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**PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR FOREIGN  
STUDENTS: ACCOUNTING VALUES AND COPING  
STRATEGIES**

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***Abstract***

International students have difficulties in adapting in the host country. Psychological support programs will be effective if students' cultural characteristics, preferred values and behavioral strategies are taken into account. The purpose of the study was to determine international students' value orientations and coping strategies contributing to their successful adaptation to training in Russia; and to perform comparative analysis of coping strategies and life values of students of different ethnic groups to develop differentiated programs of psychological support. The sample comprised 441 international students in Russian universities: Africans – 149, Turkmen – 164, Mongols – 128; mean age 21.6±0.9. The methods included the use of the Trompenaars questionnaire of national culture differences (Tunik's adaptation), Hobfoll Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (SACS), Lazarus Coping Questionnaire, Rokeach Value Survey. Descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation analysis, and comparative analysis (Mann—Whitney U-test) were conducted. We have found that successful adaptation of international students is positively linked with the coping strategies such as Social joining, Seeking social support, Planned problem-solving, and Positive reappraisal. Significant differences in coping strategies and ranking of life values among students of different ethnic groups were revealed. This study showed that psychological support should facilitate formation of sociocultural competence and development of coping strategies connected with social contacts and rationalization. In group training sessions it is necessary to focus on universal values and prevention of behavioral abnormalities.

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**Keywords:** Foreign students, adaptation, coping , values.



## 1. Introduction

International students are now probably the most-researched group of cross-cultural sojourners (Zhou et al., 2008). The problem of international students' adaptation in the country of study remains relevant today as evidenced by scientific works of the last decade (Brisset, 2010; Gallagher, 2013; Chirkov, et al, 2007; Sapranaviciute, et al, 2012). International students may have different religions and political systems but they share common circumstances that allow them to be identified as a group. These characteristics include being transient and having to adapt to new temporary situations. This adaptation causes international students to experience more stress than domestic students and also more stress than other international groups, such as immigrants and refugees (Misra & Castillo, 2004).

The added stress results from the fact that international students suffer from student stress as well as sojourner stress. Students have to adapt to the U.S. academic system, which may be very different from the academic systems in their native countries (Misra & Castillo, 2004). Their sojourner stress is compounded by the fact that their stay is temporary and they have to learn quickly to adapt to a different culture in order to succeed.

O' Reilly, Ryan, and Hickey (2010) studied the psychosocial adaptation of international students in Ireland. Using measures of social support, loneliness, stress, psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation, data were obtained from international students and a comparison sample of Irish students. Although international students had high levels of social support and low levels of loneliness and stress, students were experiencing high levels of sociocultural adjustment difficulties and psychological distress.

Depending on personality and coping skills, students adapt differently to new cultures and situations. Berry (2004) enumerated strategies sojourners often use to adjust. The strategies consider the sojourner's identification with both home and host culture. The most beneficial, according to Berry, is the integration strategy wherein the individual positively identifies with both sets of culture.

Russian researchers of adaptation problems of international students note that social adaptation phenomenon includes socialization process, i.e. an acquirement of base apparatus of social code and values allowing an individual to act as an independent subject in the society (Anufrieva, 2014).

It should be noted that in recent years the flow of international students from the countries of Central Asia (e.g. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) who come to study in Russia has significantly increased. The process of training of foreigners in Russian universities, as a rule, starts with the stage of preparatory programs. The main feature of this period is the need to adapt foreign citizens to a new sociocultural environment. In the process of adaptation necessary abilities, skills, algorithms of actions, allowing to operate successfully in a new society are created, so social and adaptive competence of international students is formed. The studies (Drozhzhina, 2013; Anufrieva, 2014) have revealed a number of difficulties, which almost all international students experience during the period of study in Russian universities:

- language barrier - students who come to study in Russia have to learn Russian language for mastering their future profession;
- difficulty of incorporating foreign students into the student community – problems of communication among students;
- social difficulties – dissatisfaction with housing and living conditions or food;

- climatic conditions - a problem for students coming from countries with a warm climate;
- coexistence with different cultures - students tend to communicate within their own reference group;
- inability to legally get a job - many students would like to earn money while learning, but current legislation forbids it.

