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## ENSURING ADAPTATIONAL READINESS OF FOREIGNERS TO STUDY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AT RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES

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### *Abstract*

The article deals with the problems of adaptation of foreign students to the conditions of study in Russian universities. Russian universities are currently facing an ambitious task: not only to enter the international educational space after a fairly long lull, but also to firmly establish themselves in it for a long time. In the Russian literature, the adaptation process is considered as a process of active adaptation of a person to a changing environment using various social means. This process is accompanied by a number of problems that also require a lot of attention. These are problems related to the need to establish social contacts, overcome the language barrier, self-realization and integration in a new society, as well as the development of a tolerant attitude to the participants of intercultural communication and interaction. It should be noted that the number of foreign students in Russian universities is growing every year. Consequently, the problem of adapting foreign students to study in a Russian university is one of the most important problems that both the university management and teachers have to solve.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Russian Federation has a real potential that allows it to occupy its rightful place in the global educational community, and has a number of advantages in the global market. In the first place, Russia has a vast experience in teaching foreign students. Since the first time when foreigners were invited as students more than a hundred years ago, a certain experience has been accumulated at universities, special methods have been developed, and a personnel base has been created. In the second place, Russian education is recognized as fundamental, it provides a solid foundation, gives an opportunity for continuous development. In the third place, of course, its cheapness remains a significant advantage. The prices are much lower for foreigners than in other countries.

The modern information society is changing the system of values, the image of an educated person and education in general; there is an innovative development of higher education; a new university model is emerging, i.e. new approaches are being developed and the quality of educational activities is improving. The primary orientation for most universities is internationalization. Internationalization of higher education is generally understood as a process in which goals, functions and organization of rendering educational services acquire an international scope.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Currently, the number of students coming from different countries to study in the Russian Federation is growing. Therefore, there is a necessity to organize a high-quality pre-university stage of study as a condition for adaptation of foreign citizens, their readiness to continue their studies at Russian universities. The process of adaptation of foreign citizens is lengthy and multi-faceted. However, implementation of additional educational programs and the PF (preparatory faculty) work system helps students integrate into a new language and cultural space. On the one hand, it leads to the intensive internalization of modern education; on the other hand, it actualizes the problem of adaptation of foreign citizens to study at Russian universities. This is an immediate problem, because every year about 10% of students do not cope with the difficulties of adaptation and go home before the end of the school year (Ryabkova, 2014).

## **3. Research Questions**

In our opinion, it seems appropriate to consider in the article the necessary categories in their natural sequence (adaptation – adaptation of foreign citizens to study at a Russian university – academic adaptation of foreign citizens during the pre-university preparation to studying educational programs at university, taking into account the difficulties faced by foreign citizens in the process of their studies – the adaptive readiness of foreign citizens to studying educational programs at university, its structure).

Academic adaptation of foreign citizens has its own characteristics. Foreign citizens come to the Russian Federation from different countries, they have limited experience in educational activities that reflects their national and cultural features. In this regard, Russian institutions of higher education serve to solve the problems of integrating general education and professional training of foreign citizens. The success of this integration largely depends on their adaptation to the pedagogical system of a Russian university. Therefore, academic adaptation is of special significance already at the pre-university

preparatory stage as a basis for ensuring the integration of students into the educational paradigm of a Russian university through learning the program developed in accordance with the established requirements. Thus, during the period of study at a Russian university foreign citizen need to study at least two educational programs: the program regulated by the Requirements, and the basic professional educational program in the framework of the Federal Educational Standard of Higher Education.

The term “adaptation” was introduced into scientific use by a German physiologist G. Aubert and it describes the characteristics of the phenomenon of adaptation of visual organs to external stimuli by increasing or decreasing the sensitivity threshold. In short form, adaptation is described as an adjustment necessary for a balanced existence under changing conditions, as well as a process of including an individual in a new social environment, mastering the specifics of new conditions.

