Tampere University of Applied Sciences

Cultural differences Finland vs. Egypt
A guidebook for Finnish teachers

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ABSTRACT

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Cultural differences Finland vs. Egypt

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In today´s diverse world everybody needs cultural awareness and intercultural competence. This research aims to analyze the cultural differences between Finland and Egypt. The goal is to support TAMK Global Education to export high-level education to Arab countries.

The research question answered in this project is: What are the most relevant cultural differences between Finland and Egypt that Finnish teachers should understand in order to work successfully in Egypt?

The qualitative approach was chosen and in the empirical part of the study the data was collected by interviewing the Egyptians who are living in Finland and have background in higher education in Egypt or in Finland. The theories of cross cultural communication were reviewed and the theoretical framework formed from psychologist Geert Hofstede´s Cultural Dimensions model and Richard D. Lewis´s Cultural Types model.

The key finding of the work is that the most significant differences between the cultures are at the areas of religion, national values, communication style and collectivism. The differences are noticeable in issues related to the power distance and collectivism which are high in the Egyptian culture compared to Finland where the interpersonal ties are loose and individuals are equal.

From the interviews and conclusions is created a guidebook for a Finnish teacher in the form of practical advices. Updating this guidebook by interviewing the Egyptian university staff and the Finns participating in the project would deepen the commissioner´s understanding of the cultural differences and help them in problem solving and developing their performance.

Key words: cross cultural communication

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In today´s diverse world everybody needs intercultural competence which comes as a result of intercultural learning. More cultural awareness, understanding and dialogue are needed especially in educational field. Gaining intercultural competence is a life-long process and teachers cannot become fully interculturally competent during their academic teacher education. Teachers, however, have an important role in the process of affecting the next generations and teaching them to become more interculturally competent in the future.

Education plays a significant role in this process; globalization has affected education. Both students and teachers, study and work in exchange in different cultures and wider than ever before. Multiculturalism has chances and challenges, but it can become a success factor in organizations as well as boost personal careers. Knowledge and awareness of cultural differences, interpersonal skills, being able to build networks and tolerance are factors that affect the work efficiency.

At the European Union level, the higher education and research are given a high priority and EU has a lot of continuous programmes to support international exchange of students and teachers. Also Finland is supporting its educational system export which has a huge global potential. In December 2018 the Finland Education Export Center was opened in Helsinki. Recently the commissioner of this thesis, TAMK Global Education has started cooperation with Egyptian University of Alexandria in Egypt. The project exports Finnish high-level education to Egypt.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of this work is to research and analyze the cultural differences between Finland and Egypt. The mission is to find the key areas where misunderstandings and conflicts may occur. The goal is to support the commissioner in its mission to export education and create a global brand.

As an outcome of the research a guidebook will be given to the commissioner´s use. It will provide cultural knowledge for TAMK teachers to help them to be successful when working in Egypt and representing TAMK.

1.3   Research questions

The research question answered in this project is: What are the most relevant cultural differences between Finland and Egypt that Finnish teachers should understand in order to work successfully in Egypt? In addition to that the following sub-questions rise up:

1. What would be the challenging issues in the interaction between Finnish teachers and Egyptian students?
2. What would be the challenging issues in interaction between Finnish teachers and the Egyptian parents?
3. What are the organizational cultural differences between Finland and Egypt?

1.4   Methodology

This research belongs to the field of social science where the aim is to understand human behaviour, their beliefs, practices, values and cultural phenomena. Social science research aims to inquire and contribute to knowledge to improve practice in some fields. It is about to uncover and understand the nature of a phenomenon or experience from the participant´s perspective. Qualitative research is a major form of study in social science.

According to Sharan B. Merriam " a ... characteristic of all forms of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis. Since understanding is the goal of the research, the human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data". (Merriam 2002, 5.)

Due to the complex nature of the research project, the principal data collection method used is qualitative research. It is an efficient method to evaluate the cultural norms and the importance of statuses in Egyptian culture.

The data for this project is collected in order to get deep understanding of the motivation, emotions and the behavior of the target group. The chosen method is interviews and the data is collected from the Egyptians living or studying in Finland at the academic level and a Finnish teacher.

Interviews have certain strengths as research method. The interview goes deep into the subject. It has a lot of flexibility, possibility to customize and adapt the conversation to the interviewees´ interactions. It opens an interviewer a possibility to gather information also through body language. Elimination of confusing questions and rephrasing them is possible immediately to avoid misunderstandings, which is not possible in quantitative research. In surveys it is not possible to see emotions like during the interview. (Roller & Lavrakas 2015, 56-57.) In addition, the researcher can check with the respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses (Merriam 2002, 5).

The author has done five deep interviews with the Egyptians living in Finland. Each interview lasted several hours. The Egyptians were very helpful and eager to contribute to the thesis with their experience. All of them have background in higher education in Egypt or in Finland or even in both countries. Also a Finnish participant of the project from TAMK was interviewed.

The discussions were in English and in Egyptian Arabic and therefore the misunderstandings could be avoided. According to Alasuutari the researchers own way of life can differ to such extend from the culture he or she is exploring that is simply impossible to understand or accept what is going on. The case is different in studies of one´s own culture everything seems so clear and so self-evident that it all verges on the banal. (Alasuutari 1995, 135). The writer sees his own background as an advantage because Egyptian culture is not completely new for him but neither is he grown inside it.

1.5   Limitations and structure of the thesis

Even though the culture has been widely studied over times from various angles it is still a difficult and complex field of study. Moreover, there is not a lot of related research concerning the cultural differences between Finland and Egypt. More information would have been possible to gain by observing the national and organizational culture locally in Alexandria in Egypt. Due to the limitations of time and resources it was not possible for the writer to meet and interview the staff in the Egyptian university to find out their expectations for the educational programme and Finnish teachers. To compensate this the writer has chosen the interviewees with academic background. Majority of them have studied in universities in Egypt and in Finland.

One of the limitations of this project is related to the credibility of the answers given in the interviews. Are the Egyptians willing to share their opinions of Finnish culture and give honest feedback even if it would not flatter the Finns? The author feels confident that his own, similar background helps building trust and openness in the communication. Also, the shared common language with the interviewees will help in avoiding misunderstandings and false interpretations.

In the following chapters will be introduced the theories of the topic, cross cultural communication and the significant features of the Egyptian culture will be presented. Also, the differences between Finnish culture and Egyptian culture are described together with the theoretical framework. The results of the interviews are explained in chapter 4 and the research questions are answered in the chapter 5. Together with the conclusions driven in chapter 6 these last two chapters form the cultural competence guidebook for a Finnish teacher.

