

Transcript of ENHANCE Podcast Episode: Shaping my Education

Recorded by: NHE

Introduction: Welcome to today's episode! This is the third part of our podcast series produced as part of the Enhance project. We will be exploring the challenges of Hungarian university education through the eyes of an international student. Our guest is a Syrian student who will share what it is like to study here, from first impressions and cultural differences to the unique strength of Hungarian higher education and the difficulties foreign students may face. We will also talk about an important question: how much voice students actually have in shaping their education in Hungary compared to back home. Stay with us as we dive into the fascinating journey of learning, adaptation and perspective.

So, hello!

Could you introduce yourself briefly?

Boushra: Yes, definitely. My name is Boushra, and I come from Syria. I'm 27. I work as an English teacher. I used to work, actually, as an English teacher back home. I have a bachelor's degree in English literature and language, and I moved to Hungary in 2023 to study andragogy, or adult education, and I graduated in June 2025.

Q: What made you choose Hungary as your destination for your university studies?

Boushra: Well, actually, when I was studying for my bachelor's degree, I had a professor who did both her master's and bachelor's in Hungary, and she used to tell us about her life there and how much she enjoyed the educational system. She told us about how interesting life is there, especially when it comes to the international environment, and because of this, I was really interested in knowing more about Hungary. So I went online, I searched how I could study in Hungary, and I found out that I can apply through a scholarship that is called the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship, and I looked for a programme which is related to human development. I felt like I found that adult education is really something related to me, and I applied in 2021, but unfortunately I wasn't able to get the scholarship in the first year, but the second year I succeeded, and I came here studying for my master's degree.

Q: What was your first impression of Hungary's higher education and student life?

Boushra: Well, I would say I was really impressed, because I saw a lot of differences between what I used to do at home or what I used to see at home and what I see here. What I liked actually is how many activities the university has for students, the technology that you can see inside the classrooms, and, of course, the open-mindedness of the professors. I would also say that here you can see a lot of diversity when it comes to programmes, so you're not restricted to a certain number. You can think about something that you like, and you can find a programme for it, and other than this, of course, there is the international environment that you can see in Hungary. You literally are living in the whole world in one city, of course, when it comes to Pécs, for example, which was something really interesting for me.

Q: From your perspective, what is better or what is the best in studying in Hungary compared to other countries? Do you have any other experiences?

Boushra: The only place I studied abroad is Hungary, but I would say that compared to other places, Hungary is somehow more affordable for students, especially when it comes to



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PhD students and master's students who have to study all the time. They don't have time to work. Other than this, actually, the welcoming environment. You always feel like you are at home. I would say, here, I never felt homesick, because people around me, both Hungarians and foreigners, were really welcoming to me, especially on holidays. I remember how many times I was invited by Hungarian families for lunch, for dinner, and sometimes even on Christmas. It was really interesting, and they would always introduce me to their culture, so you always feel that you are loved. This is something I found really interesting and actually amazing. Other than this, how close are professors with their students? They would always ask your opinion. They would, you know, treat you like a human being, so you're not a robot. They would care about your feelings, and this is something I really admired until now.

Q: Is it different in your home country? Do you know something about that?

Boushra: Yes, actually, when it comes to professors back home in Syria, a professor is a professor, so you can't cross the line. You can't treat him like a friend of yours because it would be really bad, because it's a real disrespect. So you can't joke with your professor. Even when they have an idea, that is their idea, it is always correct, and your idea should not contradict their idea. So, I remember here in Hungary, sometimes the professor says something, and then I say I believe that it's something else, and he says he respects my opinion, and he is happy to hear more about it, so it's really different. But back home, unfortunately, sometimes ideas that don't match with the curriculum can lead to failure, so yeah.

Q: What challenges have you faced as a student here? Academically, socially or even administratively?

Boushra: If I start with the administrative part, it would be the lot of paperwork to do. Sometimes you have to follow the deadlines a lot. For example, when it comes to Neptune, it was really difficult for us to start. We don't know what to do with Neptune, and even though we had a lot of people who helped us, still it really took like three months to understand. I remember here, when I wanted to register for some subjects, I missed the deadline to register, and then they had to help me, and they were very kind in helping me. Other than this, the language barriers that sometimes can happen with you and your classmates.