In Russian literature, adaptation is understood as “...any interactions between the individual and the environment in which their structures, functions and behavior are coordinated”. Rean et al. (2008) consider adaptation to be “the process and result of internal changes, external active adaptation and self-change of an individual to new conditions of existence” (p. 17). Surygin (2000a) presents adaptation as “a process of human adjusting to altered environmental conditions, to altered living conditions” (p. 167). Kogan (2013) defines adaptation as “a systemic, bilateral, stage-by-stage process of active adjusting of a student to the conditions of educational environment” (p. 34).

M. A. Ivanova defines adaptation of foreign citizens to education at a Russian university through the formation of stable relations to all the components of the pedagogical system which ensures adequate behavior of a person for effective achievement of pedagogical goals of the preparatory faculty for foreign citizens. From her point of view, a foreign student experiences natural discomfort in the new macro- and microenvironment, because he faces a reorganization, a change in personal psychophysiological processes. During the initial period of adaptation, he is in a state of shock, which is characterized by information overload at all levels (in the learning process and out of it), emotional overload (new connections, communications, language barrier, etc.), adaptation to domestic life (independence in budget administration, self-sufficiency and self-care, etc.). In general terms, according to O. L. Kamardina, T. P. Chernyavskaya and A. I. Surygin, this kind of adaptation is a multi-level, dynamic process with a structure and special characteristics connected with a person’s change in a new linguistic, sociocultural, educational and professional environment, and so on (as cited in Surygin, 2000b). In other words, adaptation of foreign students is a complex, dynamic, multi-level and multilateral process of change in the sphere of needs and motivation, change in the complex of current skills, abilities and habits in accordance with new conditions.

Academic adaptation occupies an important place among other types of adaptation: physiological, cultural, psychological, socio-psychological. There are various approaches to the interpretation of the concept “academic adaptation” in the pedagogical literature. For example, I. V. Shiryayeva interprets this concept as a formation of a stable system of relations to all components of the pedagogical system, ensuring adequate behavior of the doer of activity to effectively achieve the goals of the pedagogical system. O. L. Kamardina and O. V. Korchagina understand academic adaptation of foreign students as a process of their entry into educational activity, which allows achieving optimal results from the standpoint of learning goals and personality abilities with a sufficiently high level of motivation and self-organization, it depends on the individual psychophysiological abilities, national and cultural characteristics of all participants of the

pedagogical process. Kazantseva (2012) defines academic adaptation as “adaptation of foreign students to the peculiarities of organization of the educational process at a Russian university, to the new forms and methods of training” (pp. 68-73).

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

It is important to have a clear idea of the difficulties that foreign citizens will undoubtedly encounter as students of a Russian university in the process of studying a certain basic educational program of higher education. Obviously, these difficulties will be decomposed into general difficulties that are equal both for Russian first-year students, and for foreign citizens during their first year at a Russian university, and difficulties arising from the specific features of academic adaptation of foreign citizens in their freshmen year. So, the purpose of the study is to identify a structure of adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at a Russian university, to found out the reasons which complicate its formation and to offer ways eliminating these reasons.

#### **5. Research Methods**

To solve the task set in the work the following research methods were used: the philosophy of anthropocentrism; philosophy of the subject-humanitarian approach to the design of educational content and technologies; systemic-functional methodological approach; acmeological foundations of professional development, the basic provisions of the theory of knowledge, domestic psychodidactics of higher education; didactics of language teaching, system-activity, communicative-competence approaches.

#### **6. Findings**

The nature of difficulties faced by foreign students under conditions of a new educational system is determined by the degree of conformity of the structural and functional components of the previous and new educational systems (Fedotova et al., 2010).

The structure of difficulties both for first-year Russian citizens (Tarasova, 2017) and foreign citizens (Ivanova, 2001; Pomortseva, 2010) includes psychophysiological, educational, cognitive, communicative and everyday difficulties.

Psychophysiological difficulties for Russian citizens are characterized by the personal reorganization in the context of initial adaptation and “entry” into a new macro and microenvironment, by a different attitude towards oneself and by applying a new social role; by other standards of behavior at university and by the relationship “teacher-student” within the framework of socio-psychological groups of difficulties (Avdeyuk & Aseeva, 2011, pp. 11-13; Avdeyuk et al., 2011, p. 145), by the need to adapt to a completely new social environment.