2 TAMK GLOBAL EDUCATION

The commissioner or this thesis is TAMK Global Education. It is a separate organization from Tampere University of Applied Sciences, even though both institutions work closely and collaborate at different levels. TAMK Global Education is one of the leading and innovative educational organizations in Finland. Its mission and belief are that education is the best companion for people, institutions and nations to have a better world.

TAMK Global Education provides innovative and tailored programs of high-quality education for local market and export in a diverse range of countries. The know-how and the expertise gained through continuous and intensive research and applied projects help to face the challenges in today´s environment and in the future. Education has to adapt to the continuously changing, fast increasing technology and globalisation which is creating multicultural demands for education.

TAMK Global Education offers a variety of services such as 21st Century Educators, Emerging Trends in Education, VET Teachers for the Future, Consulting, Workshops and Post Graduate Diploma-21st Century Leaders in Education. These programmes are designed to improve education worldwide together with the partners.

As the result of characteristic Finnish virtues, resilience and efficiency, TAMK Global Education has proven its successes through the export partners, deals and business operations globally. In the figure 1 are presented the ongoing educational programmes that TAMK Global Education has around the world. The new projects are starting with Egypt, Chile and China. TAMK Global Education is dedicated to make their innovative, top-class education available worldwide.

FIGURE 1. TAMK Global Education ongoing educational programmes (https://www.tamk.fi/web/tamken/tamk-global-education)

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Culture as a research topic

From the anthropological point of view the culture is a shared set of values, concepts, ideas and rules of behaviour that exist in the minds of social group members and allows them to function, communicate and work effectively together. Culture is a complex concept and various research models and methods are required to understand cultural behaviour and to shed light to research questions. In the following chapters the key concepts and some of the famous and useful culture models that researchers have developed are introduced.

3.2 Definitions of the concepts

Definitions of culture and cross cultural communication are necessary because they are the key concepts on which this research is based.

According to psychologist Geert Hofstede culture is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or a category of people from others" (Hofstede G, Hofstede J. & Minkov M. 2010, 6). Culture shapes our lives. We are unconscious of its existence and it makes us who we are.

In his view the culture could be compared to a computer operating system. The computer´s personality and characteristics are defined by the software that it runs it. The same could be said about human beings; it is the culture that makes us all who we are. It is the software of the human mind.

The importance of intercultural communication and competence is growing in business and education because of the globalization. There can hardly be any culture without communication and the communication shapes the culture. Cross cultural communication or intercultural communication is interaction among people of different cultures. The pioneer of this field of study has been Edward T. Hall with his book The Silent Language, 1959. Hall defines intercultural communication as a form of communication that shares information across different cultures and social groups.

3.3 Hofstede´s culture model

Psychologist Geert Hofstede developed the so-called Onion model to enable to understand culture.

According to Hofstede the culture is formed by layers and he compares culture to an onion. The core of the onion are the values, invisible - but existing - they define what is right and what is wrong. The core values of any culture are learned in the early development, transferred by the parents in the childhood without us realizing them. The values can be seen through the behavior of an individual.

The values are anchored deep down in us. It is not possible to see them from the outside. It needs investigating and research to understand why a certain culture behaves the way it does. The values will not change over time if the person has lived in the same culture his first ten years. Culture is maintained through customs, traditions and rituals

The rituals are all the activities and gestures that a group performs, the rituals could be inherited through religion or customs or even created. One of the many characteristics of the rituals is that it has a place and time, for example celebrating Christmas in December for Christians. Chinese New Year changes according the moon calendar. The pilgrimage for Muslims is in Mecca in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The heroes' layer represents the beloved and appreciated personality type. The type could be real or imaginary. They are the models of behavior inside a culture group.

Symbols are words, gestures, pictures or objects that have a certain meaning for those who share the culture and they are only recognized by them. Symbols belong to the visible layer of the culture like language, food, clothing etc.
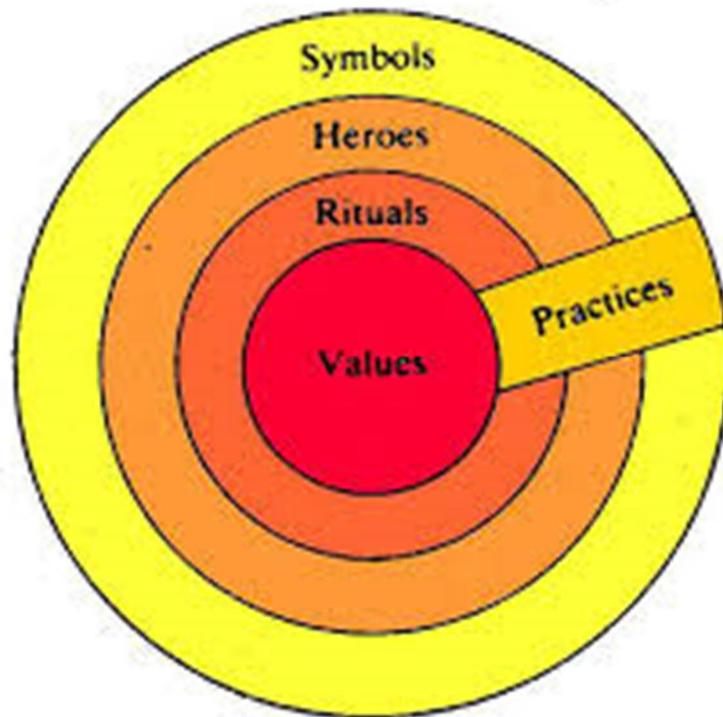
FIGURE 2. Hofstede culture (Onion) model (www.hofstede.com, 2019)

