede Insights, n.d.) using the "Country Comparison Tool" feature found at the bottom of the page. This was done for the dimensions of Individualism, Masculinity, and Uncertainty Avoidance. The final data set for Low and High Context was retrieved from Tony Morden's (1999) article 'Models of National Culture - A Management Review'. As this data set was not ranked according to an evident scoring rubric, and was instead a suggested ranking of countries, no comparison based on point distribution was possible.

The aim of this pilot study was not to establish any sort of statistical significance to the study as I was only looking at evaluation results for one data set and did not identify and factor for any population variables. Given the low number of student responses, data analysis was limited to comparisons of mean and median scores for each country and the range for each dimension.

4. Results

In this section, the results of the four survey questions regarding dimensions of cultural difference will be summarized. In the next section, these results will be compared to other available data sets and discussed further.

4.1 Dimension 1: individualism versus collectivism

Table 1: Placing own culture and other cultures on a spectrum between (1) individualism and (9) collectivism

Average score, in order from lowest to highest:

2.1	USA	n=49
3.0	UK	n=31
3.4	Brazil	n=16
3.8	India	n=18
3.9	Russia	n=22
4.0	Sweden	n=21
4.8	China	n= 36
4.8	Saudi Arabia	n=18
6.2	Japan	n=52

mean=4; median=3.9; range=4.1

The data from student responses for this dimension of cultural difference show the United States and Japan as the nations at the low and high end of the spectrum respectively. With a score of 5 indicating a neutral classification, Japan was the only one of the countries considered to score above a 5 on average. This could indicate that students perceived Japan as distinct from all of the other countries and as the only representative of some type of collective society among the nations considered. The range of scores covers 4.1 points and the United States received a very low average score in comparison to Japan. That score of 2.1 constituted the furthest extreme for any score across all four dimensions, which suggests that students had a very clear perception of the United States as an individualistic society.

A further result of interest is the relatively low score of China. Despite the nation being arguably the most prominent example of communism in the current era, and thus by definition a model reference for a collectivist society, the students in this survey, being mostly young Japanese students, found China to be somewhere close to neutral rather than highly collectivist. Russia similarly scored lower than expected, although most students who participated would not have been alive when the nation was still the base of the USSR. Sweden, a nation quite often portrayed in western media as a model of democratic socialism,

while at the same time one that maintains a high value for individualism (Hofstede Insights, n.d.), scored higher than the United States, which suggests that most students did not see Sweden as such a strongly individualistic nation.

4.2 Dimension 2: feminine versus masculine

Table 2: Placing own culture and other cultures on a spectrum between (1) feminine and (9) masculine.

Average score, in order from lowest to highest:

4.0	Sweden	n=22
4.5	Japan	n=52
5.6	Brazil	n=17
5.7	UK	n=26
6.2	China	n=28
6.2	Russia	n=20
6.2	Saudi Arabia	n=16
6.2	United States	n=42
6.3	India	n=19

mean= 5.7; median= 6.2; range= 2.3

The results for the survey questions about the dimension of femininity versus masculinity were within a noticeably smaller range (2.3) than for questions 1a & 1b (4.1). The students perceived Japan to be one of the least masculine of the selected countries, with a slight tendency toward a feminine classification and more comparable to Sweden than to its Asian fellows. In contrast, four nations: the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, and Russia, were all viewed as equivalent along this dimension of cultural difference and near the top of the range of scores in the ranking, slightly below India, which students found to be the most masculine of all of the countries considered. That being stated, none of the countries were perceived as strongly leaning in either direction.

One final observation is that this is the only dimension of the four in which Japan was not either the lowest or highest scoring country. For this dimension, Sweden received the lowest score. While it is impossible to gauge a likely influence, recent times have seen Scandinavian cultures receive attention as cultures with strong gender equality and progressive social programs (for example, up to a year before the time of writing, the Finnish system of education had been a topic of discussion in some circles in Japan). While it could be possible that this public image had an influence on the results for this dimension, whether or not this was the case was not observable in the current study.

