

## ВЛИЯНИЕ ПОКАЗАТЕЛЯ ДИСТАНЦИИ ВЛАСТИ НА ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ «УЧИТЕЛЬ-УЧЕНИК-УЧИТЕЛЬ» В ПОЛИКУЛЬТУРНЫХ КЛАССАХ

**Аннотация.** Дистанция власти – это одно из четырех культурных измерений, разработанных Гертом Хофстеде, которое существует с разными индексами в разных культурах. Необходимо знать показатель дистанции власти в каждой культуре, чтобы избежать недопонимания. Целью данного исследования является изучение влияния дистанции власти на взаимодействие «ученик–учитель–ученик» в мультикультурных классах, в которых участвуют учащиеся из разных культур. Данные были получены с помощью анкетирования, в котором приняли участие 40 иностранных студентов из разных стран мира. В статье отмечается, что все они из стран с высоким индексом дистанции власти. Основное внимание в этом исследовании было уделено положительному и отрицательному влиянию дистанции власти на взаимодействие в классе между учащимися и преподавателями. Опираясь на качественные и количественные методы, автор провел анализ и установил, что учителя чаще контролируют показатель дистанции власти, что приводит к установлению отношений близости к студентам или обособленности от них. Дополнительно было определено, что дистанция власти оказывает эмоциональное влияние на учащихся, их общие результаты обучения и взаимодействие в классе. Материалы статьи способствуют культурным исследованиям, изучающим влияние дистанции власти на общение и эмоции; показывают элементы, связанные с высоким и низким индексом дистанции власти, и то, в какой степени это может положительно или отрицательно сказываться на взаимодействии между учениками и учителями в мультикультурной академической среде.

**Ключевые слова:** дистанция власти, отношения «учитель–ученик», дискурс в классе, эмоциональный эффект, поликультурный класс, культурные ценности, формы обращения, взаимодействие в классе.

## THE EFFECT OF POWER DISTANCE INDEX ON THE STUDENT-TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

**Abstract.** Power distance is one of the four cultural dimensions developed by Geert Hofstede, which exists with different indexes in different cultures. It is necessary to know the index of power distance in each culture, in order to avoid the miscommunication. The goal of this study is to explore the effect of power distance on student-teacher-student interactions in multicultural classrooms, which involve students from different cultural backgrounds. The data was obtained through a questionnaire, with the participation of 40 international students from different countries, also, it is noted that all of them are from countries with a high-power distance index. The focus of this study was on the positive and the negative effect resulted from the power distance, on the classroom interactions between the learners and the instructors. Being drawn on qualitative and quantitative methods, analysis showed that the teachers are more likely to have control over the index of the power distance, which results in having a relationship of closeness or apartness with the students. In addition to that, it has an emotional effect on the students and their overall outcomes and interactions in-classroom settings. The results contribute to the cultural studies that tackle the effect of power distance on communication and emotions. They show the elements associated with high and low power distance index, and to what extent it may positively or negatively affect the interactions between the students and the teachers in multicultural academic settings.

**Keywords:** power distance, teacher-student relationship, classroom discourse, emotional effect, multicultural classroom, cultural values, Address forms, classroom interactions.

### Introduction

Power is one of the dimensions of culture in Hofstede's typology. Power distance is a measure of how well-established a society's social hierarchy is. The Power Distance Index (PDI) gauges how much those at the bottom of the hierarchy are willing to acknowledge that social status or power are not allocated fairly in society. This metric is used by sociologists and psychologists alike. High power distance indicates that a certain culture accepts the imbalance in power. A high-power distance culture supports rank and authority and promotes bureaucracy. In such cultures the degree to which people, communities, or cultures accept inequality (such as inequality in power, position, or money) as inevitable, acceptable, or functional is referred to as power distance. Cultures with low power distance in contrast views regarding how people with different degrees of power should interact are shaped by the acceptance of power inequalities [6].

The degree to which individuals, communities, or civilizations accept the uneven distribution of pow-

er, authority, or money in society or organizations is referred to as power distance [5]. According to Daniels and Greguras [3], nations with low power distance accept both people with high and low power distance indexes. Acceptance of inequality is the key element of power distance (Schiller [8]). People who believe in power distance strongly are more willing to accept power imbalances in their companies, specifically in terms of attitude. They would thus support hierarchy and believe that subordinates should respect and follow their superiors (Kirkman [7]).