3.4 Hall´s iceberg model

Additional information about culture gives the iceberg model that an American anthropologist Edward T. Hall presented in his book Beyond Culture in 1976.
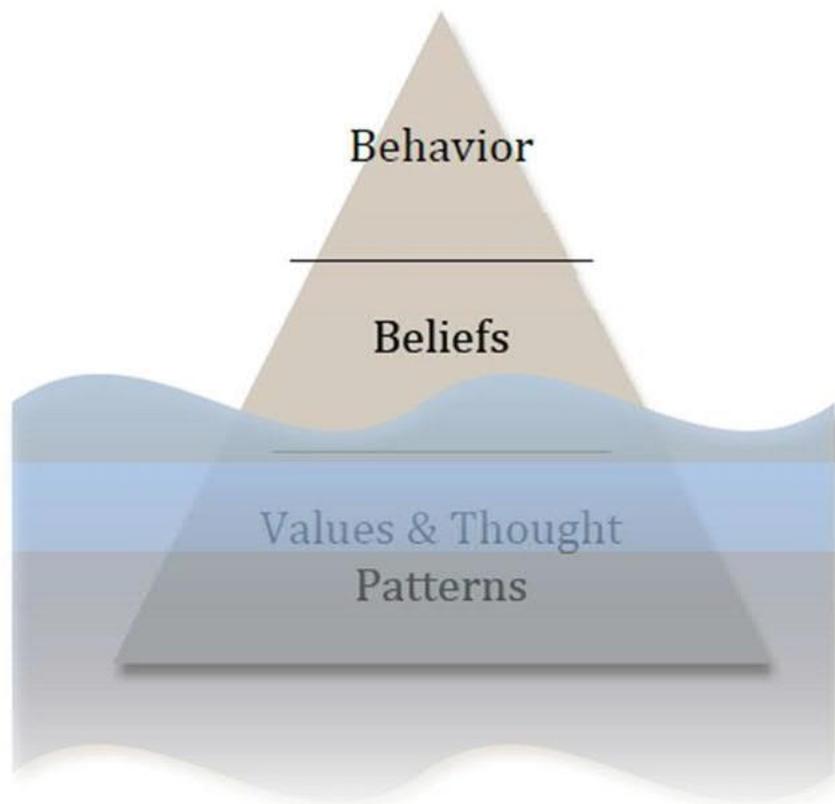
FIGURE 3. Hall iceberg model (Hall, 1976)

One of the best and easiest ways to understand the culture is through the iceberg model/metaphor. When we look at an iceberg, we can see only a tiny bit of the gigantic glacier. The massive part is hiding under the water, as it is in the culture. We can only see the superficial side (small part) such as the language, the food, the music, the dress, the behavior and its superficial, apparent interactions. We cannot see or understand the motives behind the actions; why they behave in a certain way, differently compared to another culture.

3.5 Hofstede Cultural Dimensions model

The basis of the Hofstede Cultural Dimensions model is in his large survey within the IBM organization in 56 countries in 1970. More than 1000 interviews were done from various angles. The cultural dimensions were identified for 76 countries and each one of them has a scale from 1 to 100 for each of the five dimensions which are set out in a structural model using versus construction.

| −		+
Equality	**Power distance**	Inequality
Risk tolerant	**Uncertainty avoidance**	Risk intolerant
Collectivistic	**Individualism**	Individualistic
Collaboration & cooperation	**Feminity/masculinity**	Power & competitiveness
Tradition & short term	**Time perspective**	Future & long term
Normative repression	**Restraint vs indulgence**	Free satisfaction
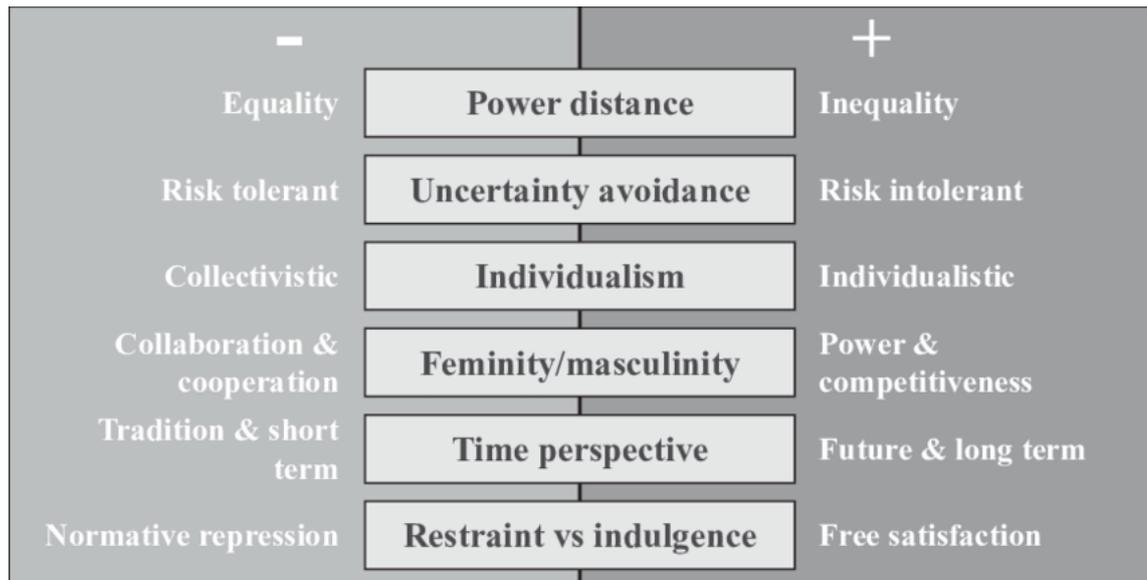
FIGURE 4. Hofstede Cultural Dimensions model (Hofstede, 2010)

3.5.1 Power distance

This dimension deals with the fact that individuals in the society are not equal. The dimension is the extent to which members of an institution or organization expect and accept the power distribution. The inequality that exists is accepted by both people, with, or without power.

3.5.2 Collectivism and individualism

This dimension deals with the degree of interdependence in the society. A high score in a individualism means that the interpersonal ties and connections are loose, and people value their time and freedom highly. In a society with more collectivism people are more loyal and respect each other more. The self-image of a person is expressed by himself (I) or by the group he belongs to (we).

3.5.3 Uncertainty avoidance

This dimension deals with the fact that the future in unknown and non-predictable, that leads to the question should we do something about it or leave as it is. The society that scored high in this dimension tend create instruction to avoid the uncertainty.

3.5.4 Femininity and masculinity

The masculinity dimension indicates that the society is driven by the accomplishments, the success, being the best is important. The femininity dimension means that the society appreciates more the quality of life as a symbol of success. Members care for each other.

3.5.5 Short term and long-term orientation

This dimension shows how the society is linked to the past, its tradition and customs. The link between the present and the past is important when facing challenges.

3.5.6 Restraint and indulgence

This dimension deals with the extent to which the members of the society try to control their desires and impulses. Indulgent society aims to enjoy life and having fun while the restraint society aims to suppress desires by setting social rules.