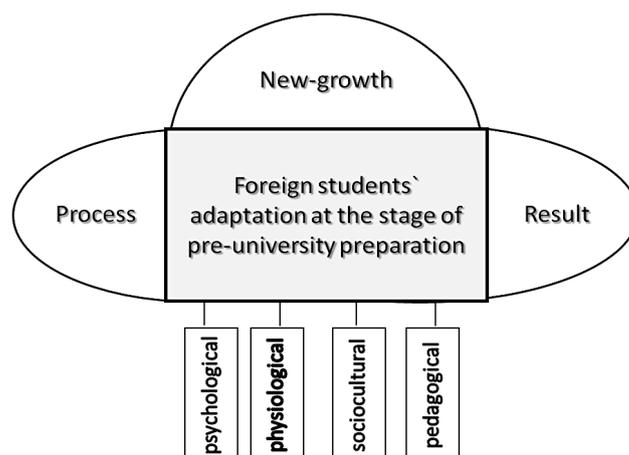
Thus, adaptation of international students is a complex, dynamic, multilevel and multilateral process of restructuring of motivational sphere, complex set of skills, abilities and habits in accordance with new conditions.

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. State of problem knowledge

More frequently studied approach to adaptation suggests that adaptation can be broadly divided into two categories: psychological and sociocultural (Ward & Kennedy, 2001; Anufrieva, 2014; etc). Ward (2001) suggested that psychological adaptation is best understood from a stress and coping framework, whereas sociocultural adaptation best understood from a culture learning framework. She further argued that psychological and sociocultural adaptations are influenced by different sets of variables. Psychological adaptation is influenced by personality traits, coping strategies, and available social support, whereas sociocultural adaptation is influenced by length of residence in the new culture, cultural knowledge, language ability, and acculturation strategy.

Having analyzed the literature on adaptation, we developed a chart of adaptation of foreign students at the preparatory stage (Fig. 1). The proposed chart is based on the definition of adaptation as a complex phenomenon that includes three main dimensions: as a process, as an outcome and as a basis for new-growth (Rean et al, 2008). The diagram shows four sides of the multifaceted phenomenon of adaptation – socio-cultural, physiological, psychological, and pedagogical.



**Figure 01.** Chart of foreign students' adaptation

Socio-cultural adaptation is the achievement of international student' compliance (compatibility) with a new cultural environment (a feeling of harmony and well-being in a foreign language environment).

Physiological adaptation is a set of physiological characteristics that contribute to the balance of the organism with changing environmental conditions (water, food, climate, time zones).

Psychological adaptation is a student's psychological preparedness, including attention, memory, thinking, will, and is determined by the individual's activity and acts as a unity accommodation (assimilation of the rules of the environment) and assimilation (the environment conversion).

Pedagogical adaptation characterizes person's adaptation to training and education in the environment of a particular institution (the ability to acquire knowledge, skills, competence in a new educational environment; the adoption of the higher education system of knowledge control, system of self-study, forms and methods of instruction).

Thus, adaptation can be defined as a complex structure of the phenomenon, representing the interaction of different types of adaptation (Somova, 2015).

## **2.2. Issues for discussion**

In this study we focus on the role of psychological peculiarities of international students in the adaptation process. On this basis we put the following issues for discussion:

- How do the national cultural differences and individual psychological characteristics influence on the process of international students' sociocultural adaptation? What psychological characteristics are important for their successful adaptation to training in Russia? Are the differences between international students of different ethnic groups significant?
- What should psycho-pedagogical support of international students be at the stage of preparatory programs, contributing to the formation of their social and adaptive competence? How to take into account the specific characteristics of different ethnic groups of students in developing programs of their psychological and pedagogical support?

## **3. Research Questions**

- What are international students' behavior features in stressful situations in the process of their adaptation?
- How to organize psychological support of international students of different ethnic groups with account of these features?

The studies show that the important factors of adaptation are coping strategies, communication skills and value-motivational features of students. Therefore, we focus on examining the contribution of coping strategies and values in the success of adaptation and the appearance of specific difficulties of students of those ethnic groups that currently prevail in Russian universities.