Power distance in academic settings can exist with different indexes and levels, it can be large in some classrooms while in others it is small. According to some scholars, power distance in classrooms causes students to become transitionally dependent on teachers, boosts students' classroom and learning anxiety, and places teachers in a position of extreme power, which makes them the dominant figure in the classroom (Wang [10]). Using this approach of high-power distance can seriously hinder students' ability to develop critical thinking, as well as their initiative and creativity in the classroom, as well as decrease student-teacher engagement and harm the teacher-student bond and relationship [10].

Power distance can be strongly witnessed in-classroom settings, but the degree in which the power distance is high or low can be generalized, due to the fact that it has a strong correlation with the cultural and the social settings. The index of power distance can greatly influence the teacher-student-teacher relationship, which is directly related to the communication and classroom interactions. In western countries, like the USA, power distance in classrooms is low, which allows the students to have freedom talking and having discussions with their teachers, as well as their ability to say what they like and what they hate without fear or hesitation. Whereas, in countries with high power distance, such as Asian and Arabic countries, the teacher is regarded as superior, that's why the students try their best to communicate formally and only within the scope of the lecture, because of the fear of punishment or offense.

According to some scholars, power distance in classrooms causes students to become transitionally dependent on teachers, boosts students' classroom and learning anxiety, places teachers in a position of extreme power, and makes teachers the dominant figure in the classroom (Wang [10]). Such a strategy can seriously hinder students' ability to develop critical thinking, as well as their initiative and creativity in the classroom, restrict student-teacher contact, and negatively affect the teacher-student connection (Xu & Fan [11]). Others contend, however, that because the teacher is a constructivist educator, the teacher's position of authority in the classroom has no bearing on whether or not the classroom becomes learner-centered (Biggs [2]). In his comments on power distance and cultural factors, Hofstede (2001) was unable to pinpoint the precise effect of power distance on learning in the classroom. While the majority of the research on combining power distance and instruction remains in the area of contrastive analysis and combining with individualism and collectivism (Alshahrani [1]; Spencer-Oatey [9]), another area is combining behavioral research, but there is a dearth of research in this area that addresses classroom equity.

### **Material and methods**

The main goal of this study was to identify the effect of the power distance index on the teacher-student-teacher relationship in multicultural classroom settings. Throughout the research a set of attitudes and opinions were discussed and analyzed in order to identify how can the power distance exactly affect either positively or negatively the relationship between the students and the teachers. The method used throughout the paper is a mixed method, through which quantitative and qualitative analysis was applied in order to address the implicit and explicit effect of this important cultural element that was originally introduced by Geert Hofstede.

The tool used for collecting data is a questionnaire that consists of ten (10) questions, some of them are choice questions, that were intended in order to get numerical data about the student preferences, for instance, students were asked about the way they like to address their teachers and how they like to be addressed, and if they are satisfied with the amount of power and freedom given to them by their teachers in-classroom settings. Also, the questionnaire contains open-ended questions, through which they can express their opinions and to justify their forementioned choices, such as, what the relationship between the teacher and student should be like? Justify your answer.

This study covers the population of 40 students who came from different cultural background, and who carry their studies at people's friendship university of Russia. Students involved in study are from Arabic countries, Asian countries, African countries and eastern European countries, also, it must be stressed out on the fact that all of them are from countries with a high-power distance index.