3.6 Richard D. Lewis Model

In his book "When Cultures Collide" (2006) the English linguistic Richard D. Lewis divided the culture in three categories; linear-active culture, multi-active culture and reactive culture. He came up with the dimension after he conducted and analysed an online survey with 75 000 answers from different nationalities. Lewis survey was collected from wider sample than Hofstede´s which was done among IBM engineers.
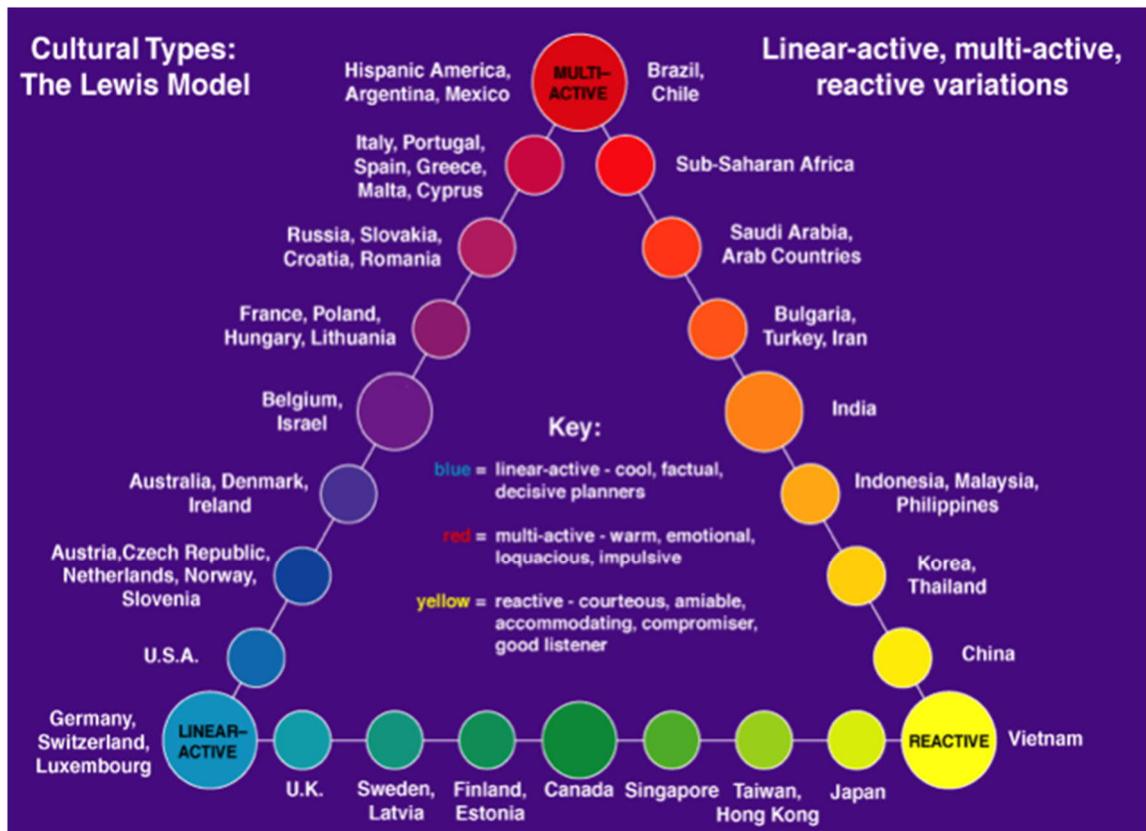
FIGURE 5. Richard D. Lewis Cultural Types Model (Lewis. 2006)

Linear-active culture: The people in this category give high importance to the effective use of time both at work and private life. Business is conducted by plans, life activities are organized by schedules and the communication between the members is direct. As an example of this dimension are Germans. It can be seen that the Japanese as reactive people are far from the Germans in Lewis model.

Reactive culture: The people under this category, typically in the Asian cultures, are very polite and calm, they do not like confrontation and avoid it. Hierarchy in the society is strong. Doing business takes time.

Multi-active culture: Multi-active people are full of energy, lively and dynamic. They give high importance to family and discussion, language is important. The concept of truth is conceptual. Small talk first, then business. Communication includes noticeable body language. The Spanish, Italians and Arabs belong to this group.

When we look at the Lewis Model, we can see that the Arab countries and Finland are located rather far from each other. Finns are more linear-active than reactive, and the Arabs are orientated more to multi-active dimension. This situation increases the challenges in cross cultural communication between the members of these groups, the Finns and the Egyptians.

3.7 Egyptian culture
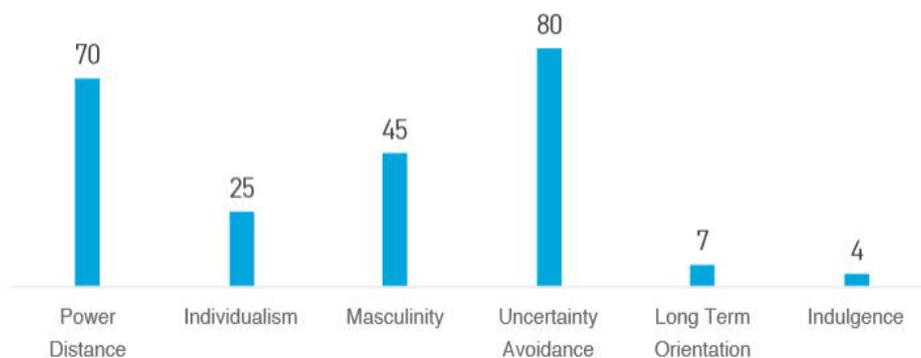
FIGURE 6. Hofstede dimensions in the Egyptian culture
(https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/egypt)

By analysing the Egyptian culture with Geert Hofstede and Richard Lewis models, we can deduct the following features:

1. High in power distance dimension means hierarchy in the society is strong. All the members of the society are not equal, communication goes in one-way direction mostly up to bottom. Decisions are taken only by the top management in the organization.

2. High score in collectivism dimension meaning each person in the society cares for the other members. Help and support are expected and rewarded. High importance is given to family, friends and relationships.

3. Very high in masculinity dimension means that the members of the society are driven by the financial success instead of the quality of life which is seen less important.

4. Very low in uncertainty avoidance means that the society is less organized. As the future is unpredictable there is no need to control it, only a minimum planning is required.

5. Low score in long-term orientation dimension shows that the society gives high importance to the past when making decisions concerning the future.