4.3 Dimension 3: avoids uncertainty versus accepts uncertainty

Table 3: Placing own culture and other cultures on a spectrum between (1) avoids uncertainty and (9) accepts uncertainty.

Average score, in order from lowest to highest:

3.9	Japan	n=50
4.5	Russia	n=20
4.7	India	n=17
4.7	China	n=32
5.1	Saudi Arabia	n=18
5.3	UK	n=30
5.5	Brazil	n=16
5.6	USA	n=45
6.1	Sweden	n=21

mean= 5.04; median=5.1; range= 2.2

The results for this dimension of cultural difference were similar in quality to the previous dimension of masculine versus feminine. The range of scores was only 1.7 and a majority of the results were clustered tightly within a half point either side of a neutral score of 5. Once again, Japan occupies the lowest position and was perceived as contrasting to the United States, Brazil and Sweden, all of which were considered relatively, though not strongly, nations which were tolerant of uncertainty.

In terms of a national image, the students clearly recognized that their nation had a much more risk-averse approach to the future than other nations. At the same time, it does not seem that the students had the sense that any of the other countries were particularly tolerant of risk and uncertainty. While Sweden scored the highest, it is interesting that the United States, despite its famous 'Hollywood' image, did not score higher than 6.

4.4 Dimension 4: low-context versus high-context

Table 4: Placing own culture and other cultures on a spectrum between (1) low context and (9) high context.

Average score, in order from lowest to highest:

3.2	USA	n=46
3.3	Brazil	n=16

4.1	India	n=20
4.2	UK	n=30
4.4	China	n=33
4.5	Russia	n=20
4.7	Saudi Arabia	n=20
5.3	Sweden	n=23
7.2	Japan	n=45

mean= 4.54; median= 4.4; range= 4

The results of Survey Question 4 show that the students positioned Japan as the clear highest context culture of the selected group of countries. At the same time, they placed the United States in furthest opposition to Japan. The range of ranked scores was an even 5 points, representing just over half (55%) of the possible spectrum, with a majority of the scores falling along the low end of the scale and in relatively close proximity to each other. Moreover, the gap between the highest scoring nation, Japan, and the next highest, Sweden, is almost the same (just .2 points difference) as the gap between Sweden and the lowest scoring nation, the United States.

It is evident in these results that students had a hard time perceiving any other nation as a high context culture similar to Japan. Hall (1976) of course used Japan as an example of a high context culture, and there is a possibility that in some way, this information reached students at some phase in their primary or secondary education. At the same time there are other nations he mentions as examples of high context cultures, notably China, and it is interesting to observe that while Japan's place on the high and low context dimension seemed quite clear to the students, as the average score is the furthest from neutral along any dimension for Japan, the results for China were not all that similar.

4.5 Across dimensions

Considered together, the results of all of the survey questions regarding the four dimensions of cultural difference selected for analysis in this study can be seen as indications of several trends. First, Japan occupied a place either at the top or bottom of three out of the four rankings, and was the next lowest in the remaining ranking. Additionally, the United States was in the top or bottom position opposing Japan in two of the dimensions, and was in clear contrast to Japan in the other two. The United Kingdom, India, and Brazil each shared similar ranking positions opposed to Japan for three out of the four dimensions, although which three dimensions were comparable varied between them. As students were mostly from Japan, a key takeaway is that these students, while mixed in their perceptions of other cultures, at the least had two strong images in mind. First, they regarded Japan as a high context, uncertainty averse, slightly feminine and somewhat collectivist nation and second, they regarded the United States most frequently as a country with an opposing profile to Japan, that is to say, as a low-context, individualistic, uncertainty tolerant, and somewhat masculine nation.