Data Analysis and Discussion

1. Where are you from?

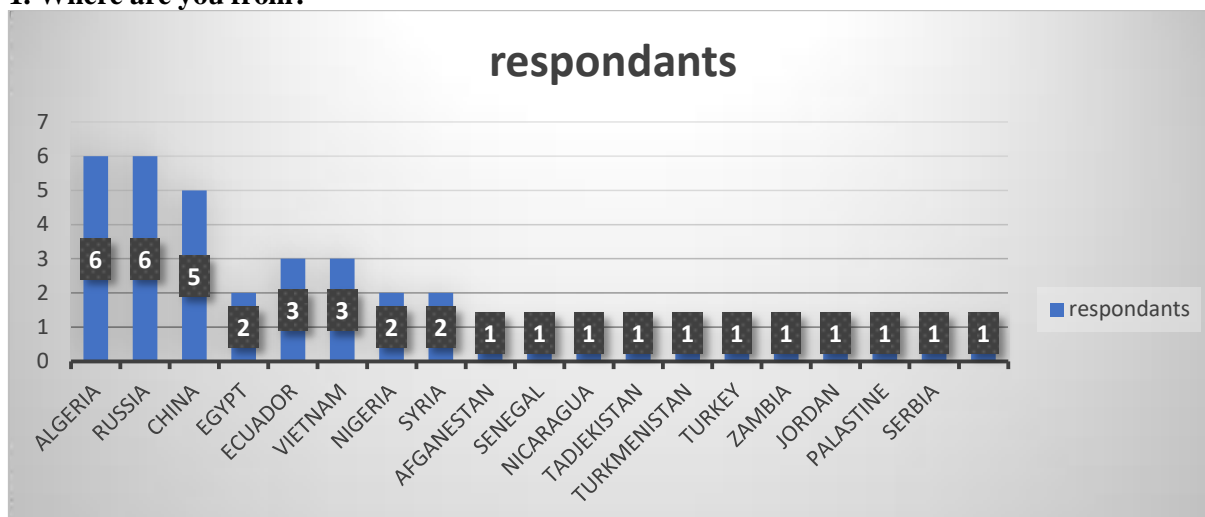


Fig.1.Nationalities of the participants

This study covers a number of students from different countries, who study in multicultural classrooms at people’s friendship of Russia. The higher percentages of the students belong to Algeria, China and Russia, while the rest of the percentages of (3 %-8 %) represents students from other countries such as; Egypt, Ecuador, Vietnam, Nigeria, Syria, Afghanistan Nicaragua, Bosnia and Serbia.

It is noticeable from the data collected that all the students who took part in this study are from High-power-Distance cultures, which is usually spotted in countries, such as Latin American countries, Arabic countries, Asian countries and African countries.

2. How do you address yourteacher?

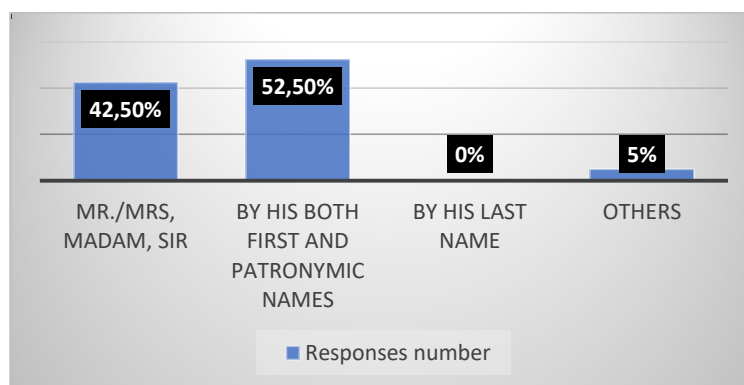


Fig.2. Forms of addressing teachers

Participants were asked about their preferred way of addressing their teachers/ instructors; The two first choices took the highest percentages, with a percentage of 42,5 % for “Mrs./Mr., Madam/sir”, While 52,5 % went for “calling the teacher by his first name and patronymic name”. 5 % of the participants chose to give other answers such as, **Teacher or Professor.**

The participants choices can be explained through the fact that they want to maintain a distance and respect between them and their teacher, due to the fact that the teacher is in a higher position than them. Most of the participants who went for the first choice (**Mrs./Mr., Madam/sir**) are from Latin American countries, Arabic countries, Asian countries and African countries, which demonstrates that this form of address is commonly used in classroom settings in these countries. While, all the ones, who preferred to call the teachers with their first names and patronymic names are from Russia and the eastern European countries, this is due to the fact that this form of address is commonly used in these countries.

