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## **PERSPECTIVES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN ON THE LOSS OF TEACHERS' AUTHORITY**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examines the perceptions of university students in Hungarian-language institutions in several countries in the Carpathian basin with regards to teacher authority and the loss of authority. The theoretical background portrays the requirements on an ideal teacher, their*

*characteristic features, as well as the evolution of these attributes over time. Expectations for teachers are examined within three dimensions, with the dimension addressing teacher personality traits being dominant in this study. Utilizing the Big Five personality model, each trait is perceived as a spectrum. The study encompasses responses from a total of 1037 university students to a questionnaire, with data processed and analysed via the statistical software SPSS. The findings of the study indicate that the most characteristic features of an authoritative teacher are being strict, respectful, firm, kind, and helpful. The loss of authority, on the other hand, is most likely linked to being disrespectful, unfair, and condescending towards their students.*

**Keywords:**

Teacher Authority, Teacher Characteristics, Questionnaire Survey, University Students in the Carpathian Basin

## **1. Introduction**

Defining the ideal teacher can vary and alter in different geographical locations and time periods. A previous study (Žemlička and Szabó L. 2024) sought to answer the question of what characteristics university students in the Carpathian Basin think the ideal teacher possesses. According to the results (the five most frequent answers), the ideal teacher is patient, helpful, kind, understanding and prepared, and compassionate. In the present study, we attempt to assess the opinions of university students studying Hungarian in the Carpathian Basin on what their perceptions of an authoritative teacher are and what may contribute to a teacher losing their authority.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

There are several studies on the requirements and characteristics of the ideal teacher (Szabó et al., 2017; Ballér, 1983; Tóth, 1985; Hajdú, 2001; Boreczky, 1997; G. Donáth, 1980; Bagdy, 1997; Szebeni, 2010; Korthagen, 2004). The results of a study conducted with 10,000 German pupils in the 1930s show that the main characteristics of teachers that pupils like the most are cheerfulness, patience, friendliness, understanding, impartiality, and fair grading (Ballér 1983). According to Tóth (1985), in the mid-1980s, the most favoured teacher characteristics included love of children, helpfulness, kindness, fairness, as well as good teaching skills and a high level of expertise. In a later study in 1997, the most preferred teacher characteristics according to primary school pupils were understanding and patience, while those according to secondary school students were strictness, fairness and consistency (Boreczky, 1997). Previous research indicates that the characteristics of an ideal teacher often present contradictions that would be unfeasible in practice; for instance, a teacher is expected to embody both understanding and consistency. A survey conducted among teacher training students in 1998 revealed that a good teacher is perceived as “friendly yet strict, demanding yet understanding, consistent, fair, impartial, direct, calm, patient, knowledgeable, authoritative, well-educated, and proficient in their subject matter” (Hajdú 2001:30).

Boreczky (1997), in his research conducted during the 1990s, differentiated between two types of educators and linked each to particular personality characteristics. The first type was defined by authority, positional influence, firmness, fairness, emotional detachment, and strict

discipline. In contrast, the second type was characterized by kindness, patience, and an emphasis on developing personal connections. Furthermore, G. Donáth (1980) involved students of different age groups to investigate their standpoints towards the traits of an ideal teacher. His findings revealed extensive professional knowledge, a genuine concern for children, empathy, and a sense of humour as the most important traits. Based on these, we can see that the criteria for an ideal teacher vary through different age groups and developmental stages of humans. Moreover, the expectations towards teachers can vary depending on whether it is teachers, students, or parents that have them. Nevertheless, the fundamental similarities among these diverse viewpoints can be summarized into three main dimensions: personality traits, intellectual behaviour (involving subject knowledge and communication skills), and teaching methods and skills (Hamachek, 1990; Szabo, 1999).

