

EEIA-2018
**2018 International Conference "Education Environment for
the Information Age"**

**TRAINING TUTORS TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN THE MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL
ENVIRONMENT**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of training tutors to support international students in multicultural educational environment of modern university. Scientific interest in this problem is caused by the processes of internationalization of higher education, the need to solve the tasks connected with international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment, their full participation in the process of education.

The authors discuss the specific problems of tutoring international students, in particular organizational and pedagogic, managerial and methodological problems. The article presents the educational technology "Tutors' psychological and pedagogical workshop" which allows to build flexibly the content of activity, to respond to the requests, to integrate different types, forms and methods in the process of training tutors to support international students in modern multicultural educational environment. The educational technology is considered in the article as systematic, stage-by-stage implementation of pedagogical process with the use of personal, instrumental and methodic means for the development of the staff professional competence in higher education institution. The authors prove unit-modular structure of the technology discussed, analyze and explain the content of the target unit, experimental-training, constructive-research, reflexive-analytical units. The results of the research are of pedagogical interest, they can serve as a basis for technological approach implementation in the process of teaching the university staff to support international students at all levels of higher education.

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Keywords: International students, adaptation, tutor, support, technology.



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1. Introduction

Currently, internationalization is becoming a key factor in the development of higher education in most countries. Individual academic mobility is an important component of the internationalization process, more than 90% of which today is accounted for by the mobility of students and post graduate students (Filippov, 2015; Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Kemp, 2016).

According to the Federal State Statistics Service, in 2016, more than 207,000 international students (5.3%) were studying at Russian state universities, whereas in 2005 their number was 78,139 people (1.3%) (Rosstat, 2017: 145). There is also an increase in ethnic and cultural diversity of international students. To create conditions for the academic and socio-cultural adjustment of international students, their full participation in the educational process is one of the priority tasks of modern internationally-oriented universities.

International students are considered in the scientific literature as one of the most disadvantaged, unprotected, 'vulnerable' categories of students at the university (Ivanova & Shirikova, 2017; Sherry et al., 2010). In this regard, nowadays a significant number of foreign and Russian studies are devoted to the issues of psychological and pedagogical assistance and support for international students (Bulgakov & Loginova, 2009; Gladush et al., 2008), identification of the factors of their successful adaptation (Iskineeva et al., 2017; Andrade, 2006; Yamada et al., 2014), the determination of typical problems (Iskineeva et al., 2017; Sherry et al., 2010).

The authors emphasize the role and significance of the work of the faculty and staff supporting international students in the process of adaptation, and note the need for a more careful approach to the study of this activity (Akli, 2012; Bartram, 2009; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; Roberts, et al., 2018; Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007).

2. Problem Statement

The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia was originally established as an internationally oriented university; today it trains nearly 9,000 international students from 155 countries around the world. The University has gained rich experience of teaching international students, including a unique experience of supporting the adjustment process (Gladush et al., 2008). The role of tutors in charge of educational work – specialists who provide social, psychological and pedagogical support to students and contribute to students' integration into a different socio-cultural environment is one of the key roles here.

At the same time, changing realities necessitate the tutors to use new approaches, pedagogical technologies that take into account the peculiarities of the contemporary multicultural space of the university and the needs of the modern generation of students.

The conducted pilot study showed that there is a contradiction between the actualization of the tutors' support for international students and the insufficient level of readiness of the university staff to implement this activity in modern conditions. The need for new pedagogical technologies aimed at helping international students in the process of academic and socio-cultural adaptation has been identified.

3. Research Questions

- What are the specific problems tutors face supporting international students in multicultural educational environment?
- How can we implement technological approach in the process of training tutors to support international students in the modern multicultural university?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at identifying and analyzing the current problems of tutor support, developing the technology for training specialists who can provide qualified assistance and support to international students in the process of academic and socio-cultural adjustment in modern multicultural educational environment.

5. Research Methods

In the course of the research a set of theoretical and empirical methods was used. The analysis of scientific literature on the research problem, theoretical modeling, study and generalization of pedagogical experience were carried out. Surveying methods were used, in particular questionnaires and focused interviews, as well as the focus group method. Forty tutors of various faculties and institutes of the RUDN University took part in the study.

6. Findings

At the first stage of the study, topical problems faced by tutors in the process of working with international students were studied and systematized.

The following main groups of problems were identified:

- organizational and pedagogical;
- managerial;
- methodological.

The analysis of the results of questionnaire surveys, interviews and discussions (focus groups) showed that all employees (100%) are aware of the relevance of working with international students and believe that assistance in adjustment must begin at the pre-university courses; little time and attention is paid in the work plans of tutors to the process of sociocultural adjustment, as reported by 43% of respondents.

As believed by 36% of the participants in the study, it is necessary to introduce a multivariate institute of tutoring to help international students (the tutor of the training group, the tutor of the student community, the tutor on foreign community issues, etc.). They justify this by the fact that there should be a separation of the zones of responsibility, since in this case it becomes possible to pay more attention to a particular group of students. In addition, 21% of tutors noted that such a differentiation of activities is not appropriate.

The respondents' opinions on the support duration were radically divided. One third (32%) of tutors believe that it is necessary to support international students for 2-3 years, as long as they go through all the stages of adaptation; 16% of respondents noted that this is a very long and expensive process, therefore, it

is advisable to carry out support in the first year of training, and only individual forms of work should be used in subsequent years where necessary. In this context, 39% of the surveys have suggested that it is necessary to support students at the entire period of their education at the university, only by changing the forms of work and placing emphasis on different components. The remaining tutors refrained from answers, noting that they were satisfied with the existing system of tutoring at the university.