### 3. How do you like to be addressed by your teacher?

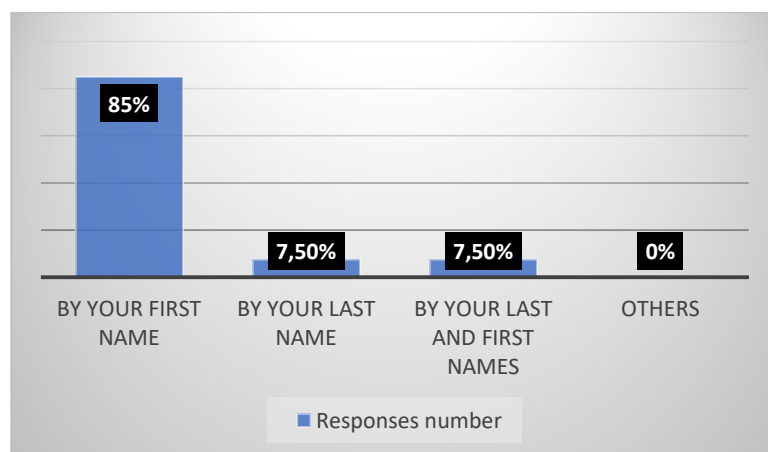


Fig.3. Preferred form of address for the students

The participants were asked to identify their favorite way of being addressed by their teachers, the greatest percentage went for the first choice, which is being called by their first name, while an equal percentage of 7,5 % went to the second and the third choices, which are being called by their last names and their first and last names.

The ones who opted for the first choice, tend to look for more of a friendly atmosphere and make them feeling closer to their teachers. While, the ones who opted for the second and the third choices are more likely to prefer professional settings and more distanced relationships.

### 4. Do you feel like being called by your teacher in a certain way can reflect the relationship between you and him?

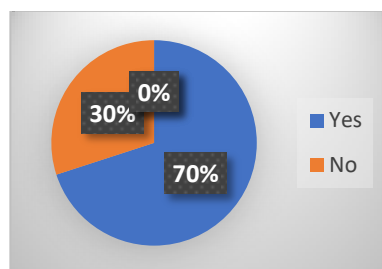


Fig.4. Students' responses towards using certain forms of address

Participants were asked about their opinions if they think that the addressing forms can reflect the relationships between them and their teachers. The majority of them (90 %) agreed that the way being called or addressed by their teachers can certainly mirror your relationship and how power is distributed, some of the participants justified their answers through saying that they feel closer and the distance between them and their teachers is narrow and it gives them a sense of comfort and completion:

(1) *"I feel like when the teacher calls me by my first name, the distance between us is narrow and we are closer to each other"*.

(2) *"When my PhD advisor calls me by my first name, I would feel very close."*

(3) *"It means there is a good relationship"*.

(4) *"I feel like I have done a good job and the relationship between us is good."*

(5) *"Yes, because being addressed by my first name, makes me feel more comfortable"*.

The 10% who agreed that being called in a certain way doesn't reflect anything, and it is just a standard element of politeness that exists in certain settings and must be done:

(6) *"No, it does not affect the relationship in any way, since the forms of address are established by society. and this is more of a politeness and an element of certain norms"*.

(7) *"In academic environment, the most important thing in a relationship between lecturer and student is how they transmit and absorb knowledge. The way they address each other is just needed to be proper and polite"*.

5. When your teacher talks to you, does he use **ТЫ/ВЫ**? Which one do you prefer more? Justify why.

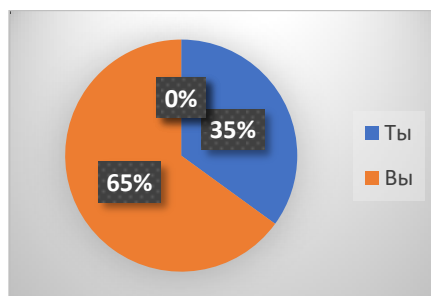


Fig.5. The use Personal pronouns **ТЫ/ВЫ** in classrooms

The participants were asked to identify the pronoun that the teacher uses in order to address them, 65% of the participants said that their teachers address them with **ВЫ** which is a more formal form of the personal pronoun “you”, while 35% said that their teachers call them using the pronoun **ТЫ** which is less formal. The participants were also asked to identify their favorite pronoun of address and to justify their choices. Some of them preferred the more formal pronoun, saying that it is more respectful and appropriate.

(8) *“I prefer **ВЫ**, it keep some distance, so, it is better.”*

(9) *“I prefer **ВЫ**, Because I want to get respected”.*

(10) *“I prefer **ВЫ**, because it feels like the respect is mutual in the teacher- student relationship.”*

While the others, who preferred the less formal pronoun, they said that it makes them feel closer to their teachers and more comfortable:

(11) *“I prefer **ТЫ**, because it feels like he knows me more and there is no huge power gap between us”.*

(12) *“I prefer **ТЫ**, because I prefer the relationship between us is less formal”.*

(13) *“I prefer **ТЫ**, because I feel much better and more comfortable”.*

This would suggest that, some students prefer to keep distance between them and their teachers, while most of the students prefer to eliminate the distance and to feel more comfortable while communicating with their teachers.