Personality traits refer to the individual characteristics that influence behaviour, emotions, and thoughts in various contexts. These traits are generally stable over time and shape our reactions to different circumstances, including qualities such as empathy and patience. The intellectual dimension relates to the teacher's expertise in the subject matter being taught. Lastly, the dimension of teaching methods and skills address aspects such as the teacher's ability to explain concepts effectively or deliver engaging lectures (N. Kollár and Szabó, 2004). The results of studies conducted in Hungarian educational settings are of considerable importance to us and are capable of providing insightful information for two key reasons. Firstly, they illustrate the expectations that teachers hold, particularly concerning what students wish to receive from their educators. Second, these surveys offer insights into the varying needs of children, allowing for a comparative analysis of the attitudes among various student groups and demonstrating how individualized treatment may differ across these groups.

Anna Imre's study of Roma vocational students showed that unprivileged learners of Roma origin have a greater need for affection, immediacy, individual attention and discipline from the teacher (Imre, 1999). In contrast, N. Kollár (2008) compared the opinions of primary and secondary school students and found an increasing role for expertise and a decrease in personality. As the characteristics of the ideal teacher are changing, so are the roles of the teacher. According to Day (1993:45), "all those who see their professional development as their responsibility must face the fact that teachers today are no longer the fountain of knowledge - information technology and the increasing openness of learning opportunities are likely to make it impossible to maintain

this role - but rather pedagogical professionals responsible for the effectiveness of learning processes”.

Although more than 30 years have passed since Day’s statement, these changes remain evident and pronounced. Hercz (2015) further supports this observation, noting that the status of teachers encompasses a range of roles, some of which are traditional and resistant to change, while others are changing. The author identifies several roles that have persisted beyond their conventional periods, such as the teacher as the sole source of knowledge, the knowledge transmitter, the subject mediator, and the facilitator of learners’ roles. Conversely, the continuing traditional roles include those of the educator in terms of nurturing, the teacher, and the varying degrees of these roles. New roles include the substitute parent, the therapist, the facilitator, the manager, the director, the expert, the consultant, the researcher-developer, the innovator, and the creator-author (Hercz et al., 2015). Therefore, we can see that the different role expectations are not always free of contradiction. One could say that they are inseparable from the work of teaching. Many teachers highlighted that the responsibility that comes with 'power' conflicts with the extent of their helping attitude. Hence, although a large majority of teachers would like to remain in the loving model, the co-existence of a strong and authoritative leadership role is not always feasible (Szabo et al., 2017).

According to the Dictionary of the Hungarian Language, authority "means a certain moral advantage, which attracts the eyes of others to itself, which requires a certain respect, homage, which inspires faith, trust in itself. (...) means a person, namely a man, who has made a name for himself in certain matters, knowledge, ability." (Dictionary of the Hungarian Language: *tekintély*). This definition indicates that the concept of authority is quite complex. It incorporates terms such as advantage, respect, honour, credit, confidence, and ability, highlighting the difficulties associated with articulating authority. When consulting a thesaurus, one finds synonyms like esteem, respect, reputation, and prestige, among others. However, it should be mentioned that the pedagogical aspect of authority is controversial, since in pedagogy a distinction can be made between 'being in authority', in which the teacher is a recognised leader of the student, and 'being an authority', which is linked to the teacher’s personal competences, such as expertise or preparation. If we consider authority along this division, we can say that both meanings are positive. We can see that in this approach, authority also creates the possibility of leadership as well as control, so it is not about the abuse of power (Szabó et al., 2017).

Szabó et al., (2017) offer an alternative perspective on authority, suggesting that its connotation is not always positive. They distinguish between "earned or assumed authority" and "authority derived from power." Earned or assumed authority is attained through training, knowledge, and expertise, yet it is confined to a specific domain and can be easily lost if the teacher makes mistakes within the field from which the authority derives. This form of authority is instinctively recognized by learners, who initially regard adults with a level of respect until they come to understand that adults are not infallible. Conversely, authority rooted in the teacher's capacity to reward and punish is also discussed. Rewarding involves fulfilling certain student needs, while punishing entails failing to meet expectations, leading to consequences. This type of authority diminishes as children develop, as does dependence on the teacher. Opportunities for rewards and punishments can be exhausted quickly, as children's need for them decreases dramatically after they have experienced them (ibid.).