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

The purpose of the study was;

- to determine international students' value orientations and coping strategies contributing to their successful adaptation to training in Russia;
- to perform comparative analysis of coping strategies and life values of students of different ethnic groups to develop differentiated programs of psychological support.

## 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. Sample

Sample consisted of 441 international students in Russian universities (Russian State Hydrometeorological University, St. Petersburg State University).

In research there were students of three ethnic groups, who were preparing to study in Russian universities: Africans – 149, Turkmen – 164, Mongols – 128; mean age 21.6±0.9.

### 5.2. Methods

To reveal differences of international students' adaptation to Russian university environment we used special adaptation questionnaire, developed on the basis of the questionnaire of cultural differences by F. Trompenaars in adaptation of Tunik (2010).

Hobfoll Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (SACS) in adaptation of Vodopyanova and Starchenkova (2009) is used for consideration of the coping behavior as a strategy (trend) of behavior. Hobfoll's model has two main axis: prosocial - antisocial, active - passive. An additional axis - direct – indirect, allows us to differentiate coping as problem-focused action (direct or manipulative) that increases cross-cultural applicability of the SACS questionnaire. The questionnaire has 9 subscales: Assertive Action, Social Joining, Seeking Social Support, Cautious Action, Instinctive Action, Avoidance, Indirect Action, Antisocial Action, Aggressive Action.

Lazarus Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) designed by Lazarus and Folkman as a measure of coping processes used in a particular stressful encounter. In accordance with the authors' methodology coping with adverse life circumstances is conscious behavior aimed at active changing, reconstructing of verifiable situations, or adapting to non-controllable situations. In this study we used the technique in adaptation of Kryukova et al (2007). The questionnaire has 8 subscales: Confrontive coping, Distancing, Self-controlling, Seeking social support, Accepting responsibility, Escape-Avoidance, Planful problem-solving, Positive reappraisal.

Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) in modification of Leontiev is used to determine the basic life values of representatives of various ethnic groups. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of 18 terminal values (list A): Health, Development, Self-Respect, Active Exiting Life, Love, Cognition, Interesting Job, Wealthy Life, True Friendship, Public Recognition, Productive Life, Family Happiness, Career Opportunity, Wisdom, Nature & Art beauty, Freedom from inner contradictions, Happiness of others, Creativity.

Descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation analysis, and comparative analysis (Mann—Whitney U-test) were conducted.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Differences in coping behavior among students of different ethnic groups]

Table 01 presents the preferred ways of coping among students of different ethnic groups, expressed for comparison in percentage of the maximum possible values. As you can see, all students

most frequently use the strategies *Planful problem-solving*, *Seeking social support*, *Accepting responsibility*.

**Table 01.** Results of testing on scales of the Lazarus coping test

Subscale	Africa	Turkmenistan	Mongolia	Mean±SD
Confrontive coping	35.55	35.55	46.11	39.07±2.11
Distancing	39.44	40.00	44.44	41.29±3.62
Self-controlling	41.42	51.90	51.42	48.25±4.97
Seeking social support	55.55	51.11	54.44	53.70±1.41
Accepting responsibility	47.50	52.50	56.66	52.22±3.21
Escape-Avoidance	30.83	37.91	34.58	34.44±1.3
Planful problem-solving	51.66	56.66	55.55	54.62±2.04
Positive reappraisal	48.09	53.33	48.47	49.96±3.65

However, there are significant differences among the groups: Mongolian students in comparison to Africans and Turkmens are more likely to exhibit *Confrontive coping* ( $p=0.011$  and  $p=0.015$ , respectively), *Distancing* ( $p=0.022$  and  $p=0.031$ ), *Accepting responsibility* ( $p=0.003$  and  $p=0.025$ ). Turkmen students more often than African and Mongolian students demonstrate *Positive reappraisal* ( $p=0.045$  and  $p=0.015$  respectively) and *Planful problem-solving* ( $p=0.029$  and  $p=0.039$ ). Students from African countries less than Turkmen and Africans resort to *Accepting responsibility* and *Escape-Avoidance* ( $p=0.027$  and  $p=0.036$  respectively), but have the highest rate of use of *Seeking social support*.