6. Low score in indulgence dimension means that the Egyptians cannot express their desires freely.

3.8 Finnish culture
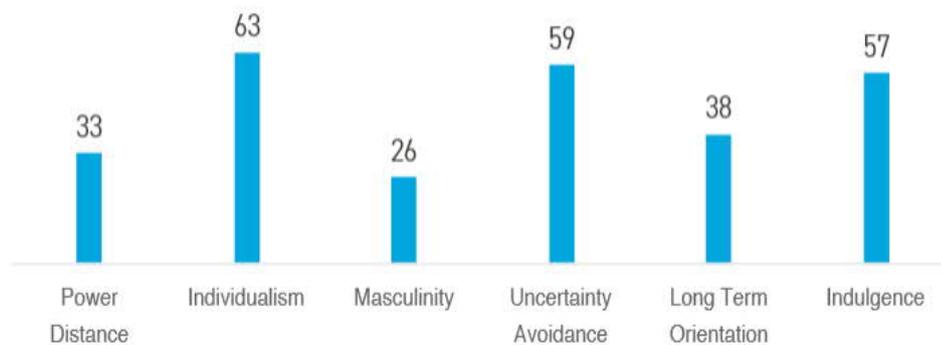
FIGURE 7. Hofstede dimension in Finnish culture
(https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/finland/)

By analysing the Finnish culture with Geert Hofstede and Richard Lewis model, we can deduct the following features:

1. Very low in power distance dimension, meaning in Finland there is a flat society where all the members of the society are equal. High importance to communication is given and it goes in two ways style. Decisions are taken after long discussions and debating.

2. High score in individualism; each person in the society is taught in the childhood to look after himself or herself. Family ties are close only with the immediate family but of the rest of the relatives are more distant.

3. Very low in masculinity; the members of the society care for each other and the quality of life matters often more than the financial success.

4. Very high in uncertainty avoidance; the society is very organized, all the issues related to the life and organization are planned ahead to avoid surprises. The future is unpredictable, but you can affect your destiny.

5. Below average score in long term orientation dimension, meaning the society does give certain importance to the past and history. However, the future decisions are taken according to the present.

6. Average score in indulgence dimension meaning that the Finns can express their desires freely with no retention and accomplish them.

3.9 Combination table of Finland and Egypt; Hofstede dimensions

	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long Term Orientation	Indulgence
Egypt	70	25	45	80	7	4
Finland	33	63	26	59	38	57
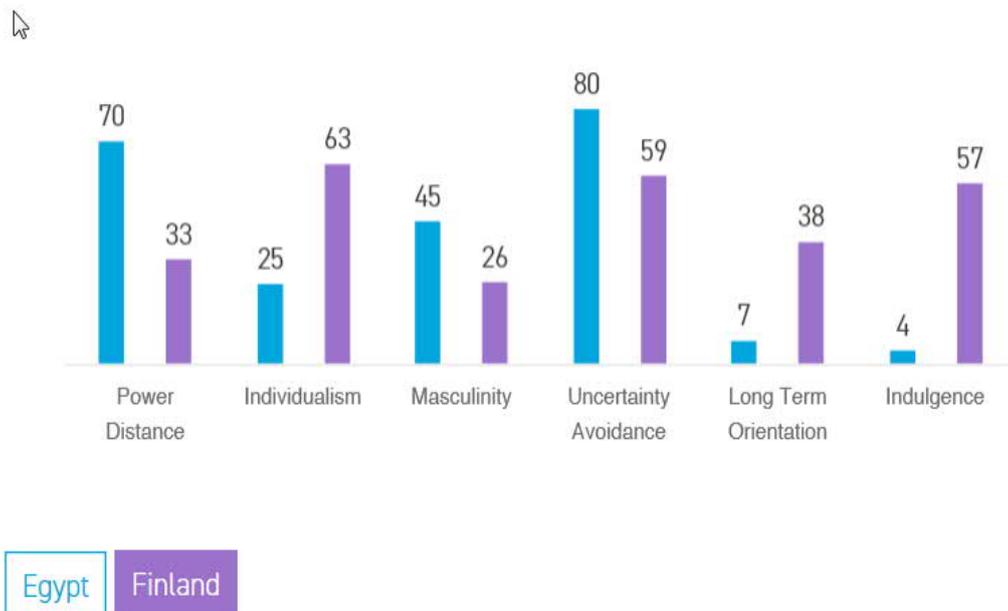
FIGURE 8. Differences in Hofstede dimensions between Egypt and Finland (https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/egypt,finland)

In the table above can be seen how Finland and Egypt have scored in Hofstede cultural dimensions. The differences are noticeable in every dimension but especially in issues related to the power distance and indulgence.

3.10 Finland compared to Egypt in Lewis model

From the figures 9 and 10 below can be seen the difference between the communication styles in the two cultures. Figure 9 describes how an Egyptian will proceed with his speech when discussing or when giving a presentation. Any conversation, business-related or general topic, starts with prolonged small talk. Then the approach is widened to more expansive levels. When the resistance or objections occur, the Egyptian will go even deeper to the subject and explains his opinion with more talk to clarify his message. In the end the information may be still unclear.
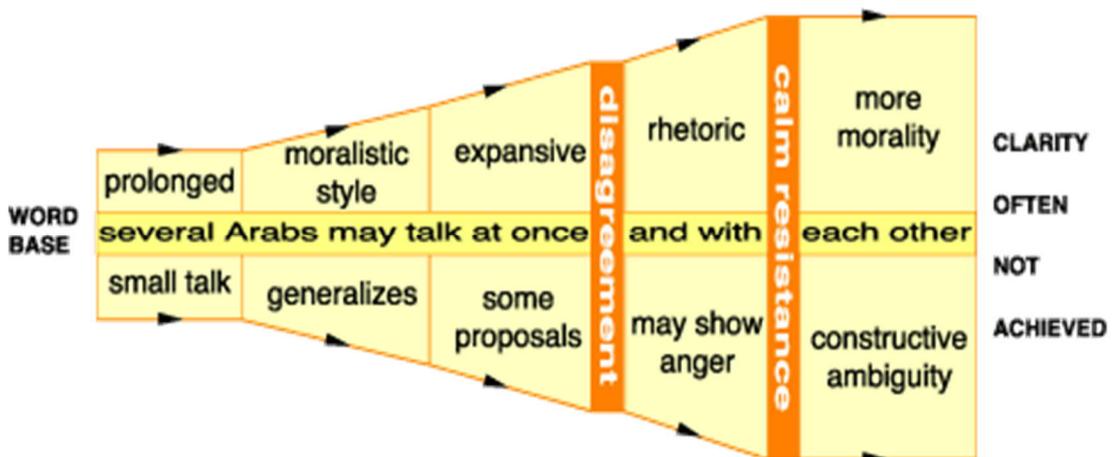
FIGURE 9. Egyptian communication style (https://www.crossculture.com)

FIGURE 10. Finnish communication style https://www.crossculture.com)

Finns typically use minimal speech to make their point in the discussion. If something is unclear and there is a need to clarify the message, a Finn starts summarizing the key points. Unlike the Egyptian, a Finn uses even less words to make a difference between the important and less meaningful aspects of the issue.

