

## **TRUST, LEARNING AND ANOMALOUS EXPERIENCE OF JAPAN AND SLOVAK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Trust is an important element of the learning processes and overall academic achievement of university students. It represents the highly sensitive domain of the intrapsychic life of each student. The paper states the original premise that trust or distrust respectively can be specifically related to anomalous psychical experience. As some paranormal experiences can be evoked by physical or chemical stimuli such as electric pulse to the brain and mental drugs, for example, DMT (N, N-dimethyltryptamine), paranormal experiences are based on people's physiological system chiefly, not only psychological factors such as belief. In this view, trust can be considered as one of the most important impulses as well as a consequence of the perceived anomalous experience of the student. But trust as one of the crucial sub-elements of higher education is not related to paranormal phenomena. Trying to face this challenge, the paper has the ambition to enrich the scientific basis of higher education through performing research supported by relevant hypotheses and an empirical survey. Based on the analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization, induction and deduction of theory, completed by results of the quantitative survey, the aim of the paper is to search and confirm potential relations between the trust and unusual psychic experience of higher education students. Targeted experiences are specifically examined in two geographically different countries: Japan as a representative of specific Asian countries, and Slovakia as a representative of specific (Slavic) Central Europe countries. For the paper, two hypotheses are formulated: H1: Paranormal experiences have not relevant influence on the student distrust; H2: There exist only small differences between Japan and Slovak respondents' expressions in the field. The survey, participated by 405 Japan and 443 Slovak university students, confirms that the most frequent experience in both countries is déjà vu (76.79% of Japan and 87.84% of Slovak respondents). Applied Chi-Square Test and Product-Moment Correlation reveal that the searched forms of paranormal experiences do not call-up the negative form of trust, i.e. distrust. Also, only unimportant differences in perceived anomalousness exist between university students of chosen two countries. In this way, both hypotheses are considered to be confirmed. From the perspective of recommendations, assistance and belonging, providing anonymous psychological consulting, applying motivational

educational methods and techniques can encouragingly act on student trust and learning.

**Keywords:** *Trust, distrust, anomalous/paranormal experience, learning, students*

## INTRODUCTION

University as the brightest representative of higher education, must adequately respond to the needs of society, and at the same time form the scientific and cultural potential of the regional and national elites independently [1]. Processes, intended to sustainably keep all serious opportunities and challenges arise in higher education and development of science, demand new and deeper knowledge of various aspects of the university. Especially, such knowledge is important which could be viewed as socially sensitive or even sophisticated and which describe “students’ current characteristics, traits, changed expectations, i.e. their motivation, satisfaction, and trust” [2].

Trust can be considered as the confidence that one party has in another because of the honesty and reliability of his or her partner [3]. It is the individual’s general belief in the honesty and cooperative intentions of others [4] while it increases the speed at which the individuals are able to accomplish tasks [5]. Trust is the personal tendency that applies across various circumstances; it is the behavior determined by certain conditions; and simultaneously, it is the process that goes through stages and evolves over time [6]. Recently, trust is often discussed and explained in the relation to distrust. “Trust and distrust as paired notions exist in a dynamic interim zone between the deal clear cases of trust and ideal clear cases of distrust” [7]. Discussions comparing trust versus distrust are important in creating conditions that are necessary for the qualification of trust. In such view, it is needed to differ between a ‘bad’ or ‘paranoid’ distrust and a ‘good’ or ‘prudent’ distrust [8] because when realizing sensitive nuances between them, the cooperation and higher level of self-acceptation and acceptance of others can be developed easier. Because the “trust is cognitive, that it is de facto an assessment of the trustworthiness of the potentially trusted person or group or institution” [9], it can be assumed there exist a lot of various elements, circumstances, and experiences that affect the trust, both in a positive or negative way. These influences flow out and can act on all decisions taken by the individuals; they can be conscious as well unconscious in nature. They may spring from absolutely real and objective facts confirmed by other individuals or groups. However, they can also arise on the basis of a purely subjective nature, and although they cannot be testified by others, the individual him/herself is completely self-certain about their existence. This creates an opportunity to consider the impact of abnormal experiences too [10].