The concept of authority is strongly influenced by changes in society. As has society, so has the parent-child relationship also changed a lot in the last two decades. This relationship has become much more flexible and mutual equality has become an important part of it. Children are taught to be independent and to form their own opinions, which then spills over into secondary socialisation areas such as education systems. The student of the 21st century is now able to formulate their expectations of an authoritative teacher, and prefers "authority based on mutual recognition of personal qualities" to authority based on power. Age differences, professional competences, knowledge, and hierarchical relationships are still important factors today, but students reject constant domination and prefer understanding and helpfulness (Csorba, 1995). If considering this, we can see that one of the most difficult and conflictual aspects of social roles is leadership, i.e. the teacher's implementation of their leadership role. According to Cartwright and Zander (1968), leadership can be understood as both a characteristic of a group, or a characteristic of an individual. In this sense, the authoritative teacher can be described as a leader to some extent. A study by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) on the personality traits of leaders identify the most important characteristics of leaders, which are having ambition, being honest, having self-confidence, having adequate cognitive ability, being competent, and being creative and flexible.

As regards personality traits, we should first look at the concept of personality. According to Allport (1997:39), personality is "the dynamic organisation within an individual of the psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behaviour and thinking". Malovics

(2020:3) further states that “trait theory of personality holds that people differ along a number of personality dimensions”. On the question of which personality traits are fundamental, a consensus has begun to emerge among researchers that personality is composed of five higher order factors, which have been termed the "Big Five" (Peck and Whitlow 1983).

The Big Five model has a long history in personality psychology. Starting in the 1930s, researchers began to study the common words in the English language that people regularly used to describe certain personality traits. Through statistical analysis, they discovered that these traits could be grouped at the level of language. By the 1960s, these groups had been organized into five broad traits, which were eventually named the Big Five in 1981. This model is now one of the most widely used and influential tools in the study of personality (DeYoung et al., 2016). The Big Five model conceptualises personality traits as spectra and places individuals on a scale between the two extreme ends of these dimensions. An example is openness. The Big Five model places the individual on a scale that determines the level of openness. These indicators can be used to effectively measure personality differences between individuals and are relatively stable over a person's lifetime. They are significantly influenced by environment and genes and can be used to predict certain life outcomes, such as career or education (Lim, 2023). The characteristics of each category are described below.

According to the extraversion group, an extraverted individual is generally assertive and outgoing, while a less extraverted individual is quieter and more reserved. Highly extroverts tend to have a wide circle of friends, while less extroverts tend to focus on a few close friends (Soto, 2018). That is, it reflects the tendency and intensity to which an individual aspires when interacting with their environment, expressing confidence and comfort in social settings. The concepts are divided into two groups according to their intensity, which are "high" and "low". High intensity includes energetic social interaction, thrill-seeking, attention-seeking, and sociability. The low-intensity ones include loneliness preference, tired social interaction, reservation, and others (Lim, 2023).

The agreeableness category includes characteristics that individuals are generally tolerant, compassionate, and trustworthy (Soto, 2018). Furthermore, Törő et al. (2020) include caring and lovingness here. In contrast to extraversion, which consists of seeking relationships, friendliness focuses on interacting with others. High intensity includes trust, honesty, conformity, modesty and empathy. Low intensities include scepticism, stubbornness, disinterest, belittling and

demanding. According to B.R. Little, friendliness is not closely related to organisational success, as "there is evidence that friendly people are less successful at their jobs, at least as their earnings suggest" (Little, 2017:51).

The conscientiousness category includes characteristics that indicate that conscientious individuals are more self-disciplined, goal-oriented and organised. They enjoy planning their lives and sticking to their plans. Törő et al. (2020) also include a sense of duty and obedience. High-intensity includes organization, commitment, persistence, and inhibition. The low-intensity ones include ineptitude, disorganization, carelessness, procrastination, indiscipline, disorderliness, and disorganization (Málovics, 2020).