The analysis of results of SACS methods, in general, confirms the data on similar scales in the test of Lazarus, given in Table 01. Thus, the most preferred for students of all groups were the strategies of coping behavior *Seeking social support* (Mean±SD 23.56±1.3 of 30 maximum possible points) and *Social joining* (23.2±2.1). Methods of SACS revealed the relative rarity of use of the strategies *Instinctive action* (Of 17.26±1.7), *Antisocial action* (16,33±0.9), *Aggressive action* (17,23±1.1), *Indirect action* (18,17±2.3). Significant differences were detected in the fact that Turkmen students less than other groups use *Indirect action* ( $p<0.01$ ) and *Antisocial action* ( $p<0.05$ ), and African students are less likely to demonstrate *Aggressive action* ( $p<0.01$ ).

## 6.2. Life values and cultural peculiarities among students of different ethnic groups

The analysis of the results of Trompenaars' questionnaire of cultural differences on a dichotomous scale universalism-particularism shows that the African students (69%) prefer a universal approach, i.e. in new culture tend to follow the established laws and rules, while the Turkmen (63%) students show themselves as representatives of culture of particularistic (specific) disposition, i.e. are more inclined to act in accordance with personal preferences, kindred and friendly ties. In the course of socio-cultural adaptation in a foreign country following the laws and rules releases people from many social complications and facilitates its integration into a new society. The reverse situation (violation of rules and norms of behavior to support a friend or a relative) entails a large number of problems, often causing social lack of adaptation.

**Table 02.** Ten most preferred life values of students of different ethnic groups

Место в иерархии	Africa	Turkmenistan	Mongolia
1	Health	Health	Health
2	Love	Family Happiness	Love
3	Interesting Job	True Friendship	Family Happiness
4	Family Happiness	Active Exciting Life	True Friendship
5	Freedom from inner contradictions	Wisdom	Active Exciting Life
6	Active Exciting Life	Wealthy Life	Interesting Job
7	Wisdom	Freedom from inner contradictions	Wisdom
8	Career Opportunity	Love	Freedom from inner contradictions
9	True Friendship	Interesting Job	Development
10	Happiness of others	Career Opportunity	Nature & Art beauty

The analysis of differences on the scale of individualism-collectivism revealed the tendency of African students to a collective form of activities (85.1 %), in contrast to Turkmen (37.3 %) and Mongolian (42.3 %) respondents, most of whom chose individual form. Thus, gathering of African students into small groups to solve some educational problems at the stage of pre-university training will help to reduce the level of anxiety and the feeling of friendly support. The peculiarities of the ethnic groups in the educational process will contribute to creating a situation of success, achieving better results in training activities.

The study of locus of control of international students showed that the majority of African students (77.1 %) have external locus of control of different intensity, that is, rely more on external circumstances (God, fate, luck) than on themselves. These results confirm earlier studies (Babiker, Cox, Miller, 1980; etc.). Most of Turkmen (66.3%) and Mongolian students (58.2%) rely on their own resources, i.e. have an internal locus of control, promoting more rapid and successful adaptation to new conditions of life. Thus, students expecting foreign aid need special programs of psychological and pedagogical support, particularly at the initial stage of studying.

Table 02 presents the results of the study of life goals-values of international students from Turkmenistan, Mongolia, African countries studying in Russia. Of 18 life values all respondents, irrespectively of their nationality, preferred *Health, Love, Family Happiness, Interesting Job, True Friendship And Active Exciting Life*. The obtained results confirm the research of leading life values of youth age and their similarity in different countries. However, there are significant differences in ranking of certain life values in different ethnic groups of students. For example, for Turkmen students significantly more important values are *Family happiness, True friendship, and Wisdom*, less important are *Love and Interesting job* than for other groups (significance level p is not below 0.05). For African students more important is *Freedom from inner contradictions* and less important is the value of *True friendship* ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). Mongolian students, in comparison with other ethnic groups, appreciate *Development and Nature & Art beauty*.