There are many scientific works and sociological studies dealing with the trust of university students. But trust as one of the crucial sub-elements of higher

education is not related to paranormal phenomena. Trying to face this challenge, the paper has the ambition to enrich the scientific basis of higher education through performing research supported by relevant hypotheses and an empirical survey.

As some paranormal experiences can be evoked by physical or chemical stimuli such as electric pulse to the brain and mental drugs, for example, DMT (N, N-dimethyltryptamine), paranormal experiences are based on people's physiological system chiefly, not only psychological factors such as belief. In this view, trust can be considered as one of the most important impulses as well as a consequence of the perceived anomalous experience of the student. This untraditional approach enables to link of the psychological perceptions and mental anomalous (i.e. psychological phenomena) with the recognized and re-evaluated relationship and/or attitude towards other social beings (i.e. sociological phenomena). The specific situation is a connection of anomalous experience with a unique form of psycho-sociological un/acceptance of oneself, i.e. self-trust and self-distrust respectively.

However, as mentioned above, studies which search the student trust to other individuals in relation to the students' anomalous experience, are still rare in the literature. Also, there is a lack of studies that are focused on links between academic trust, anomalous experience, motivation and learning. Within this perspective, investigation of trust, when compared to some forms of imaginative psychical experiences of university students (e.g. déjà vu, sixth sense belief, presentiment, etc.), and mutually related to learning motivation, might be considered contributive.

Based on the aforementioned, the paper's research goal is defined in this way: Theoretically and empirically relate the higher education students' trust, learning motivation, and anomalous experience. With use of theoretical and empirical analysis and synthesis, survey results will be statistically investigated, compared and deduced, with an intention to disclose potential links between trust, learning motivation, and unusual psychic experience. The empirical part will present questionnaire surveys performed in two different countries: Japan ( university students; Asia) and Slovakia ( university students; Europe). To achieve the paper's research goal, two hypotheses will be tested: links of dis/trust and paranormal experiences (H1); results comparison in both participated countries (H2).

## **TRUST, MOTIVATION, LEARNING AND ANOMALOUS EXPERIENCE**

In higher education institutions, it is not intellect that makes a great teacher, but rather, a character which includes trust and openness [11], [12] consider as the most important personality traits especially repressive defensiveness, trust, emotional stability, desire for control, hardiness, positive affectivity, etc.

Therefore, the search for finding the optimal level of the student's trust in oneself and/or in others is really important; if the idealization of trust or distrust occurs in the individual's intra-psychical processes, this can lead to choosing ineffective strategies as well as applying negative destructive behavior [13]. The importance of mentioned warning is emphasized especially by the existence of all forms of university students' trust, i.e. trust towards the study subjects, trust towards oneself, trust towards the peers and friends, trust towards the teachers, trust towards the university, and trust towards the society [2]. Unfortunately, under the specific (mainly negative) circumstances and pressures, these forms of trust could be potentially transformed in distrust.

### Trust and Setting the Hypotheses

Academic trust significantly influences the sustainable academic motivation and performance of students [14], [15], [16]. Sustainable academic motivation can be defined as a proactive interconnection of basic ideas of sustainability and basic characteristics of academic motivation. In this view, students' trust and motivation can be consistently increased and sustained through many of modern educational methods and approaches, or their harmonized combination. For example, through an integrative learning [17], in-service training [18], flipped learning [19], meta-learning [20], learning from mistakes [21], student coaching [22], etc.

As it flows from the previous section, trust is the highly sensitive domain of each student's intrapsychic life. There are many different and time-varying elements that affect it. At the same time, trust affects conscious decision-making, learning and "providing help or manifesting fair behavior to others" [2]. It acts on the human subconscious, and vice versa, the subconscious is induced, corrected, attenuated, etc. through it. It can be reflected in unusual 'dreamy' experiences, of both positive and negative nature. Full trust gives inner energy and personality-analytical-cognitive certainty to the individual. It can potentially lead to a strong intuition or can support a sixth sense which is considered very important in the academic effort.