Emotional stability is also referred to as neuroticism. A neurotic individual is less emotionally resilient and therefore more affected by negative situations. Such individuals are more prone to anxiety as well as pessimism. In case of these traits, we should not talk about emotional disorders, but about sensitivity to cues in the environment. Emotional stability involves the way a person perceives the world. High-intensity characteristics include worry, anger, shyness, vulnerability, mood swings, and noticing threats and grievances that a more stable person may not notice. Low-intensity traits include nonchalance, resilience, assertiveness, positivity, and calmness (Málovics 2020).

Openness fundamentally refers to how open an individual is to new things. Individuals who are open to new experiences tend to be imaginative and creative, as well as open to new ideas, relationships, and environments. This trait is closely linked to creativity (Málovics, 2020). Openness is considered the most controversial of the five factors, as experts disagree on which characteristics are included. Törő et al. (2020) include intellectual curiosity and sophistication in addition to those mentioned so far. High-intensity traits include curiosity, resourcefulness, openness and unusualness. Low-intensity indicators include predictability, love of tradition, routine, and stability (Málovics, 2020).

### **3. Research**

The main aim of the study is to examine the perceptions of Carpathian Basin university students studying in Hungarian language on ideal teachers, on authority and its loss, and to compare whether there are differences in the perceptions on each of the background variables.



Considering the above objectives, the following questions were formulated to guide us through our research:

**RQ1:** What characteristics do university students in the Carpathian Basin consider to be the characteristics of a respected, authoritative teacher?

**RQ2:** What are the characteristics that contribute most to a teacher losing authority according to the perception of Carpathian Basin university students?

**RQ3:** What personality traits of teachers, as perceived by university students in the Carpathian Basin, are least likely to be considered authoritative and are most likely to be incorporated into the Big Five model?

In order to fulfil the aim of our study, a questionnaire was selected as the method of data collection. A total of 1037 students completed the questionnaire, which was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire was presented in Hungarian language from March 1 to March 13, 2024 and was distributed to several universities in the Carpathian basin, out of which five collected a sufficient amount of responses for us to be able to compare the received results. These were the J. Selye University in Slovakia, the Eszterházy Károly Catholic University in Eger, Hungary, the Partium Christian University of Oradea in Romania, the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College in Berehovo, Ukraine, and the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. The questionnaire contained 14 questions in total. As for the participants of our study, the demographic information is provided as follows.

- **sex:** male - 32.8% (340 participants); female - 67.2% (697 participants),
- **age:** 18-21 years old - 44% (456 participants); 22-25 years old - 31.1% (323 participants); 26-35 years old - 13.5% (140 participants); 36-50 years old - 10.2% (106 participants); over 50 years old - 1.2% (12 participants),
- **University:** J. Selye University, Komarno, Slovakia - 60.8% (631 participants); Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Eger, Hungary - 12.6% (131 participants); Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania - 9.9% (103 participants); Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College, Berehovo, Ukraine - 7.7% (80 participants); University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia - 8.9% (92 participants),
- **Type of education:** full-time - 73.5% (762 students); part-time - 26.5% (275 students),
- **type of residence:** capital city - 3.4% (35 participants); big city - 11.9% (123 participants); small town - 31.4% (326 persons); municipality - 53.3% (553 participants),

- **level of education:** bachelor (BA/Bc) - 87.6% (908 participants); master (MA/Mgr) - 11.4% (118 participants); doctorate (PhD) - 1.1% (11 participants),
- **whether there is a teacher in the family:** yes - 32.5% (337 participants); no - 67.5% (700 participants),
- **field of education:** teacher education - 54.8% (568); economics/economics - 43% (446); natural sciences/ natural sciences - 2% (21); social sciences/social sciences - 0.2% (2).

The table below shows the distribution of students participating in the questionnaire by subject and university.