As for the scores themselves collectively regardless of dimension, students showed, on average, a slight tendency towards the lower end of each scale. The full range for all four scales combined was 5.1 points, but both the mean and median were just below 5, at 4.8 and 4.7 respectively, and the standard deviation was 1.13, indicating a relatively tight distribution around the center. Only two average scores were more than 2 points away from center in either direction: the 7.2 given to Japan for the high context dimension and the 2.1 given to the United States for the individualism dimension. As for the frequency of selection, a quick post-hoc analysis shows an average across all four questions gives us the following information:

Table 5: frequency of selection for response (max n=52)

Average across the four dimensions, ranked lowest to highest.

49.8	Japan
45.5	United States
32.3	China
29.3	United Kingdom
21.8	Sweden
20.5	Russia
18.5	India
18.0	Saudi Arabia
16.3	Brazil

While the results shown in Table 5 cannot be used to conclude very much of substance, it is worth noting, perhaps, that the two countries with the most responses also happened to be the two countries with the most salient results. The remainder of the countries share a more or less equal familiarity with students, with China and the United Kingdom receiving a modest increase in responses compared to those other countries while still pacing well behind the two top countries.

5. Discussion

5.1 Student results

As a survey of students' intuitive evaluations of countries in terms of what could possibly be new concepts to them, or ones that at best they vaguely understood, both uncertainty and ambiguity were to be expected for either the selected dimensions of cultural difference, or a particular nation's place along the spectrums of those dimensions. On that point, Japan noticeably scored above or below the mean for each dimension, falling at or near one limit of the range on all four dimensions. This would seem to indicate that students did, to a varying extent across dimensions, consider Japan as distinct in some way from most of the other nations. This should not be too surprising, given the fact that a vast majority of

the participants were from Japan. At the same time, the United States shared a similar trend of scoring noticeably above or below the middle on each dimension, with students having the tendency to place the nation at or near the other limit of the range in opposition to Japan. At the very minimum, it could be suggested that these results indicate that most students had a clear perception of the United States in comparison to Japan. While other nations such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Brazil had similar trends, each of those countries had at least one dimension on which it shared more affinity with Japan than with the United States. While this is a completely natural possibility when comparing nations using a system such as Hofstede's, which will be discussed below, it is worth noting that students did not find the United States and Japan to share any real similarities among the selected dimensions.

As was mentioned in the methods section, students were given options of other countries to select, rather than be given the same countries to evaluate, as a means of addressing the lack of knowledge students might have about some of the countries selected for the study. Therefore, it was assumed that any selections that students did make were for countries they felt comfortable and confident enough to evaluate. In addition to this, the 9-point scale was selected to give student the option of selecting a neutral score in cases where their perception did not lean in either direction of a given dimension. Given these facts, there are a couple of considerations to make when analyzing the results. First, for any particular dimension, a very tight distribution of average scores around the middle of the scale (5), might indicate that students did not completely comprehend that dimension from the explanation provided in the question, or that, by chance, most of the countries happen to have been perceived as roughly equivalent, or having only minor variance. Second, across dimensions, if a country's average scores were consistently close to the middle of the scale, while it could indicate that the country in question was indistinct one way or the other for any of these dimensions, it is assumed to be more likely that students simply lacked sufficient knowledge of that country to rank it definitively for at least one of the dimensions.

In terms of the first consideration, that a tight distribution around the middle might indicate a comprehension gap of the concept, one could argue that Dimension 3 is a possible candidate for this analysis. The mean and median are both within a tenth of a point from the middle, and the range is only 2.2 points. While Japan and the United States are positioned in opposition to each other, the range makes this fact seem rather less substantial, as a gap of more than 1 point between two *adjacent* countries can be seen in the results for the other three dimensions. While the current study cannot provide sufficient data for a more robust analysis, one could at least say that this dimension was the most ambiguous for the students given how generally neutral all of the results were. Dimension 2 is another possible candidate based on an almost equally narrow range, but the mean and median both lean closer to 6 than to 5. At the same time, the cluster of five countries at the higher end of the scale, with four having the identical average score of 6.2 and one having an average score of 6.3, it could be fair to suggest, at the very least, that students were not fully capable of discerning how most of these countries were distinct from one another for this dimension of cultural difference.