Confused trust can cause the subconscious signs leading to a reminder of the importance and consequences of different situations, and the possible 'replenishment' of confidence lack (e.g. déjà vu or clairvoyance). An unsatisfied level of trust can evoke subconscious fear of perceived loneliness, feared failure and the like. Such subconscious psychological processes can be reflected in negative feelings, e.g. sleep paralysis or nightmares of the students. However, the paper does not agree with the opposite effect in this field. On the contrary, it supposes that occurred paranormal experiences do not increase the distrust. Based on the aforementioned, two hypotheses of the paper can be defined:

H1: Paranormal experiences have no relevant influence on student distrust.

H2: There exist only small differences between Japanese and Slovak respondents in the field.

It is assumed that in most of the studied anomalous experiences (déjà vu, sleep paralysis, out-of-body experience, a sign of ghost, presentiment, telepathy, clairvoyance and 6th sense belief) it will be refused their significant negative impact on trust. It is also expected that, despite different cultural, social, political and continental conditions, there will be shown only small differences between Japanese and Slovak respondents in existing links of trust and paranormal experience.

### Anomalous Experience and ESP versus Trust and Motivation

Déjà vu alerts the individual to a discrepancy between his or her feeling of familiarity and knowledge of novelty [23]. This means déjà vu can inspire students to fulfill their need or desire for disclose a matter-of-fact of such ‘questionably re-repeated situation’ and find a satisfactory answer in the science; learning process and found correct answer can move students to other challenges, relying on their high inner certainty.

When experiencing sleep paralysis, the student can feel oneself tired and with decreased energy/motivation for any action, not only for learning, but for trusting too. [24] used the third of searched phenomena, i.e. signs of ghost in the education process, with intention the students could understand these signs as “clues to memory and the past”. However, if ghost takes a negative, fear-evoking form, it can adversely affect the psychological balance of students and impair the ability to focus on learning. In such a situation, “question-based learning methods instead of collecting information” [25] could strengthen both the student's self-trust and self-motivation, and remove his or her doubts about own mental health.

Although out-of-body experience (OBE) can bring uplifting, discovering and joyful feelings, positively affecting motivation and trust, they may also induce some distress and concern. I.e., they may rather hinder full concentration on the learning process. Furtherly, from the viewpoint of self-trust and learning motivation, if the student is sure of his or her presentiment-ability, with an intention to overcome his own fate, the student can find a strong motivation inside him/herself for responsible learning. However, if s/he beliefs in own ‘attractive vision of future success, this can decrease his or her learning enthusiasm.

Telepathy demonstrates that the mind is also transpersonal [26]. I.e., a student can rely on others to a much greater extent than is appropriate and then dampen his or her conscious behavior. On a positive note, clairvoyance can strengthen student's self-confidence and self-motivation. On the other hand, if a student overestimates his or her ‘clairvoyance’, its failure at a critical moment can cause the student's inconvenience e.g. on the exam, project presentation, etc.

If a student believes that s/he has the sixth sense (s/he has repeatedly confirmed this fact in previous situations), he or she may relieve the learning process and caution in the area of trust, hoping that the situation itself will tell him or her the ‘optimal answer’. In the case of a student with the opposite motivation, ‘learning sixth sense’ can lead to an even stronger academic enthusiasm – believing that an honest study is the most proper way in study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The intention to focus research attention on the underlying anomalous experience was inspired by a questionnaire sheet of McClennon (Elizabeth City University, USA) that [27] later completed by additional questions for medical staff and transformed to a Japanese questionnaire sheet. Kokubo [10] substantially modified the original Japanese questionnaire and extended the attention on nine areas of paranormal beliefs: déjà vu; sleep paralysis; presentiment; telepathy; clairvoyance; out-of-body experience; 6th sense belief; signs of a ghost; other experiences.