**Table 1:** *Distribution of participants by subject and university*

	J. Selye University SK	Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, HU	Partium Christian University, RO	Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College, UK	University of Novi Sad, SR	<b>Total</b>
in teacher education	317	85	28	62	76	562
in economics	314	39	75	18	0	446
in natural sciences	0	5	0	0	16	21
In social Sciences	0	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	631	131	103	80	92	<b>1037</b>

The distribution of students participating in the research, categorized by university and type of training, is presented in the following table.

**Table 1** *Distribution of participants by university*

	Full-time	Part-time	<b>Total</b>
J. Selye University, SK	545	86	631
Eszterházy Károly Catholic University Eger, HU	81	50	131
Partium Christian University, Oradea, RO	96	7	103
Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College, UK	18	62	80
University of Novi Sad, SR	22	70	92
<b>Total</b>	762	275	<b>1037</b>

The following table, last but not least, portrays the distribution of participants on the basis of their university and sex.

**Table 2** *Distribution of participants based on sex*

	Male	Female	Total
J. Selye University, SK	213	418	631
Eszterházy Károly Catholic University Eger, HU	46	85	131
Partium Christian University, Oradea, RO	59	44	103
Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College, UK	12	68	80
University of Novi Sad, SR	10	82	92
<b>Total</b>	340	697	<b>1037</b>

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The participants were asked about their opinions regarding the essential qualities of a teacher as authority using three adjectives or attributes. A total of 1,015 students contributed at least one descriptor of what they perceive to be an authoritative educator, while 716 students provided two descriptors, and 451 students offered three. Based on the responses from university students who completed the survey, the predominant characteristics attributed to an authoritative teacher included strictness (185), respectfulness (165), and a combination of firmness, kindness, and helpfulness (134). Additionally, an analysis of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of an authoritative teacher was conducted with respect to sex, with the results detailed in Table 4.

**Table 4** *Teacher characteristics based on sex*

Descriptors based on participants' answers	I.	II.	III.
Male (340 participants, 658 descriptors)	strict (66) – 10%	respectful (47) – 7,1%	kind (44) – 6,7%
Female (697 participants, 1524 descriptors)	respectful (118) – 7,7%	strict (115) – 7,5%	helpful (101) – 6,6%

We also asked the participants to share their perceptions regarding the qualities that might cause a teacher to lose their authority among students. They were requested to provide three adjectives or

attributes in their responses. Out of the total, 979 students offered at least one adjective or attribute they deemed relevant to an authoritative educator, with 394 students providing two, and 136 students supplying three. In total, 71 unique adjectives were recorded. The participants identified the leading reasons for a teacher's diminished authority as disrespect (130), unfairness (112), and the act of disrespecting their students (85). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that 48 respondents, or 4.6%, mentioned that a teacher humiliating their students was also a contributing factor. These 71 adjectives were organized according to the Big Five personality model, as shown in the following table.

**Table 5** *Answers in group on the basis of the Big Five model*

<b>The Big 5 grouping</b>	<b>Occurrence in numbers</b>	<b>Occurrence in %</b>
Extraverted	63	4,17%
Cooperative, agreeable	697	46,19%
Conscientious	458	30,35%
Emotional	162	10,74%
Open to new experiences	129	8,55%