5.2 Comparison of results with other evaluations

Dimensions 1-3 in this paper are borrowed from the work of Hofstede. As Hofstede created a management consultancy company based on his research regarding these dimensions, we can use the website for his company to get the necessary values for comparison. While Hall (1976) did not provide a scoring system or ranking for low- and high-context cultures, one can find a suggestion for a ranking in the work of Morden (1999), which is used for the current study. What follows is a one-by-one discussion of each dimension in order, comparing the results of the current study with these sources.

5.2.1 Dimension 1: individualism versus collectivism

Table 6: Hofstede Insights score for - Individualism

(Shown lowest to highest, on a 100 point scale with individualism at the high end)

China	20
Saudi Arabia	25
Brazil	38
Russia	39
India	48
Japan	46
Sweden	71
United Kingdom	89
United States	91

As the data in Table 6 shows, China and Saudi Arabia rank as the most collectivist while the United States and the United Kingdom rank as the most individualistic of the nations scored here. Sweden trends towards individualism while both Japan and India are scored as almost neutral.

Table 3 below shows the comparison of values from Tables 1 and 6, allowing a visualization of the relative rankings according to both the student survey and Hofstede's model. It should be noted now, and for each of the subsequent dimensions hence, that the comparison of rankings is not visualized in terms of equivalent point values, but merely in terms of equivalent positions within each data set.

Table 7: Comparison of rankings

(Ranked top to bottom from most to least individualistic)

this study (student survey)	Hofstede Insights model
United States	United States
United Kingdom	United Kingdom

Brazil	Sweden
India	Japan
Russia	India
Sweden	Russia
China / Saudi Arabia	Brazil
Japan	Saudi Arabia
	China

In comparing these results, both rankings have the United States and United Kingdom as the most individualistic, and Brazil, India, Sweden and Russia all occupy the middle, though in different orderings. Most notable, perhaps, is that the Hofstede model features China decidedly as the least individualistic, with Japan somewhere in the middle, while the student survey placed Japan in the lowest position with China above it. On this point, while both rankings have a large gap between the most individualistic (USA) and the least (Japan or China), the Hofstede model has a gap between the most and least individualistic that is more pronounced, at 70% compared to only 45% for the student survey.

5.2.2 Dimension 2: feminine versus masculine

Table 8: Hofstede Insights score for - Masculinity

(Shown lowest to highest, on a 100 point scale with masculinity on the high end)

Sweden	5
Russia	36
Brazil	49
India	56
Saudi Arabia	60
United States	62
China; United Kingdom	66
Japan	95

In stark contrast to the student survey, the results and ranking for the Hofstede score have a greater range than the dimension of Individualism (20 points greater), and Japan is emphatically at the top of the list -- the score of 95 on the 100 point scale indicating an extremely masculine society in comparison to Sweden, which is seen as an extremely feminine society in this scoring system. In terms of scoring along the scale, the results for the US, UK, China, India, Brazil, and Saudi Arabia are similar to the student results. Russia scored much lower here, and while Sweden was ranked the lowest in both, it scored much lower with Hofstede Insights.

Table 9 below shows the comparison of Tables 2 and 8, allowing a side-by-side visualization of the relative rankings according to both the student survey and Hofstede's model.

Table 9 :Comparison of the student survey results to Hofstede's model
(Ranked top to bottom from least to most masculine)

this study (student survey)	Hofstede Insights model
Sweden	Sweden
Japan	Russia
Brazil	Brazil
UK	India
USA, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia
India	United States
	China, United Kingdom
	Japan

Comparing the two rankings for this dimension of cultural difference, the most salient results are Japan and Russia's opposite positions. Students results indicate that Japan was perceived as relatively similar to Sweden, while the Hofstede Insights scores consider the two nations as, essentially, polar opposites. The other nations share similar rankings in both columns, with Russia being the only difference. Hofstede Insights scored Russia well below the USA and China, while the students viewed them as roughly equivalent.