“The entry” of foreign citizens into a new macroenvironment and microenvironment has specific features. There are ethnosocial and ethnocultural features for the macroenvironment; the microenvironment is multicultural horizontally and is controlled vertically. Pozdnyakov (2010) points out ethnocultural problems of interpersonal interaction and contact with the surrounding social environment (p. 161-167). Arsenyev et al. (2003) connect difficulties with conditions of a new social environment. Among the

objective reasons for adaptation of foreign citizens Wittenberg (1995) points out difficulties connected with a new environment, a new group of people, living conditions in isolation from one's family and homeland (p. 57). Krivtsova (2011) draws our attention to difficulties focused on the need to overcome stress arising from the abrupt climate change, lack of familiar living conditions and nutrition faced by foreign students (pp. 284-288). The subjective reasons for adaptation of foreign citizens are associated with their individual characteristics (shyness, desire / unwillingness to learn, etc.) (Wittenberg, 1995).

From Tarasova's (2017) point of view, educational and cognitive difficulties for Russian citizens are associated with: adaptation to new requirements and knowledge control system; organization of educational process, development of independent work skills; a sharp change in the content and volume of material; university-specific activities; other than at school study load and requirements; lack of independent work skills; inability to recap and to work with primary sources. O. A. Avdeyuk, E. N. Aseeva support a number of difficulties highlighted by L. E. Tarasova (a sharp change in the content and volume of material, university-specific activities, lack of independent work skills, inability to recap and to work with primary sources) and supplement it with the difficulty associated with new professional and subject terminology. The psychological and pedagogical theory also presents a number of difficulties associated with adaptation to the conditions of educational activity of Russian citizens: adaptation to new forms of teaching, control and assimilation of knowledge; adaptation to a different mode of work and rest, an independent lifestyle, etc.; adaptation to the educational process. M. I. Ivanova, N. V. Pomortseva identify such difficulties as adaptation to new requirements and knowledge of control system, to organization of educational process and development of independent work skills as common for Russian and foreign freshmen.

Along with this, there are difficulties arising in connection with the specific features of the academic adaptation of freshmen as foreign citizens:

- overcoming the language barrier, differences in education systems (M. I. Ivanova and N. V. Pomortseva); language training and differences in the educational system of Russia and that of students' native countries (I. O. Krivtsova); teaching in a non-native language, unpreparedness due to education in the native country and / or a long break in studies (Yu. A. Aleksandrovsky); linguistic problems of obtaining knowledge and skills of the major subject (I. A. Pozdnyakov);
- difficulties associated with the need to transfer to the pedagogical system of a higher level of education (school-university) within the framework of educational groups of difficulties (A. I. Surygin); with adaptation to the transition to a higher level of education, i.e. adaptation to the educational process itself; to pedagogical methods and forms of teaching that are different from the native ones (Kazantseva, 2012, p. 68-73);
- difficulties determined by overcoming "the didactic barrier", meaning a change of the school attitude to the educational process at university (O. N. Dudchenko, A. V. Mytil).
- difficulties associated with the mismatch of education programs in the field of studying general scientific disciplines in Russia and in a foreign student's homeland which are in the structure of the substantial difficulties group (Vinogradova et al., 2016, pp. 11-13); with a sudden change in the content and volume of material;

- difficulties in getting used to technologies, teaching methods, the specifics of teaching and methodological aids, forms of control within the framework of the methodological group of difficulties (Yu. V. Vinogradova), a variety of new forms and methods of teaching;
- difficulties associated with organization of the educational process: getting used to the requirements of teachers and the dean's office, need of personal self-control of studies, having classes within groups of organizational and physiological difficulties, new educational activities within the framework of objective reasons for adaptation of foreign citizens (E.V. Wittenberg), etc. Moreover, an educational process should be organized on the bases of the principles of personal self-development;
- lack of skills of independent work; poor skills of independent work, self-control, etc. in the framework of subjective reasons for adaptation of foreign citizens.