Kokubo’s most important decision was to conduct a survey on university students and add an entirely new research domain to the questionnaire: trust. Thus, in the current version, the questionnaire examines, on the one hand, the students’ views on trust, and on the other hand, examines the occurrence of student paranormal experiences. This allows to focus the research in this paper on acquiring unique knowledge about the thinking and preferences of contemporary university students and, in addition, link them to potential anomalous phenomena. Moreover, the paper’s authors decided to carry out the survey in two absolutely different countries: Japan (an Asian country, with unique history and culture) and Slovakia (A central European country, belonging to Slavic countries, also with unique historical and cultural specifics).

The sample of respondents consisted of  $n = 405$  Japanese students and  $n = 443$  Slovak students can be considered relevant (95% confidence level). The Japanese respondents were students from three universities, namely: 1. Atomi University, 2. Meiji University, and 3. Wako University. There were  $n = 144$  males and  $n = 261$  females, with an average age of 19 years. The Slovak respondents were students of the University of Žilina, Faculty of Management Science and Informatics. Concretely, they attended the following study programs: 1. Management, 2. Informatics, 3. Information management, and 4. Computer engineering. There were  $n = 300$  males and  $n = 143$  females, with an average age of 21. In contrast between the countries, there was a higher number of females in the group of Japanese respondents.

## **RESULTS**

The primary role of respondents was to select the subjectively correct dichotomous response (yes/no) to all the selected paranormal experiences: déjà

vu; sleep paralysis; presentiment; telepathy; clairvoyance; out-of-body experience; 6th sense belief; signs of a ghost; other experiences. The data collected were primarily examined on the basis of quantification of frequency.

### Data Analysis and Testing Hypotheses

As flows from Table 1, most respondents in both countries experience déjà vu (76.79% of Japan and up to 87.81% of Slovak respondents) and sixth sense (57.78% of Japanese and 68.85% of Slovak students). The basic mismatch was revealed in the third item, where the Slovak respondents, unlike the Japanese, in the absolute majority (73.14%) indicated that they are experiencing presentiment. For questions about sleep paralysis, telepathy, clairvoyance, OBE and signs of ghosts, most respondents in both countries tended not to meet (they chose answer 'no'). Japanese respondents have the least belief of clairvoyance (95.80%) and telepathy (93.33%). The least experience among Slovak students was OBE (73.59%) and telepathy (71.33%).

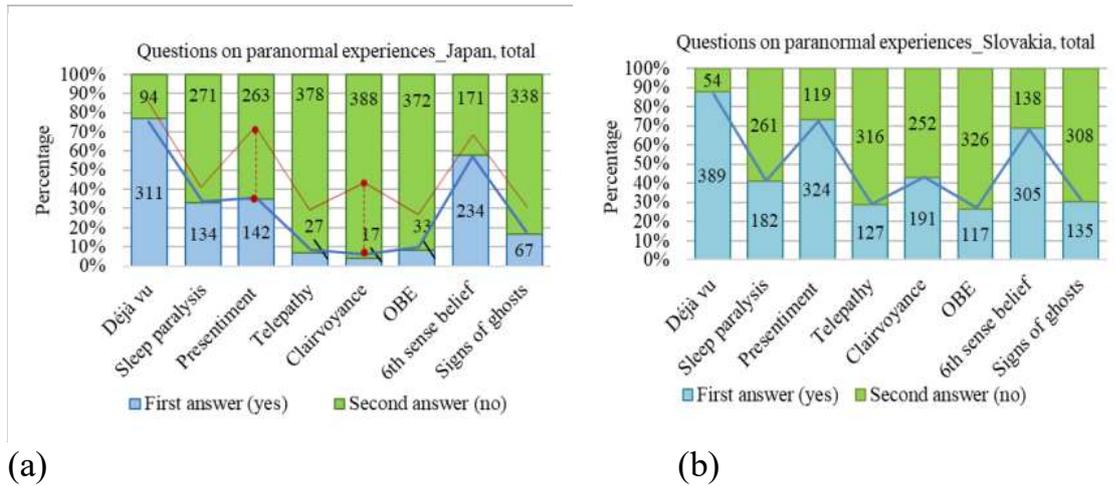
**Table 1.** *Anomalous experience and belief of Japan and Slovak respondents.*