These opposite ways in communication can cause confusion and misunderstandings because the discussing partners have completely different expectations how meetings and discussion should go.

4 EGYPTIAN AND FINNISH CULTURES – LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Analysis of the interviews

4.1.1 General overview of Egyptian culture and society

One of the core values of Egyptian culture is the religion. Majority of the population is Muslims but Egyptians are tolerant towards their Christian minority also. The religion is present in everyday life; the calls for prayers can be heard, the religious public holidays are celebrated and fasting at the time of Ramadan is a norm. However, the religion is a private issue. Like one interviewees put it: "You cannot know from the person how deep are his religious feelings until you have had deep discussions with him".

The collectivity in the Egyptian culture is high. People prefer doing things together with the family and friends rather than alone. They gather together to spend free time in cafeterias, with colleges and family. The attitude is grown to people in the childhood which is normally spent in a large group of family and kids from the neighborhood. In addition, the loyalty towards the family is expected as well as hospitality, generosity, help and support among the family members and even wider, between the friends. The one who has a chance to help the less fortunate friend does it willingly from the goodness of his heart. Individualism is not seen as a positive value, rather it expresses selfishness.

The generosity applies to time also; people are willing to give time to each other. Time has a different value in Egypt than in Finland. The attitude towards time is more flexible. This applies to friends and free time. It does not mean that at work or in official meetings would be appropriate to be late.

The Egyptians are proud of their history as a place where civilization was born. However, this conservatism and resistance to change slows down the embracing of the innovations and new technology.

In every aspect of Egyptian life, in every manifestation of its culture, a deep conservatism can be observed. This clinging to the traditions and ways of earlier generations was the particular strenght of the Egyptians. (Lewis 2006, 409.)

Honor is one of the ancient Bedouin values and it still has important position in the culture. Bringing shame to the family is not acceptable and for example failing with studies or violating the law would be dishonorable.

4.1.2 Power distance

Egypt is a class divided, hierarchal society. All the economic classes exist from the very poor to enormously rich. The power distance is high. It was mentioned in the interview that people in Egypt are on the different level of Maslow´s hierarchy of needs. The ones who can hardly survive to fulfill their basic needs are at the other end of the power while the top of the society uses the power. As in the other high power distance societies too, both the less powerful and the ones with the power are accepting the situation. In Egypt the position in the society affects everything. A person is treated according to his social class, wealth, education, contacts etc.

When interviewed a Finn from TAMK working in the project confirmed that the power distance was noticeable compared to Finnish organizations. ”Reporting to the superiors and micromanagement was common”. A Finnish teacher cannot take the same level of freedom in work that exists in Finland granted in Egypt where interference from the higher level is normal.

4.1.3 Communication

Indirect communication is common in feature in Arabic language in general and Egypt is not an exception. The interviews confirmed the Lewis model characteristic that the Egyptians are multi-active, full of energy, like to express their feelings strongly, are emotional and use a lot of body language. For example long handshakings and kissing on the cheek is common. These gestures are signs of friendship and attachment. Egyptians are sweet-talkers, eloquence and mastering the language is highly valued. Open confrontation or embarrassing others is

avoided because loosing face or putting another person is shame is not accep-
table.

In organizations due to the high power distance the communication style is often
one-way from top to down. Respectful behavior is a part of the culture everywhere
in a daily life from marketplaces to universities. It is very common to call the per-
son by his title; Mr, Mrs or Doctor especially in the formal situations and when
meeting a person who has higher position.

4.1.4 Uncertainty avoidance

Because of the Islamic fatalism the Egyptians do not plan with long-term axis.
The uncertainty avoidance is very low, and people accept that the plans don´t
come true. The destiny of a person is set already in advance.

4.1.5 Masculinity-feminity

One of the key features in the Egyptian culture is masculinity dimension. The
score was 45. Success in material things like money, status and prestige is de-
sirable cause it brings respect. A good example of how prestige can be more
important than the quality of life was given by a respondent in an interview:

An Egyptian ophthalmologist surgeon had his own business in Egypt. He had his
own staff serving him at work and at home. He immigrated with his family to Ca-
nada and after a short stay there he decided to return back to Egypt. His children
stayed in Canada. His position in Canada which is feminine society did not please
him. He rather had his higher status in Egypt than higher quality of life in the North
America.

4.1.6 Collectivism

The collectivism has different forms in Finland and Egypt. In Finland the citizens
are members of the society and their connection with each other comes through
the government. The welfare society takes care of its members and people pay
willingly taxes to support the system that offers them a lot of personal freedom.

In Egypt the security comes from the family and less is expected from the government and society. The duties towards the family are stronger. Parents expect their children to help them in old age and as an example, sending parents to a nursing home would be shameful thing to do for an Egyptian.

4.1.7 Interactions between teachers and students

When asked about the relationship between a student and a teacher all the answers confirmed that teachers are respected among the students on all the levels of education. It is not appropriate for a teacher to be in a close contact with the students i.e. spend free time with them or become a personal friend.

The question concerning the need of guidance, follow up and assistance gave different answers regarding of weather the experience was from the public university, private university or private foreign university in Egypt. In the public sector the students still expect guidance from their teachers because the old traditional teacher-student relationship is still strong there. According to a Finnish interviewee there had been concerns among the Egyptians related to the Finnish teaching method and the new approach. The experienced Egyptian teachers with long careers were asking:"How do you know that the student is learning?"

The new generation of Egyptian students are more open to knowledge and equality and their attitude is similar to the youngsters in western societies. This is partly because of their free access to information through internet and social media.

The quality of the education in private foreign universities in Egypt is on the same level as the western countries university education in general according to the answers. The atmosphere in the foreign university was described:"It is international, you feel like you were abroad."

The students are highly motivated and if given a chance they are willing to use their talent. It is, however, essential that the teacher sets the tone of the communication style in the beginning of the course. The teacher should make it clear what he expects from the students; if he wants them to participate to the

discussion and share their opinions or not. That will affect the students´ attitude and positioning towards the teacher. Also the Pygmalion affect was mentioned in an interview. It means that the teacher´s expectations of the student affect the student´s performance. The idea behind the Pygmalion effect is that increasing the teacher´s expectations of the student´s performance will result in better performance.