6. Do you feel the urge to address your teacher formally?

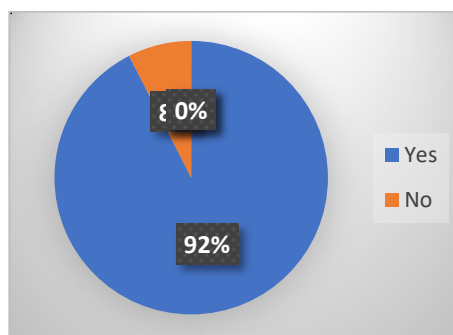


Fig.6. Students' responses towards being formal or informal with their teachers

Participants were asked to identify if they feel the urge to address their teacher formally. Most of them (92%) agreed that they have to address their teacher formally, because of many reasons related to certain factors such as, age, status and academic settings, also to the cultural background:

(14) *“Yes, I have to address my teacher formally, because in my country it is compulsory to address teachers formally. More like a tradition”.*

(15) *“Yes, because I always consider that there is a must to show respect in the way of speaking with teachers.”*

(16) *“Yes, I have to address him formally, Due to the difference in academic degree and age”.*

The 8% who said that they don't feel the urge to address their teachers formally, because they feel so close to their teacher and comfortable, so, they don't have to be so formal with them:

(17) *“My lecturers are friendly and gentle with students; we don't necessarily call them in a formal way all the time”.*

(18) *“The relationship between me and my mentor is both a teacher and a friend”.*

**(19) “Because I feel like I will be more comfortable”.**

It can be said that the students are aware of the unequal distribution of the power, and is that the teachers are in a higher position than them, that’s why it is necessary for the them to emphasize the distance through the formal address of the teachers.

**7. Do you believe that the degree of formality inside the classroom can affect the teacher-student-teacher relationship?**

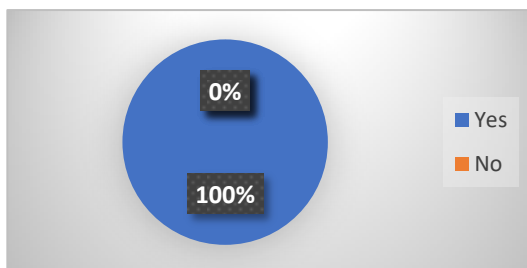


Fig.7. Students’ thoughts about using the degree of formality

Participants were asked to identify whether the degree of formality inside the classroom can affect the teacher-student-teacher relationship. all of them agree that the degree of formality can be a factor that can affect their relationship with their teachers.

This would suggest that the degree of formality inside the classroom has a great effect the teacher-student-teacher relationship, and it also mirrors how the power distance index exists in-classroom-settings, either high or low depending on the degree formality.

**8. Are you satisfied with the amount of power given to you by your teacher inside the classroom? Please say why?**

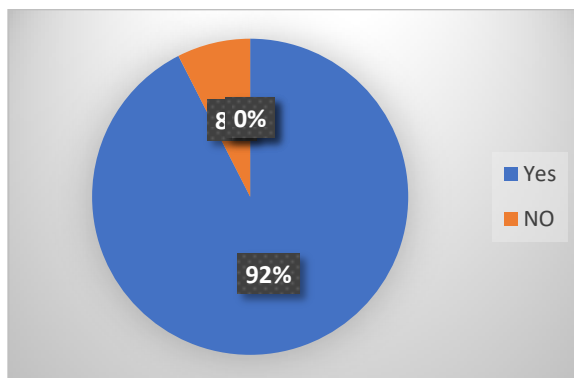


Fig.8. Students’ satisfaction of the amount of power given to them

Participants were asked about their satisfaction of the power given to them by their teachers inside the classrooms, 92 % of them said that they are satisfied and they have no problems with how power is distributed, saying that the teachers are listening to them and giving them the adequate power that they are in need for:

**(20) “I’m not the best student in the class, but the teacher still treats us equally and listens to me every time I speak”.**

**(21) “We need to have hierarchy in classroom, that's why I am ok with the inequality of power, also I am satisfied with the power given to me”.**

**(22) “I believe that the teacher should have a higher power, and the power given to the students should be less, in order to make sure that everything is under control”.**

**(23) “I am satisfied with the power given to me, the ability to speak freely, respond and organize other students helps me to develop my leadership skills”.**

**(24) “Satisfied because I have the opportunity to express my opinion”.**

Meanwhile, 8% of the participants weren’t satisfied with the amount of power given to them by their teachers, saying that some of the teachers are giving them negative energy and making them unable to express their thoughts freely which is somehow uncomfortable for them.