These observations being stated, it is important to note that the Hofstede ranking constitutes a much greater range of scores than the student surveys does (90% of the scale against 25% respectively). Therefore, for the students surveyed, all of the nations considered were perceived as being much more similar to one another and thus were bunched closer to the middle, while in the Hofstede scoring matrix, there was a much more even spread of results across the spectrum, indicating that most of these nations were each seen as noticeably distinct from one another.

5.2.3 Dimension 3: avoids uncertainty versus accepts uncertainty

Table 10: Hofstede Insights score for - Uncertainty Avoidance

(Shown lowest to highest, on a 100 point scale with uncertainty avoidance on the high end)

Sweden	29
China	30
United Kingdom	35
India	40
United States	46
Brazil	76

Saudi Arabia	80
Japan	92
Russia	95

According to Hofstede Insights, out of the nine countries considered, Russia was the least tolerant of risk, while nearby Sweden was the most tolerant of risk, with China a very close second. The United States ends up near the middle of the pack, in a similar position to how the students perceived it.

Table 11 below shows the comparison of Tables 7 and 8, allowing a side-by-side visualization of the relative rankings according to both the student survey and Hofstede's model.

Table 11 : Comparison of the student survey results to Hofstede's model
(Ranked top to bottom from least to most avoidant of risk.)

this study (student survey)	Hofstede Insights model
Sweden	Sweden
USA	China
Brazil	United Kingdom
UK	India
Saudi Arabia	United States
India; China	Brazil
Russia	Saudi Arabia
Japan	Japan
	Russia

While the rankings show similarities at the extremes, with Japan and Russia as the least tolerant and Sweden as the most tolerant of risk in both rankings, the difference in the range of scores between both studies is large. Student results fall within a range of only 25% of the scale, while the Hofstede scoring covers 66%. This difference in results indicates that students did not perceive any of the countries included in the survey to be particularly distinct from one another, merely that they perceived Japan as somewhat less tolerant of risk than Sweden. The Hofstede scoring makes it clear, by contrast, that Japan, as the most averse of risk, is in marked contrast to Sweden, as the most tolerant of risk. Moreover, Japan is nearly at the maximum possible score, while Sweden, far below, is still almost 30 points from the minimum possible score, indicating that all of these nations, despite the vast gap along this dimension between extremes, still skew slightly more towards risk avoidance.

5.2.4 Dimension 4: low context versus high context

For this final dimension, a points-based ranking is not possible with the Hofstede model, so only a

suggested ranking without an explicit value rubric is available with Morden (1999). As a comparison of differences with how countries are distributed by points along a spectrum is not possible, the discussion can move straight to a side-by-side comparison between Morden's rankings and the student responses. The table below shows this comparison.

Table 12: Comparison of student responses to Morden's (1999) rankings
(Ranked top to bottom from high- to low-context)

this study (student survey)	Morden suggested rankings
Japan	Japan
Sweden	China
Saudi Arabia	Brazil
Russia	Saudi Arabia
China	India
UK	Russia
India	UK
Brazil	Sweden
USA	USA

Comparing the results of the student surveys to Morden's suggested ranking of countries, the most salient result is the fact that both the United States and Japan occupy the same opposing ends of the spectrum in both rankings. Sweden is considered much closer to Japan by students, albeit as a more or less neutral entity on this spectrum, while Morden places the nation close to the United States on the low context side. Similarly, students perceived Brazil as a low context nation comparable to the United States, while Morden's ranking conceives of it being much more of a high context culture and more comparable to Japan and China. The other nations considered occupy similar positions in their respective rankings, although as with the other dimensions discussed, their ordering differs.