Experience	Option	Japan (n=405)		Slovakia (n=443)	
		Freq.	[%]	Freq.	[%]
1. Déjà vu	(a) yes	311	76.79	389	87.81
	(b) no	94	23.21	54	12.19
2. Sleep paralysis	(a) yes	134	33.09	182	41.08
	(b) no	271	66.91	261	58.92
3. Presentiment	(a) yes	142	35.06	324	73.14
	(b) no	263	64.94	119	26.86
4. Telepathy	(a) yes	27	6.67	127	28.67
	(b) no	378	93.33	316	71.33
5. Clairvoyance	(a) yes	17	4.20	191	43.12
	(b) no	388	95.80	252	56.88
6. OBE	(a) yes	33	8.15	117	26.41
	(b) no	372	91.85	326	73.59
7. 6th sense belief	(a) yes	234	57.78	305	68.85
	(b) no	171	42.22	138	31.15
8. Signs of ghosts	(a) yes	67	16.54	135	30.47
	(b) no	338	83.46	308	69.53

*Source: Own source*

The frequencies shown in Table 1 were also illustrated by Figures 1a and 1b which show the similarity of the responses in both countries (blue curves). The red curve in Figure 1a represents the quantified difference in respondent responses between the countries.

These results indicate that hypothesis H2 (there exist only small differences between Japan and Slovak respondents in the field) can be considered as confirmed (first time). The results in several of the following subsections will also support the validity of this hypothesis.



**Fig. 1.** (a) Paranormal experience – Japan; (b) Paranormal experience – Slovakia

Source: Own source

Subsequently, the analysis was focused on searching possible links between students’ opinions on their trust and paranormal. The independent variable can change itself, regardless of other factors; the dependent variable depends on the investigated situation [14]. In this survey, trust is put as the dependent variable and anomalous phenomena as an independent. Hypothesis H1 excludes the negative impact of paranormal experience on perceived trust, i.e. presumes that paranormal experience has not relevant influence on the students’ distrust. Table 2 shows the results of the dependence testing between examined items. The first relationship concerned the option of ‘cannot be trusted’ and all eight items on paranormal experiences. The statistical significance of none of the relationships was confirmed in the data of Japanese respondents. Only one result was an exception in Slovakia: dependence was confirmed between opinions on distrust and clairvoyance. Of the 297 Slovak respondents who think that people cannot be trusted, 46.46% said they have experienced clairvoyance. On the other hand, only 36.30% of 146, who think people can be trusted, experienced clairvoyance. Therefore, in addition to hypothesis H1, also hypothesis H2 can be accepted.

**Table 2.** Correlations of trust (cannot be trusted) and paranormal experiences – Japan and Slovakia.

Combinations analyzed	Japan				Slovakia			
	Chi-Square Test		Product-Moment Correlation		Chi-Square Test		Product-Moment Correlation	
	z	P-value	r	P-value	z	P-value	r	P-value
Cannot be trusted and <i>déjà vu</i>	1.718	0.086	0.850	0.86	0.555	0.579	- 0.026	0.580
Cannot be trusted and <i>sleep paralysis</i>	0.157	0.875	0.008	0.876	0.818	0.413	0.039	0.414
Cannot be trusted and <i>presentiment</i>	0.185	0.853	- 0.009	0.854	0.734	0.463	- 0.035	0.464
Cannot be trusted and <i>telepathy</i>	0.688	0.491	- 0.034	0.492	0.191	0.848	0.009	0.849
Cannot be trusted and <i>clairvoyance</i>	1.452	0.147	- 0.072	0.147	2.03	0.042*	0.096	0.042*
Cannot be trusted and <i>OBE</i>	0.105	0.917	0.005	0.917	1.045	0.296	0.050	0.297
Cannot be trusted and <i>6th sense belief</i>	0.391	0.696	0.019	0.697	0.113	0.910	0.005	0.910
Cannot be trusted and <i>signs of ghosts</i>	0.244	0.807	0.012	0.808	1.429	0.153	- 0.068	0.154

Source: Own source

## DISCUSSION

An examination of the latter area of paranormal phenomena also pointed to the considerable similarity of relatively different countries. Many colleagues from European partner universities (e.g. in Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania) expected diametric differences when mentioning such a focus of this study (Japan as an advanced Asian country versus Slovakia as a country long stopped by Russian influence). However, the authors of this study hoped that the parapsychological elements were 'regionally independent' and rather influenced by the current dynamism of economic processes and ever-increasing demands for future careers and performance. With considerable scientific satisfaction, the results confirmed this assumption and supported the validity of the H2 hypothesis several times.