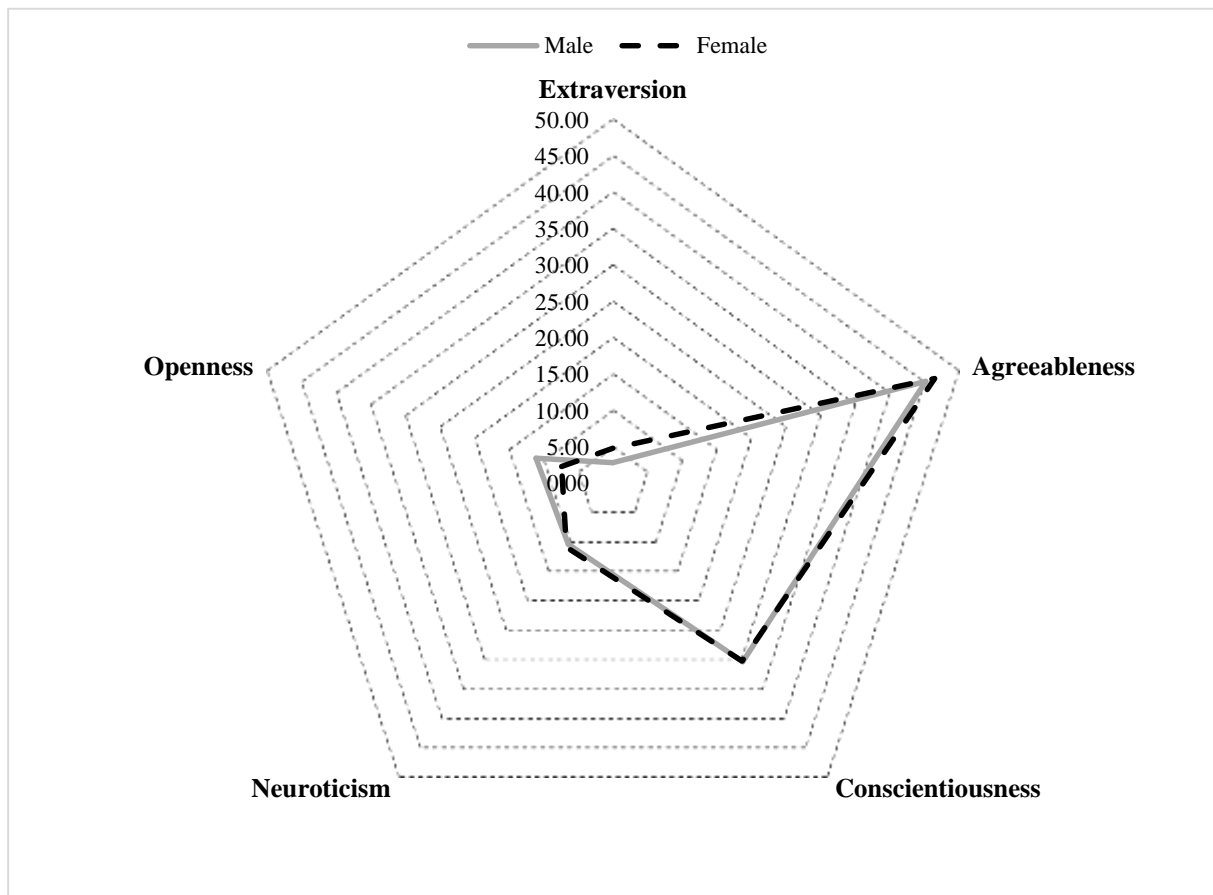
Furthermore, the distribution of the Big Five grouped indicators and attributes for the two subsamples, which include (1) sex and (2) educational institution (country) were also analysed. The findings are detailed below.

**Table 6** *Subsamples of sex and educational institution for the indicators*

<b>The Big Five grouping</b>	<b>Male answers (3x340=1020)</b>		<b>Female answers (3x697=2091)</b>	
	Number	%	Number	%
Extraverted	13	1,3%	50	2,4%
Cooperative, agreeable	209	20,5%	488	23,3%
Conscientious	140	13,7%	318	15,2%
Emotional	48	4,7%	114	5,5%
Open to new experiences	51	5%	78	3,7%
No response	559	54,8%	1043	49,9%

The distribution of responses among male respondents, excluding non-respondents, is as follows: 2.8%, 45.3%, 30.4%, 10.4%, and 11.1%. For female respondents, the distribution is 4.8%, 46.6%,

30.3%, 10.9%, and 7.4%. Additionally, a radar chart (Figure 1) visually represents the sex distribution.



**Figure 1** Matching views on teacher authority

The most significant difference was observed in the dimension of openness to experiences, with a difference of 3.7%. Male university students believed that the traits associated with teaching behaviour within this dimension may contribute more to the loss of teacher authority than female university students. The smallest difference was found in the conscientiousness dimension (0.1%). The prevalence of the Big Five personality traits in relation to the educational institution background variables is detailed in the next table.