Of course, because we're speaking in our second language, which is English, sometimes we get to a point when nobody understands the other, which really can be tough sometimes, and you can get exhausted from using, you know, your second language all the time. Other than this, also, it can be that sometimes you can't find a lot of places where they speak English, so you always have to use your Google Translate, but I would say that these challenges can be overcome. It's not like something difficult, so I think this is something everyone faced, but later it became easy. It's not that difficult anymore.

Q: In Hungary, how much voice do you think students really have in shaping their education in the classroom, in decisions or in university life?

Boushra: I would say, compared actually to my home country, they have a really big voice when it comes to shaping education. I had an incident that happened with me: that one day, I remember that I had an exam in two hours, and I started feeling sick, and I wasn't able to reschedule the exam because, you know, I passed the deadline. I went to the professor, and I told her I'm sorry, but I'm feeling really sick, and I can't do the exam. And she was really helpful, and she told me, 'Don't worry, we can reschedule it even if it is only two hours before.' So only this incident had me believe that you can have a voice and you have a



decision you can make. Other than this, I saw in some classes that I have attended that some students didn't like the way that this course is being taught, and they asked the professor to change the way that it is being held and so on, and the professor was very happy to do it. Also the practical part – we asked for a practical part for one of the classes, and the professor immediately changed the plan, so it was really amazing, so I would say they really have a big voice in reshaping the education system.

Q: What do you think Hungarian universities could do better to support international students?

Boushra: I would say having more programmes that could combine both Hungarians and international students. You know, it's sad sometimes when you are in the university; you see Hungarian students standing apart from the international ones because we don't have this thing that can unite us together. Having more classes that can combine us together so we could understand each other more, so we could learn more about their culture, the Hungarian culture, which would be a really good thing. Other than this, it is to support language, the Hungarian language, and learning more. I know that we have classes, but, unfortunately, there are a bit too few; there are only a few, so sometimes you can't attend them because you have other responsibilities, so I would say that this thing would really help. Other than this, we could also have this kind of programme, which is for hobbies, like art, sport and so on, so it's not something only related to the university itself, like a subject, but it's just a programme that I want to do just once.

Q: Looking ahead, how do you see your degree helping you in Hungary, back in Syria or elsewhere?

Boushra: Okay, so when I wanted to do my master's, I was really focusing on the human development of adult education, and my plan was to try to make this kind of centre that can help adults in vocational education and of course training when it comes to linguistic parts, vocational parts, or anything. I wanted to do it in Syria in order to help adults to upskill themselves to find new job opportunities and to really find what their skills are and how they can develop the community better. But unfortunately, right now because of the economical situations, it's really difficult to open such a centre, so I was thinking that I can find a job here with my degree that would help me gain more experience. I would have more kinds of perspectives; I would understand how vocational education is held and how I can try to make adults become more like active citizens. I would hold this idea and bring it back home because I believe it's a really great project in order to build the society, starting not only from children but also from adults themselves.

Q: So this is your future plan also, or what else? Tell me more about it.

Boushra: I would say also that I would also focus on the language part, as I've worked as an English teacher since 2018. I really want to have this kind of language centre that would also include adults, because this is my main focus here: to help adults learn the language better. I would also focus on what stands in their way in gaining language skills and how I can help them to have better proficiency in languages. I would say these are my two main plans, but also other volunteer works that I really want to do in the human development part.

Q: One last question: if you could give one piece of advice to other international students considering coming to Hungary, what would it be?



Boushra: I would say go for it! Just apply for the subject that you want to get the scholarship for, get the approval from the university, pack your clothes, get the visa, and just go there. It's a really nice experience, and I would say that the best decision I've ever made in my life was coming here to Hungary and studying in Hungary. It's something that I always think about as one of the best decisions in my life. And, actually, something really interesting: tomorrow would be the anniversary of me coming to Hungary. It's the third anniversary of me coming to Hungary, so it's a really emotional day, because I remember how my life changed actually after coming here. So I would recommend that you can come, and actually I would recommend the University of Pécs because it has the most interactive programmes and the most welcoming environment that you can ever see in your life.

Q: Thank you very much! Thank you for coming!

Boushra: Thank you so much!



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