A study of [28] performed on 286 respondents, analysed the effect of various external and internal factors on student trust: "There is a positive and significant effect on the quality of service on student trust; there is a positive and significant effect on the image of the institution on student trust, and there is a positive and significant quality of service to student trust through the image of the institution". In line with this, results confirming the relevance of hypothesis H1 that was shown in Table 2 confirmed the interdependence only between the negative form of trust, i.e. distrust and clairvoyance. This leads to the conclusion that, if these external-internal university elements are positive, they can foster student confidence and, to some extent, 'mitigate' the impact of negative paranormal student experiences. Respectively, a reversed impact can also be considered: if students' paranormal experiences stimulate their sophistication, zeal, and the effort to uncover the essence of phenomena and things, they promote student trust, both student trust in themselves and trust in the university. Dissemination of the prevailing student satisfaction and trust will consequently positively influence the image of the university and thus promote the trust of other students and the public.

With the use of the above deductive ideas, the opinion of [29], flowing from the survey performed on 451 people, can be agreed: illusory beliefs have an important role in the behavioural choices of individuals. In a similar perspective, the study of [30] searched relations of perceived stress, thinking style (rational and experiential), and paranormal belief. Results collected from 82 participants revealed that "perceived stress alone was not a prominent predictor of belief, but the combination of stress and thinking style, significantly predicted greater global paranormal belief" [30].

From the participated sample, 76.79% of Japan and 87.81% of Slovak respondents express their experience with *déjà vu*; 57.78% and 68.85% express their belief in the sixth sense. Altogether, listed above studies and results support the relevance of hypothesis H2 about only small differences in university students' anomalous between countries.

All presented discussion complexly leads to an important conclusion: paranormal phenomena should be viewed either as a great inspiration.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Although the study addressed a relatively unconventional topic and even included a comparison of two countries that had never been compared in the area under study, all four hypotheses were valid. Specifically, paranormal experiences have not relevant influence on student distrust (H1); there exist only small differences between university students of examined Asian country (Japan) and Central European country (Slovakia) (H2). The most important contributions, findings and recommendations of the paper include mainly following:

1. Theoretical disputation was opened on paranormal experiences of university students in relation to academic motivation and learning.

2. In general, it can be summarized that although Japanese culture and Slovak culture have diametrically different roots, the participated university students show relatively similar results due to their anomalous experience. The difference was shown in presentiment and clairvoyance.

3. Moreover, the interdependences among all of the searched anomalous prevail in both of searched countries. In detail, from 28 potential dependences, 16 were documented in the group of Japanese respondents and 15 in Slovak respondents. From the viewpoint of gender, the correlations were positive in 4 from 8 beliefs of Slovak participants and in 2 from 8 beliefs of Japanese participants (i.e. clairvoyance and sixth sense belief).

4. When relating trust to paranormal experience, identical features between countries have not been achieved numerically. However, except the opinions on trust versus anomalous experience in of Japan respondents, some of the dependences were proven partially for each country.

It is necessary to encourage students conscientiously, strengthen their self-trust and trust in others, positively influence their motivation, and inspire them for academic life. The joy and possibilities of progress should balance and inevitably exceed all potential discomfort. In this way, anomalous experience (i.e. déjà vu, presentiment, clairvoyance, sixth sense, and telepathy) can be exploited at least partially positively. At the same time, appropriate and encouraging learning methods can alleviate the burdensome aspects of sleep paralysis, a sign of ghosts and an out-of-body experience.

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