**Table 7** *Prevalence of the Big Five groups for educational institutions*

	JSU, SK (1893)	EKKE, HU (393)	PKE, RO (309)	II. R. F, UK (240)	ÚE, SRB (276)
Extraverted	35 (3,6%)	10 (5,6%)	6 (4,5%)	4 (4,3%)	8 (5,8%)
Cooperative, agreeable	451 (46,8%)	87 (48,6%)	60 (45,1%)	32 (34%)	67 (48,2%)
Conscientious	289 (30%)	55 (30,7%)	40 (30,1%)	34 (36,2%)	40 (28,8%)
Emotional	108 (11,2%)	14 (7,8%)	11 (8,3%)	12 (12,8%)	17 (12,2%)
Open to new experiences	81 (8,4%)	13 (7,3%)	16 (12%)	12 (12,8%)	7 (5%)
No response	929	214	176	146	137

The distribution for the educational institution background variables is also illustrated by a radar diagram (Figure 2).

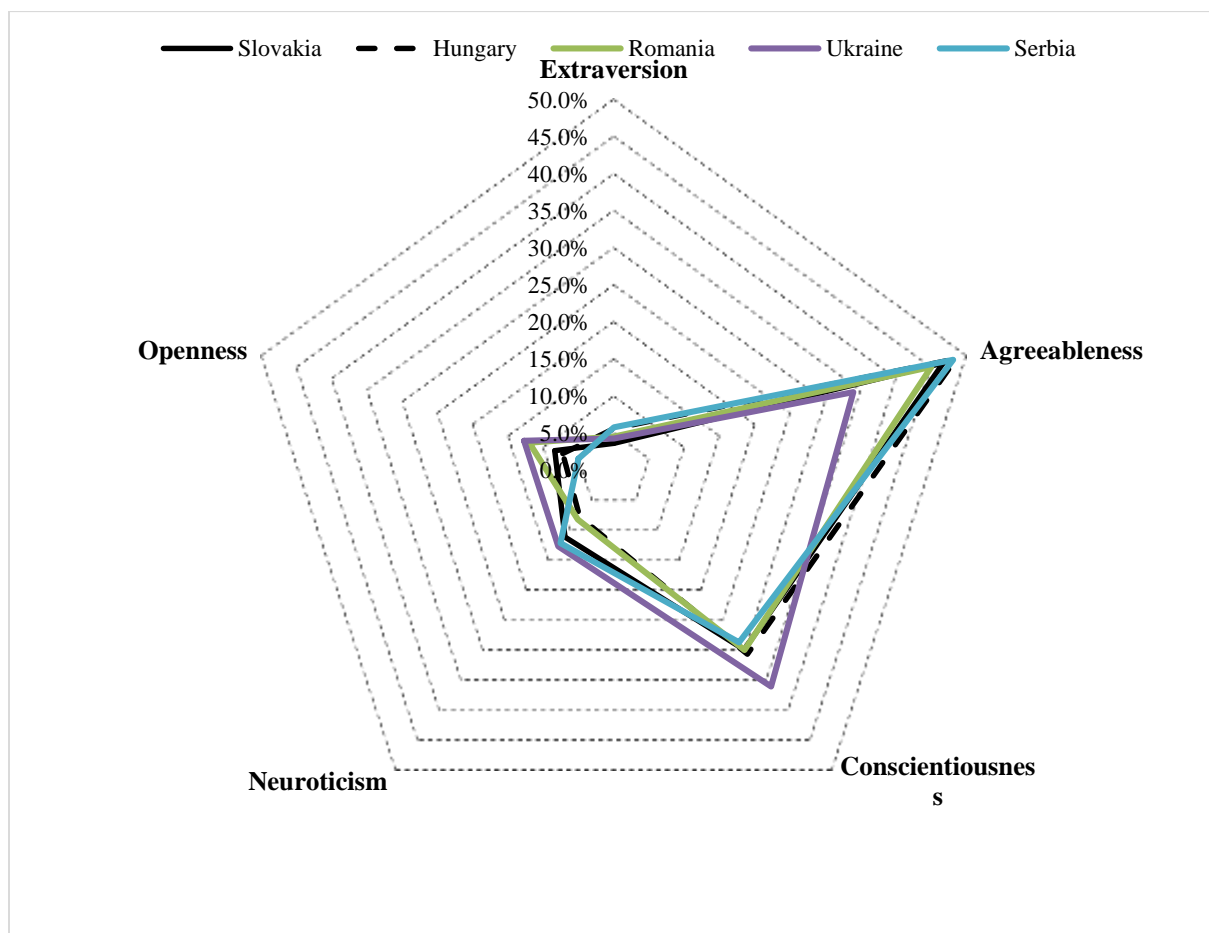


Figure 2 clearly shows the most significant difference in the dimension of agreeableness, which stands at 14.6%. Hungarian participants believe that the traits associated with teacher behaviour, categorized under cooperative and friendly, may have a greater impact on diminishing teacher authority as compared with their Ukrainian university counterparts. Equally, the least variation was observed in the conscientiousness dimension, with a difference of only 1.9%.

To conclude the data portrayed above and provide answers to our research questions, out of the total of 1,037 students that completed the questionnaire, a total of 2,182 adjectives and/or attributes were collected. Based on the feedback from the participants, the five most common characteristics of an authoritative teacher are: strict (185), respectful (164), firm (134), kind (134), and helpful (134). As for the second inquiry regarding the loss of authority, a total number of adjectives/attributes submitted was 1,509, with 71 distinct adjectives identified after accounting for duplicates. According to the responses, the primary factors contributing to a teacher's loss of authority include disrespect (130), unfairness (112), and condescension towards students (85). For the last question regarding alignment of participants' answers with the Big Five personality model on teacher lacking authority, the 71 listed attributes were categorised into the Big Five dimensions (table 5). The majority of these fell under the agreeableness dimension, totalling 697. In terms of sex, the cooperative, friendly dimension of agreeableness also had the highest number of personality traits that the Carpathian Basin university students considered to be the reason for the loss of teacher authority (45.3% for males and 46.6% for females).