**(25) “No, no, there are some teachers who only give negative energy, and make me uncomfortable.”**

**(26) “Because it doesn’t let me be myself and I can't express my thoughts properly.”**

It can be said that the amount of power given to the students depends mainly on their teachers and their choice of keeping the relationship more formal or not. Also, it must be noted that the effect of the inequality of the power distribution can have an emotional effect on the students.

**9. Do you feel like the teacher has the absolute power inside the classroom? Please, say why.**

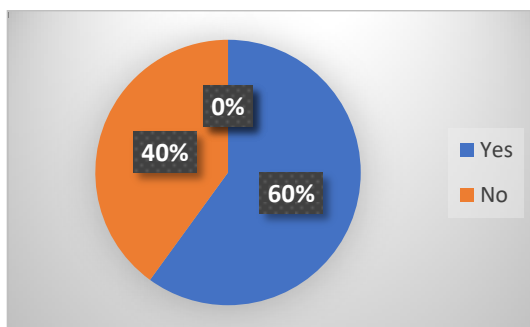


Fig.9. Students' thoughts about the distribution of power

Participants were asked if they think that the teacher has the absolute power inside the classroom, 60 % of them said yes, and said that the teacher has a higher status and he is the controller of the classroom that's why he has the absolute power:

(27) *"Yes, the teacher has the absolute power, because he is in a higher position than the students".*

(28) *"Yes. The teacher is at the top of the entire class. he is the leader".*

(29) *"Yes, because the teacher, by virtue of his position, can tell the students what to do and how to do it".*

Meanwhile, 40% of the participants said that teacher doesn't have the absolute power, he is only an instructor with a slightly higher power than the students, also, due the fact that they are given much freedom and power from their teachers to express their ideas:

(30) *"Our lecturer doesn't seem like showing their absolute power in classes. We focus on the lesson and the way we interact with each other."*

(31) *"Teachers may have more experience and knowledge than students, but students always have the right to express their views and contribute their opinions, not always 100% listening to the teacher."*

(32) *"No, because the teacher let us to participate, students have time to express their ideas about the topic we are talking about. If we have mistaken the teacher clarify them."*

(33) *"I feel like he has slightly higher power than the students. I don't think that there is such a thing as an absolute power."*

**10. How do you like the relationship between the teacher and student to be?**

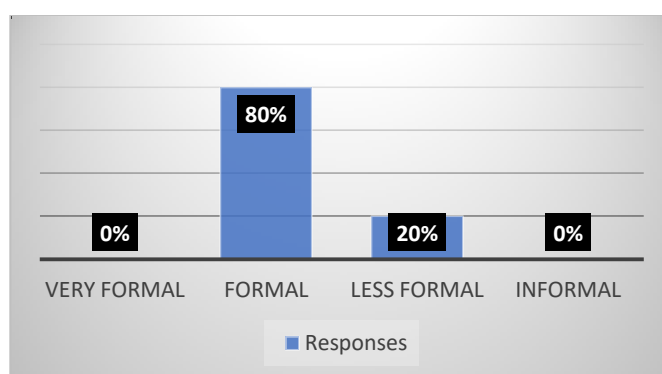


Fig.10. Preferred degree of formality for students

The participants were asked about how the relationship between the teachers and the students should be, the greatest percentage (80%) agree that the relationship should be formal, while 20% said the relationship should be less formal. None of them chose "Very formal" and "Informal".

Those who preferred the relationship to be formal, justified their answers through saying that they want to maintain the respect between them and their teachers, also due to the fact that this is an educational environment and the formality is a must, as well as, due to the teachers' high status:

(34) *“This is a relationship that requires mutual respect. In an educational environment, the relationship between lecturers and students needs a certain solemnity”.*

(35) *“It should be formal in my opinion, because in other way if teacher loses respect of the students, it is harder to lead the class”.*

(36) *“The formal relationship between students and the teacher can affect the overall outcomes of the whole educational process. The less it is the less outcomes are going to be”.*

(37) *“Well, formal because it has some flexibility with rules and protocols, but still emphasizes respect and professionalism”.*