Both Russian and foreign freshmen have communicative difficulties ahead of them. These difficulties are both vertical, i.e. connected with the faculty administration, teachers and staff, and horizontal, i.e. connected with interpersonal communication within a small study group, other student groups, at hostel, etc. (L. E. Tarasova, M. I. Ivanova, N. V. Pomortseva). However, according to A. A. Kazantseva, regarding the difficulties for foreign citizens, the natural barrier between ethnic groups (to overcome it will be the first step to successful learning) is linguistic adaptation. Yu. V. Vinogradova associates difficulties with the level of Russian language proficiency in the field of communication with teachers, administration, groupmates, problems when working with the course books and the information environment of the university; problems of getting used to the new style of communication with teachers, dean's staff, and groupmates. From the point of view of Evsenkova (2010), the main difficulty for 90% of foreign students who have some knowledge of the Russian language, and who have recently started studying Russian, is learning in a foreign language (p. 145).

Household difficulties, from the point of view of L. E. Tarasova, M. I. Ivanova, N. V. Pomortseva are common to both Russian and foreign citizens in terms of lack of skills of independence, decision making and problem solving.

The specific difficulties that foreign citizens need to overcome are those associated with security and livelihood issues.

As a result of the analysis of the approaches identifying common difficulties, we have distinguished psychophysiological, educational, cognitive and communicative groups of difficulties.

Psychophysiological difficulties connected with:

- "entry" of foreign citizens into a new macroenvironment (ethnocultural problems of interaction with the surrounding social environment) and a new microenvironment (ethnocultural problems of interpersonal interaction);
- getting used to a new style of communication with teachers, dean's staff, groupmates;
- subjective reasons for adaptation of foreign citizens connected with their individual
- characteristics (desire / unwillingness to learn, determination, self-criticism, etc.).
- Educational and cognitive difficulties:

- difficulties associated with organization of the educational process: getting used to the classes time schedule, to the requirements of teachers and dean's office;
- overcoming the language barrier, differences in educational systems;
- difficulties associated with a new subject and professional terminology;
- difficulties associated with the mismatch of education programs in the field of general scientific disciplines in Russia and a student's homeland;
- a sudden change in the amount of learning material offered for studying educational program at university;
- difficulties in getting used to technologies, learning methods, a variety of new forms and methods of teaching, specifics of text and method books, and forms of control;
- weak skills of independent work, personal self-control of learning activity.
- difficulties associated with the level of command of Russian in the field of communication with teachers, administration, groupmates;
- difficulties in working with study material, primary sources, and the information environment of the university.

The academic adaptation of foreign citizens to studying educational programs of higher education in a Russian university implies the continuity of this process during the pre-university training and study at a university. It is possible to implement such adaptation only in a unified educational environment, which allows integrating the pedagogical efforts of the preparatory faculty for foreign students and the faculty that implements educational programs of higher education of the university.

The academic adaptation of foreign citizens during pre-university preparation for studying educational programs at a Russian university is adaptation to the psychophysiological, educational, cognitive and communicative difficulties that they have to overcome in the process of studying educational programs at a Russian university.

It is the pre-university stage that demands to prepare foreign citizens to study the basic professional educational programs in the process of academic adaptation. The result of the adaptation is adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at university.

When we define the concept of "adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs", we use Grigorieva's (2016) approach. She understands adaptational readiness in the "personality-environment" system as willingness to effectively interact with new elements of this environment; willingness to change which means the final result of adaptation expressed in a person's ability to fully and successfully carry out the leading activity for a certain age and / or individually significant activity under changing conditions. In other words, adaptational readiness is "a person's propensity for perceiving and accepting the environmental dynamics, for carrying out certain actions in a dynamic and subjectively new situation, when these actions are aimed at establishing a balance between the requirements of the environment and the possibilities of the person..." (Grigorieva, 2016, pp. 275-277).