4.1.8 Inteactions between parents and teachers

In the interviews it was confirmed that the university student who is already 18 years old is usually considered as an adult and responsible of his actions. The family is not involved in student´s life very much anymore. However, the private universities are expensive and the studies are mostly financed by the parents. Naturally, the parents monitor the success and progressing of their child in the university. It is common that the family asks for explanation or feedback if the student fails in exam.

4.1.9 Interactions in the Egyptian organization

The hierarchy is strong in the organizations and the subordinates are expected to be loyal to their superiors. Punctuality is important in certain fields of industry (oil) or sectors like banking or health care. In the universities the schedules are more flexible. Decision-making and communication goes top-down. The higher the rank, the more power. Bureaucracy is heavy and micro-management common. On one hand the technology has made it possible to get a passport in three days but on the other hand a lot paper is used in the administration. E-services are not used widely like in Finland.

Formal titles are used when discussing. The Arab spring has changed the attitude towards the power distance; people are demanding more rights to take part to the decision making, to speak freely and they want to be treated as equals.

5   WHAT ARE THE CULTURAL ISSUES FINNISH TEACHERS SHOULD TAKE INTO THE CONSIDERATION WHEN GOING TO TEACH IN ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT?

5.1   Significant cultural differences between Finland and Egypt

The main research question set in the beginning is: What are the biggest cultural differences between Finland and Egypt? The outcome of the research is that the following differences are the most significant: Religion, national values, communication and collectivism.

In the following chapters each difference is explained and examples are given concerning the daily life situations in order to help Finnish teacher to adapt into the Egyptian culture.

5.1.1   Religion

85% of the Egyptians are Muslims and almost 15% are Christians. The fundamental difference between the Finns and Egyptians is that Islam is a way of life; it affects in all the aspects of life and in the daily life activities much wider than just five prayer calls a day.

Friday is a holy day for Muslims and the noon prayer on Fridays starts the social gathering together. The feeling of Muslim brotherhood is important for them. Christians (Coptic) get together in their churches on Saturdays. This strengthens the bonding between the people and the collectivism, friendships and family ties. The holy month of Ramadan when the Muslims fast from dawn to sunrise is a special time of the year. In the evenings people get together to share the food and socialize. If invited for a dinner especially at the time of Ramadan refusing would be very rude.

The values of the religion and the expectations of being honest, good believer affect in the interactions between people. In Finnish values honesty is similarly highly expected.

Very sensible topics in Egypt are politics and the religious feelings. There is no need to talk about these things until you know the person and his habits very well.

5.1.2 National values

Hospitality is one of the old Bedouin values inherited from the time of desert life. People were living in the hard desert conditions and needed to trust on the help others in order to survive. Helping others was essential and helpfulness is still one of the key values in the Egyptian society even though the big majority of the people is living in cities and small villages. Generosity and hospitality also symbolize the social status of a person and reflects a desired personal quality. Even the poorest ones want to offer what they have regardless of his economical status.

Loyalty has a strong impact as a value on how organizations are functioning and how things are taken care of. Contacts play a significant role in the interactions between people and organizations. It is necessary to know people to achieve goals and a friend of a friend can be valuable asset. This applies to less significant issues and daily life issues too. Asking help from someone who knows someone is normal. The trust is created between friends and loyalty among the group is expected even up to the point of favoritism.

Dignity and honor go together, even though they are universal values. Arabs in general consider them very important. Egyptian will feel honored to host a Finn and assist him or her in any kind of needs.

Sense of brotherhood, again it is related to Islamic fundamentals. All the Muslims are brothers without distinction between the nationalities, languages or color of the skin. This bond is strong like the brotherhood by birth, essentially help and support is always provided and expected from that basis.

5.1.3 Communication

Arriving to talkative Egypt might feel like a cold shower for a Finn. Egyptians love to talk and they admire good verbal skills. Arabic language has arrived with the Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula and replaced the ancient languages. The art of language (eloquence, al balagha in Arabic) has deep roots and a high status in the culture. Due to the time of colonialism English is also mastered widely among the people. Talking is very important in the communication and when changing information. Opposite of the Finns who like to communicate with short and informative sentences and exact expressions without circulating around the topic the Egyptian way of explaining starts from the wider context.

Ferraro states that "Arabic cultures are imprecise, they engage in overassertation, exaggeration and repetition. The Arabic language is filled with forms of verbal exaggeration. What would be an assertive statement to an American might appear to be weak and equivocating to an Arab". (Ferraro 2002, 61-62.)

Egyptians want to make the issue worth a thorough discussion. To use the Finnish expression for a point in the speech, "pihvi", it doesn´t come in the first sentence with an Egyptian. Patience and tolerance are needed and a Finn has to be prepared to use more time in discussions concerning issues that are clear and have no problem.

Communication and small talk: Small and "empty" talk is an important part of daily life. People talk about sports, family etc. with strangers just to be polite. However, Finns are shy and not arrogant, being silent among others is perceived as non-social behavior. The one who does not share a small conversation is regarded rude person. Interrupting is normal. If a Finn is waiting for his turn to speak the technique may not work because the turn may never come.

Greetings: In Egypt it is common to shake hands and hug with the people you know and even with the ones you don´t know. It is a social norm when meeting people. It is not acceptable to refuse a handshake.

Compliments: It is very common to give compliments and praise the other with expressions that may feel exaggerated for a Finn. It is part of the Arab culture that good talking skills are appreciated as a sign of education and talent.

5.1.4 Collectivism

If possible, every Finn should take the best out of the collectivism while staying in Egypt and not to isolate himself from the group. The more the Finn goes out of his comfort zone the more he gains from his stay and learns from the new experience. The Scandinavian people have a reputation as honest and reliable people in Egypt and Egyptians do not want to cause them disappointments. The Egyptian hosts will feel responsible of the Finns visiting their country as they would feel for their guests.

The attitude towards foreigners is positive and the Egyptians are aware of the individual behaviour in other cultures. Egyptians are tolerant with foreigners who are not familiar with Egyptian habits and they forgive if mistakes happen. Egypt is a tourist destination and there is a lot of foreign companies and foreign influence in the country. As a Mediterranean country Egypt, and Alexandria indeed has been international, cosmopolitan country through its history.