While the others who preferred the relationship between them and their teachers to be less formal, said that would be much comfortable for them and much better to have a friendly atmosphere and that the very formal environment can negatively affect their relationships:

(38) *“Some formality that emphasizes the position of a teacher and a student is needed, but excessive formality only alienates them from each other, which, in my opinion, negatively affects the educational process”.*

(39) *“When teachers and students talk less formally, then the class will be less stressful, students will be more interested in learning, and the transmission of knowledge will also become easier with teachers”.*

(40) *“When relationship is very formal, students can be afraid of teachers. When relationship is less formal, students will be comfortable and enjoy the lessons”.*

### Discussion

The results of this research show that the index of power distance has an effect on the student-teacher-student relationships in multicultural classrooms with a different quantification. What must be noted at this research is that all of the students who took part in this paper are from countries with a higher power distance index, which makes it much easier to analyze their opinions and reactions towards certain items related to the classroom settings.

The findings showed that most of the participants prefer to use forms of address such as, Mr./Mrs., Madam/Sir, which is a commonly used form of address in African, Arabic, Latin American and Asian Countries. While those who address their teachers with their first and patronymic names are from the western European countries, especially in Russia, and that’s what was seen through the results. Also, it has been noticed that the majority of the participants have preferred being addressed by their first names by their teacher, which is a great sign that the students enjoy the fact that the index of power distance is lowered and the gap between them and their teacher is much narrow, adding to that, it gives them a feeling of accomplishment and comfort, and this what was confirmed through their responses.

Meanwhile, the findings showed that most of the students prefer being called by their teachers using the formal personal pronoun “**Вы**”, which can be explained through the fact that they consider it as a sign of a respect and positive politeness, but, some of them preferred the less formal personal pronoun “**Ты**” and considered it as a sign of closeness with their instructors, that would provide them with much comfort.

The majority of the students prefer to be formal with their teachers and to address them formally, due to many factors, such as; status, age gap and the academic settings, because as it is agreed upon in all cultures, especially in those with a higher index of power distance, the teacher is considered as a leader in academic settings, and he must be respected and treated formally, that’s why it is always believed that the teacher has the absolute power inside the classroom and this was confirmed by the results of this study. On the other hand, very few students had or have the urge to be formal with their teachers, due to the fact that their teachers have created an environment with a low index of power distance and this made them feel free and more comfortable, even some of them, described their relationship with their teachers as “Friendship” which might sound weird, in spite of the fact that all the participants (students) came from high-power-distance countries. Students were asked last to identify what kind of relationships they prefer to be between them and their teacher, the majority preferred it to be formal due to the fact that would keep the respect intact between them and their teachers, also to emphasize the roles of each of them inside the classroom, as well as to keep control inside the classrooms. Meanwhile, a minority of the participants preferred the relationship to be less formal, so that would create a more of a friendly and comfortable environment for them. None of the participants opted for the informal relationship between them and their teachers.

From the above results and analysis, it can be said that the relationship between the students and the teachers in intercultural classrooms mainly depends on the teachers’ control of the index of the power distance, which implies that the teacher has the control over the kind of the relationships he wants to build with



his students despite their cultural backgrounds. Also, it is noted that the power distance is not just a factor that affects and controls the relationships between the teachers and the students, but also, it can reflect how this relationship is, either characterized with closeness or apartness.

### Conclusion

Through this paper, we investigated the effect of power distance index on Student-teacher-student interactions in multicultural classrooms. We aimed to find out the different effects either positive or negative on the student-teacher relationships, and how can power distance acts as an active factor in academic settings. The findings show how cultural background can have a relationship with the overall settings of the classroom, also, how it can be related to the power distance index. This suggests that both learners and educators need to be aware of one another's backgrounds in order to prevent any negative effects that could result in misinterpretation and miscommunications. Since this study was performed on the limited material, its results are preliminary, and further studies are needed. Nevertheless, the findings appear to confirm that the power distance index can have an effect on students-teacher relationships. For teachers involved in multicultural classes, it is distinctly important to be aware of index of power distance and how to control it, in order to prevent negative effects on the students and to create a comfortable emotional atmosphere.

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### Сведения об авторе

*Сухила Лайш* – аспирант кафедры иностранных языков Российского университета дружбы народов, Москва, Россия; laiche.souhilaa@gmail.com.

### Author:

*Souhila Laiche*, PhD Student, Department of Foreign Languages, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russia; laiche.souhilaa@gmail.com.