## **5. Conclusion**

In the course of our research, we explored the perspectives of university students studying in Hungarian language in the Carpathian Basin on teacher authority. According to the opinions of the participants, the most characteristic features of an authoritative teacher are being strict (185), respectful (164), firm, kind and helpful (134). Furthermore, the most important factors contributing to the loss of teacher authority are being disrespectful (130), unfair (112) and condescending (85) towards their students. The majority of the personality traits listed by the participants could be classified as cooperative, friendly and conscientious, while the personality traits of extraversion, openness to experiences and emotionality were almost absent. Based on these results, it can be concluded that tolerance, trustworthiness, compassion, organisation, and self-discipline are important components of teacher authority in the sample studied, based on the

Big Five model. Conversely, the misuse of these attributes appears to result in a reduced sense of authority, as reported by the participants. The personality traits in the dimensions of agreeableness and conscientiousness reflect the teacher's attitude towards the students. Disrespect, unfairness and contempt are in contrast to the modern view that children should be taught to be independent and critical thinkers. These children already have expectations of the teacher, just as teachers have of them, such as cooperation, appreciation and equal treatment. This may be the reason why personality traits that reflect the teacher's relationship with themselves, even if negative, do not directly entail a loss of authority. However, further research is needed to prove this hypothesis. Another area for further research could be the humiliation of students by teachers, which 4.6% of the students in the present study (48) had already encountered. The issue at hand is whether the teacher's loss of authority can be justified based on the following considerations: (1) the student having personally endured humiliation; (2) the student having observed a fellow peer being subjected to humiliation by a teacher; and (3) the student having learned of such an incident through hearsay or informal communication.

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