5.2.5 General observations

All in all, the most telling result was that students had a fairly clear perception of how Japan compared to the United States, consistently putting the two in clear opposition. At the same time, their placement of Japan relative to other countries only matched up well with the other studies for two of the dimensions: uncertainty avoidance and low - high context. The United States was likewise only comparably positioned in two of the dimensions: individualism - collectivism and low - high context. The United Kingdom, fared better, finding roughly equivalent positions in all four dimensions. As for the remaining countries, Saudi Arabia has roughly similar positions for all four dimensions as well, while Russia, China and India had roughly similar positions for two as well. Sweden presented challenges for students, it would seem, as their results matched for two of the dimensions but differed noticeably for the other two.

Lastly, students only matched up Brazil closely with the other studies for one dimension: masculinity - femininity.

6. Conclusion

That the results of the study were somewhat inconclusive was not a real surprise. Given that Hofstede and Meyer, among others, make a living consulting with businesses on matters regarding these dimensions, it would not be fair to assume that an average, untrained university student would intuitively be able to place a variety of well-known cultures in a meaningfully contrastive way. At the same time, students were at least aware of Japan's high-context communication and the United States contrastingly low-context communication. They were aware of this enough to also correctly put them as the two outside extremes of this dimension of national culture. Additionally, students were able, more or less, to match experts for Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. One could expect Japanese and Korean students to have a decent familiarity with China, but the results for the current study suggest that this may not be the case. Alternatively, it could be the case that students were simply not able to comprehend one or more of concepts adequately enough as they were explained to realize that Japan may not be as similar to China as they think, or in other cases, that the two countries may, in fact, be more similar in the eyes of experts than they themselves might imagine.

As for the pilot survey itself, I feel it fulfilled its purpose well enough. It indicated the possibility that students might need more training with some of the concepts. Uncertainty, for example, might make sense as a feeling, but as factor that effects cultural behavior on an organizational level, younger people may not have built up enough experience or done enough relevant reflection to realize its influence. Alternatively, as uncertainty at least appeared to be the most ambiguous dimension for the students, a future survey might be better served with a replacement, even though it was a dimension for which Japan scored very highly with Hofstede Insights. The difficulty to face in moving forward with such a survey as the one in the current study is that there is still the desire to gauge how students perceive the countries *without* special training. One possible next step to such an inquiry would be to compare results for university students from more diverse contexts, or potentially to compare the results between students who receive some sort of specialized training to those who only get the bare minimum with the survey questions.

I think there is value in culture training being part of any language course. The results of this paper tell me that it cannot be taken for granted that students, even in this more interconnected and internet-equipped world, develop all that much awareness at all for the cultural tendencies of other countries through the media they consume and the interactions they have with foreign teachers in school. Of course, without actually investigating such factors more fully, it is hard to say if they actually have all that much influence on how cultures are perceived in terms of various dimensions of national culture, including one's own. It is also not established yet if people from more multicultural countries would produce dissimilar results to those of the students. Perhaps students around the world, regardless of

their country, are not any more intuitively able to receive and apply the concepts presented in the four dimensions. Perhaps differences in national culture are not something that can be adequately handled without training. In the end, while national culture does not mean that individuals lack agency in how they operate, they can still be useful guides for understanding and anticipating how patterns of communication will differ between cultures. This knowledge in turn will have, I believe, a positive influence on language learning as it would promote more proficient communication skills by recognizing the driving force that cultural values have on patterns of communication.