In view of this, adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at a Russian university is the final result of academic adaptation. It expresses the willingness of foreign citizens to overcome the psychophysiological, educational, cognitive and communicative difficulties in the process of mastering educational programs at a Russian university.

To determine the structure of foreign citizens' adaptational readiness to study educational programs at a Russian university, we have modified A. Ya. Aleeva and I. V. Arendachuk's approaches, considering the motivational, cognitive, operational and reflective components as structural components.

Motivational component of foreign citizens' adaptational readiness to study educational programs at university.

In our opinion, the content of the motivational component in the structure of adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at university includes communication models of foreign citizens with teachers, the dean's office staff, groupmates in Russian language; motives for studying educational programs at a Russian university.

The cognitive component of adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at university.

The Latin word "cognitio" means "knowledge, cognition". Yu. K. Babansky emphasizes that knowledge is the result of cognition of reality proven by practice, and the correct reflection of the reality in human thinking. The most important for foreign citizens are such qualities as completeness and strength. The completeness of knowledge acquisition is determined by a number of structural elements of knowledge (concepts, scientific facts, laws, theories, research methods) learned by students. The strength is determined by the degree of proficiency in education material at the level of long-term memory.

We believe that the cognitive component includes: communication, basic and special knowledge of foreign citizens that is necessary for successful continuation of studies at Russian universities; knowledge of how to solve educational and cognitive tasks and self-control; understanding of the structure and content of the basic professional educational programs.

The operational component of the adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at university.

As regards content, the operational component is represented by foreign citizens' practical knowledge of the following skills:

- the linguistic apparatus necessary for assimilating important information in the Russian language;
- ways to solve educational tasks by way of example and in an altered situation;
- ways to solve educational problems in new and unusual situations.

Certainly, it is extremely important for foreign citizens to possess a linguistic apparatus for learning significant information, i.e. to consciously use their communicative skills in order to carry out appropriate activities according to a model and under various changing conditions. It is the cultural and educational environment that provides optimal conditions for developing students' communication skills. First of all, these are a) speech communication skills (knowledge of subject and professional terminology, organization of a dialogue); b) skills of cognitive information perception (the ability to listen, understand, evaluate, analyze information, as well as the ability to start and end a conversation).

The reflective component of the adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at university.

The Latin word "reflexio" means "turning back". Reflection is internal human activity which focused on self-knowledge, understanding of personal actions and conditions; "a specific human ability that allows a person to submit his thoughts, emotional states, his actions and relationships, himself in

general for a special consideration (analysis and evaluation) and practical transformation ...” (V. I. Slobodchikov, E. I. Isaev).

This component actualizes the need for search and discovery of new knowledge, new ways of activity, new ways of resolving problem situations, revising motivation and self-esteem, personal self-development and self-improvement. The need for a reflective attitude to one’s own educational activity is determined by the fact that foreign citizens cannot realize their individual experience without applying to the experience of others. They cannot adopt the experience of others without correlating it with their own activities. Foreign citizens learn this social experience, using it when organizing their individual activities, accepting themselves as the subject of educational and cognitive activities. In this case, reflection helps future applicants formulate the results obtained, redefine goals of their further work, and adjust their educational way.

Consequently, the content of the reflective component in the structure of the adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at university reflects the emotional acceptance of oneself as a subject of educational activities and the willingness to independently determine one’s own role in the process of study at a Russian university, and personal self-control of educational activities.

## 7. Conclusion

The article clarifies the concept of adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at a Russian university, which is the end result of academic adaptation. The end result expresses itself in the willingness of foreign citizens to overcome psychophysiological, educational, cognitive and communicative difficulties in the process of studying educational programs at a Russian university. We also offer a structure of adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at a Russian university which includes motivational, cognitive, operational and reflexive components. In the course of the research work we have found out the reasons which complicate formation of adaptational readiness of foreign citizens to study educational programs at university. They include psychophysiological, educational, cognitive, communicative, and sociocultural difficulties. In view of this, we offer ways to eliminate these reasons.

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