5.2 General recommendations

To conclude the research questions concerning what a Finnish teacher should know when working in Egypt the following list of recommendations is collected:

- Lauring´s study among the Danish expatriates working as managers in Saudi subsidiary of a Danish corporation showed that ethnocentric perception of other nationalities created an unfriendly atmosphere between the nationalities. Segregation was implemented to ease the daily communication, but the result was that it fostered a certain discrimination. (Lauring, 2010.) Open attitude towards intercultural communication as well as flexibility in the interactions are recommended because seeing cultural differences as an obstacle will affect negatively in an organization.
- Work ethics: The presence of men is high in working life. In education and health services sectors there are women though. Typical for the society is a high power-distance between the people and their leaders. This applies

to organizations too. Employees don´t express their opinions freely, the communication goes from top to bottom in one-way. The boss decides and the employees obey. The top management holds the information and does not necessarily share it. It is part of the power. There is no need to try to change these habits, it won´t be successful. A Finn should not expect Egyptians to be always in time. Being late is considered ok, it is not a big thing.

- Finnish teacher´s interaction with Egyptian student: Finnish teacher should be aware that applying the same teaching methods as in Finland will be challenging. It will require time and patience, but the new Egyptian generation is motivated and keen to learn.

- At the beginning of their journey Finnish teachers will spend most of the time at the university teaching. Being social and open to their colleagues would be beneficial when building a long-lasting relationship. However, a Finn should not be too naïve or too spontaneous when building friendships.

- Interaction with female colleagues and female students: As more than eighty percent of Egyptian population are Muslims, the Muslim woman has a special place in the society. Keeping distance is the way of showing respect to women in Muslim countries. Avoid any question or comment about a man´s wife or any female children over the age of 12 (Bjerke 2001, 110).

- Right from the beginning, a Finnish teacher should draw a line in the relationships with the students; at the university the relationship is strictly professional.

- The rule is to call the Egyptian colleagues by their titles. Maybe later by the time spent together this may not be necessary.

- Personal space: Touching and standing close to another person when talking is normal and foreigner should try to adapt to this as well as possible.

- Gifts: According to local values and culture neither alcohol, food that contains pork meat nor clothes are not possible gifts to give. It is important to know in advance that the present is acceptable and appreciated among both parties.

- Politics and jokes: These areas are very risky to bring up and it is better to keep the discussion away from these topics.

- Swearing and blasphemy are considered rude and should be avoided.

- Hospitality: Being generous is an important value, hosting is a question of honor in Arab world. It is strongly bonded to the idea of losing face and being embarrassed in front of others, family or friends. The foreigner should not in any case refuse an invitation for coffee, tea or meals without a valid reason. Refusing to share a moment of joy is arrogant in the eyes of the hosts because it insults the religion, tradition and good manners. Patai reminds that hospitality like the other ancient Bedouin values, generosity, courage, honor and self-respect serve the great goal of Bedouin life; the strengthening of the group and ultimately the survival of the community (Patai 2007, 89-100).

- Society: The poverty in the country may be shocking for a Finn. Due to the economic situation the local people will always try to get something from a foreigner for free. This is good to keep in mind. The lack of efficiency in the public sector may also be frustrating. In Egypt you need to take time to take care of things even though it feels like wasting time.

- Learning basic Arabic: As common language brings people together also a Finn should learn at least basic greetings to show interest to the culture. The basic vocabulary from the tourist guide would be an advantage.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The research interviews confirmed Hofstede and Lewis models concerning the Egyptian culture. The gap between Finland and Egypt is vast and there are significant differences in various dimensions of the culture. An important finding is that religion as a way of life has an overwhelming affect in all the areas of life in Egypt. It is present in the organisations and working life in a larger scale than in Finland where religion is hardly visible at work. Even though the religion is not openly visible in Egypt, it is underlying there and affecting the behaviour.

Another challenging difference is the difference in communication styles. Egyptians admire mastering the language and they use a lot of time and effort for verbal communication. Finns on the other hand are opposite; quiet, modest and sometimes even shy and reserved. Finns emphasize the accuracy and effectiveness in discussions, and they say everything what they mean. Expressing oneself directly and precisely is positive and in Finland it reflects the person´s knowledge. In Egypt, part of the information is hidden and needs to be sensed. Egyptians presuppose a certain degree of knowledge and use indirect ways of communicating. This might lead to misunderstandings because the fine elements of language and specific meanings behind an expression and its cultural connection are unknown. However, being westerner is an advantage in Egypt and the Finns are respected due to their reputation as honest, sincere and trustworthy people.

Due to the high power distance in society in general also the management culture is more hierarchical in Egypt. Formal and respectful, appropriate and polite behaviour is a socially expected in organizations.

Resulting from the limitations mentioned earlier more studies should be carried out in the course of the TAMK Global Education project in Egypt. The method could be interviewing the Egyptian university staff by Skype to collect their experiences and opinions of the project and intercultural communication in high-level education export. Naturally, the Finns participating in the project should be interviewed about the experience after they have returned from Egypt. Updating this thesis work would deepen the commissioner´s understanding of the cultural differences and help in problem solving if necessary. Finally, it would help fulfilling

the tasks successfully in the future. The commissioner could take advantage of the experience and develop their performance based on the knowledge collected in the project.

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8 APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The list of the interviews and participants

N	Designation	Date of interview
1	Finnish teacher in TAMK, Tampere	27.03.2019
2	Egyptian student in Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki	04.04.2016
T	Egyptian translator, BBA HAMK, resident in Finland for 20 years, Tampere	06.04.2019
4	Egyptian PhD student at the University of Turku	23.04.2019
5	Egyptian Business advisor, Tampere	23.04.2019
6	Egyptian graduate, Master´s degree in Leadership and service design, Turku	30.04.2019

Appendix 2. The list of the interview questions

What are the most relevant cultural differences between Finland and Egypt that a Finn should understand in order to work successfully in Egypt? Can you tell me about the importance of these values? Tell as much as you can.

- Family

- Religion

- Language

- Traditions

- Respect

- Friendship

- Hospitality

- Honor

- Others

What would be the challenging issues in the interaction between Finnish teachers and Egyptian students?

- Communication style
- Approach to learning
- Expectations
- Respect

What would be the challenging issues in interaction between Finnish teachers and Egyptian parents?

- Expectations
- Involvement
- Conflict issues
- Others

What are the organizational cultural differences between Finland and Egypt?

- Hierarchy/Power distance
- Time management
- Communication style (direct or indirect)
- Respect
- Efficiency
- Others

In your personal opinion, what advices would you give to a foreigner to work efficiently in Egypt?