References

- Fukuda, T. (2009). 'Japanese students' perception of American English.' *Jalt 2009 Conference Proceedings*. <https://jalt-publications.org/archive/proceedings/2009/E128.pdf> Accessed 04/07/21.
- Guerra, M.A., Murzi, H., Woods Jr., J.C and A. Diaz-Strandberg (2020). 'Understanding Students' Perceptions of Dimensions of Engineering Culture in Ecuador'. *ASEE's Virtual Conference 2020 (conference paper)*. <https://doi.org/10.18260/1-2--35429>. Accessed 04/07/21.
- Hall, E. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hofstede, G. (n.d.) 'The 6-D model of national culture'. *Geert Hofstede* (research website). www.geerthofstede.nl
- Hofstede Insights (n.d.) 'National Culture'. *Hofstede Insights (consultancy firm website)*. <https://hi.hofstede-insights.com/national-culture>. Accessed 04/07/21.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G. (2011). 'Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context'. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J. and M. Minkov (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (Rev. 3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G. and M. Bond (1998). 'The Confucius connection: From cultural roots to economic growth'. *Organizational Dynamics* 16, 5-21.
- Kapoor, S. and A. Wolfe (1995). 'American and Japanese Students' Values, Perceptions of American

- Values, and the Impact of U.S. Television on Such Perceptions'. *Intercultural Communication Studies V* (1).
- Liu, S., Volcic, A. and C. Gallois (2019). *Introducing Intercultural Communication: Global Cultures and Contexts*. London: Sage.
- Meyer, E.(2015). *The Culture Map: Decoding how people think, lead, and get things done across cultures (2nd Ed.)*. Philadelphia: Public Affairs.
- Morden, T. (1999). 'Models of National Culture – A Management Review'. *Cross Cultural Review* 6(1), 19-44.
- Yazawa, O. (2017). 'Students' Perception of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Japanese Teachers on English: The Effect on Students' Self-Efficacy and Emotional State'. *Eruditi*, 1(section 3), 61-72.
- Yoo, A.J. (2014). 'The Effect Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Have On Student-Teacher Relationships in the Korean Context'. *Journal of International Education Research* 10(2), 171-178.

Appendix A

Survey Questions

- 0.1 Have you ever lived or studied outside of your home country? If yes, where and for how long?
- 0.2 What country are you from?
- 1a. INDIVIDUALISM sees each person's needs and goals as more important than that of a whole group. Individualism values independence, self-reliance, and competition. COLLECTIVISM considers group needs and goals and what is best for the group (family, social circles, etc..) Collectivism values duty, harmony, and belonging. QUESTION: On a spectrum of 1 (individualism) to 9 (collectivism), where would you put your country?
- 1b. Using the same 1 (individualism) - 9 (collectivism) scale, pick at least two countries from the list, then select a number for each country. Do not use your country here.
- 2a. FEMININE cultures tend to be passive and cooperative and concerned with caring for others and quality of life. MASCULINE cultures tend to be assertive and competitive, and concerned with achievement and reward. QUESTION: On a spectrum of 1 (feminine) to 9 (masculine), where would you put your country?
- 2b. Using the same 1 (feminine) - 9 (masculine) scale, pick at least two countries from the list, then

select a number for each country. Do not use your country here.

3a. LOW-CONTEXT cultures rely on direct, explicit communication. People can understand what is being said without needing to know their conversation partners well. Talk has value. In contrast, HIGH-CONTEXT cultures rely on indirect, implicit communication. People need to be familiar with each other and their backgrounds (usually from relationships built slowly over time) in order to better understand what is meant by what is said and what isn't said. Silence has value. QUESTION: On a spectrum of 1 (low context) to 9 (high context), where would you put your country?

3b. Using the same 1 (low-context) - 9 (high-context) scale, pick at least two countries from the list, then select a number for each country. Do not use your country here.

4a. Some cultures value order and avoiding conflict. So, these cultures also typically AVOID UNCERTAINTY and prefer structure and more careful planning for every detail of any undertaking. Other cultures are more tolerant of risk and ACCEPT UNCERTAINTY in the same situations. These cultures have less need for all details or rules to be defined or decided before starting something. QUESTION: On a spectrum of 1 (avoids uncertainty) to 9 (accepts uncertainty), where would you put your country?

4b. Using the same 1 (avoids uncertainty) - 9 (accepts uncertainty) scale, pick at least two countries from the list, then select a number for each country. Do not use your country here.