### 6.3. Links between coping behaviour, values and adaptation of international students

According to a survey of students of all groups, socio-cultural adaptation passes successfully for those who prefer active coping strategies: *Social joining*, *Seeking social support*, and strategies associated with cognitive actions: *Planful problem-solving*, *Positive reappraisal*. Obviously, the strategies connected with the social contacts are of great importance for international students, since communication in a foreign language is always linked with great difficulties, and lack of knowledge or poor knowledge of the language reinforced these difficulties. Therefore, the possibility of coming into social contact is a fundamental factor contributing to the adaptation of international students, reducing the stress of acculturation and allowing to solve necessary household and educational issues.

**Table 03.** Links between coping behaviour strategies and values among students of different ethnic groups, Spearman correlation

Coping way	Africa	Turkmenistan	Mongolia
Social Joining	Seeking Social Support r=0.454, p<0.001	Seeking Social Support r=0.378, p<0.001	Seeking Social Support r=0.273, p<0.01
	Cautious Action r=0.357, p<0.001	Accepting responsibility r=0.263, p<0.01	Cautious Action r=0.386, p<0.001
	Indirect Action r=0.267, p<0.01		Escape-Avoidance r= - 0.471, p<0.001
			Aggressive Action r = - 0.262, p<0.01
	Self-Respect r = 0.259, p<0.01	Public recognition r=0.258, p<0.01	True Friendship r = - 0.534, p<0.01
	Freedom from inner contradictions r=0.345, p<0.001		Freedom from inner contradictions r=0.460, p<0.001

Table 03 presents the results of correlation analysis of data showing that the strategy *Social joining* in all ethnic groups are positively correlated with the strategy *Seeking social support* (the strongest is this relationship among African students). However, other characteristics of students associated with this strategy differ. Thus, among Turkmen students *Social joining* is positively correlated with the strategy *Accepting responsibility* and the value *Public recognition*. Among Mongol students *Social joining* is positively associated with the strategy *Cautious action*, as well as with the occasional use of the strategy *Escape-Avoidance* and low severity *Aggressive action*. Among African students *Social joining* is also positively correlated with the strategy of *Cautious action*, but herewith is positively correlated with manipulative behavior and values of *Self-Respect* and *Freedom from inner contradictions*.

Thus, we see that *Social joining* among different groups of students is correlated with different sets of coping strategies and life values, i.e. has a different personal meaning. Among Turkmen students social factors and responsible behavior are of great importance, among Mongol and African students more important are individual factors and caution in social interaction. The reasons of differences in correlation interrelations require further cross-cultural studies.

## 7. Conclusion

The obtained results give the possibility to justify the choice of certain strategies, forms and methods of psychological support of international students.

For example, high values of indicators of the use of strategies *Confrontive coping*, *Self-Control*, *Accepting responsibility*, *Positive reappraisal* among Mongolian students suggest that for representatives of this ethnic group forms of learning tasks that require independence are possible.

African students have high rates of strategy *Seeking social support* and low indicators of strategies *Self-control*, *Accepting responsibility*, *Planful problem-solving*. Consequently, for representatives of this ethnic group the leading role of the teacher and positive interpersonal relationships are very important.

The study of the factor *Seeking social support* is of great importance for the analysis of foreign students' adaptation processes. Formed social network (relatives, acquaintances, friends, and not virtual social networks) stays at home, and young people in the conditions of a new socio-cultural reality often need advice, sympathy, and friendly support. The ability and desire of a man to seek the support of the people can help solve many vital problems and find the correct way out of difficult situations.

The study of the behavior of international students in stressful situations that are associated with adaptation to a new society showed that Mongolian and African students more actively involve in the adaptation processes than Turkmen students.

It can be assumed that social joining among different groups of students is motivated by a different set of reasons and has different personal meaning that requires further research.

The obtained results should be considered when resolving conflicts in multi-ethnic student team. The correct interpretation of the behavior of international students in the process of training and education will contribute to their successful social and cultural adaptation. The focus on universal values in the process of psychological support has a positive effect on the psychological climate in a multi-ethnic student group, smoothening the symptoms of culture shock.

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