Among the preferred forms of work with international students, 45% of tutors use traditional mass cultural events, excursions, events dedicated to specific dates important for Russia in extra-curricular activities. Only 29% of respondents stressed that the emphasis should be on individual consultations and the process of personal support.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (80%) noted that they are not well acquainted with the ethnically and culturally conditioned psychological characteristics of international students. And 78% of tutors agreed that it is necessary to master and introduce new pedagogical technologies adapted to the specifics of a particular university, to apply more widely individual and group interactive methods of working with students.

For the purposes of improving the competence of tutors and their readiness to work with international students, at the second stage of the research the “Tutors’ psychological and pedagogical workshop” technology was developed on the basis of the key ideas and provisions of the technological approach in education (Afanasyev & Afanasyeva, 2016; Bepalko, 1989; Selevko, 1998).

“Tutors’ psychological and pedagogical workshop” is a unit-modular technology that enables to flexibly build the content of activities, to respond to the requests, integrating various types, forms and methods in the process of training tutors. The selection of forms and methods of teaching was conditioned by such factors as the age of tutors, basic education, work experience at the university, experience of interaction with international students. Lectures and discussions, workshops in small groups (up to 10 people), individual consultations and trainings were offered as the basic forms of training.

Development of this type of technology is conditioned by the desire to achieve several goals: to allow tutors to work at a pace convenient for them, to choose the appropriate method of instruction; to study all aspects of tutor activity with international students; to integrate various methods and forms of education.

Like any educational technology focused on increasing competence, it has not only the goal and result in its structure, but also the stage-by-stage actions, since in general this technology is the algorithmization of activities aimed at a definite result.

1. The target unit includes the goals, objectives and content of the technology; contains clearly defined learning outcomes for tutors, forms of control and evaluation criteria. It provides an opportunity to see the perspective and plan independent work of tutors in the course of training. Before the training, diagnostics is carried out, which enables to reveal the actual level of professionally significant competences in a group of tutors who interact with international students.

2. The experimental-training unit is the leading element in the structure of the pedagogical technology “Tutors’ psychological and pedagogical workshop”. It is aimed at stimulating the cooperation of tutors, obtaining theoretical knowledge about the problems of academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students and the stages of this process, developing professional skills and increasing competence through specific events and activities, and self-education. During the sessions, active and

interactive forms and methods are used, such as brainstorming, mind mapping, case study, working with media texts (parts of films, TV shows of suitable themes to illustrate the problem, subsequent analysis and discussion), conditions are created for modeling problems, searching for ways to solve them and discussing the results.

The first section of the training program is devoted to the consideration of academic and socio-cultural adjustment of international students as a problem of modern science, adjustment difficulties at each stage of the adaptation process, ways of helping and supporting international students in the process of academic and socio-cultural adjustment. Within the second section, the essence and content of the professional readiness of teachers and tutors to work with international students is examined; the peculiarities of the influence of the social and cultural environment on students' choice of acceptable or undesirable behaviors to solve their problems are considered; the basic methods of diagnosing the level of adaptation basic methods and technologies of prevention and correction of the international students' problems are discussed.

Special attention is paid to the stages and types of pedagogical support and follow-up. Pedagogical support is deemed as the creation of conditions by the tutor for revealing the foreign student's potential – the pedagogical activity, carried out both on request and in the case when the tutor sees that the trainees cannot cope with their problem. Pedagogical follow-up differs from the support in the decreased degree of tutor's intervention, and the increase in the individuals' ability to independently solve their problems. A significant place is occupied by mastering different strategies of pedagogical support in relation to various ethnic-cultural groups.

An important objective of the training is to develop the tutors' ability to realize the potential of the multicultural educational environment in the process of working with international students, to select the necessary resources, to develop interaction with other specialists.

Certain time is devoted to trainings of intercultural communication, in which the participants improve their communication and interaction skills and also work with their own ethnic and cultural stereotypes and prejudices.

3. The constructive-research unit includes the development of methodological recommendations for the development of professionally significant qualities of tutors; the provision of methodological assistance to this category of university staff, the identification, study, generalization, formation and dissemination of positive pedagogical experience in this direction.

4. The reflexive-analytical unit implies studying the effectiveness of pedagogical influences and measures to increase the tutors' competence, determining the level of their research qualities, evaluating behavioral strategies, the communicative minimum, re-measuring the level of knowledge about the problems of academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students in the university.

Practical evaluation of the "Tutors' psychological and pedagogical workshop" technology was carried out within the framework of short-term courses of professional development of tutors at the RUDN University premises. The volume of theoretical and practical training was 72 hours.

Objective assessment of the efficiency of the offered technology requires not only and not so much the analysis of direct results, as the assessment of its long-term effect, first of all the influence on the process of academic and sociocultural adjustment of international students. At the same time, now it is possible to

highlight a number of positive tendencies: the activation of tutors interaction with various university departments and services (in particular, with the Psychological Support Service) in the process of supporting international students; the use of the potential of students community, the development of volunteering and peer-mentoring programs.

7. Conclusion

Professional competence of tutors is a complex formation, which makes the basis for their successful professional activity and includes a system of activity-role and personal characteristics.

The presented technology “Tutors’ psychological and pedagogical workshop” is fundamentally the most optimal and effective means of increasing the professionalism and productivity of specialists in solving the problems associated with support of international students in the process of academic and socio-cultural adjustment. The technology is characterized by dynamism, a variety of forms of activity, a reasonable combination of theory and practice; it is intended not only to help tutors to develop effective skills and abilities, but also to realize the importance of their professional activity, to increase their professional self-esteem and satisfaction with their work. “Tutors’ psychological and pedagogical workshop” is aimed at forming the trainees’ understanding of the ‘contextuality’ of the profession of tutor and the realization that it is impossible to carry out their professional activities according to certain patterns, developing creativity in solving sometimes non-standard professional tasks.

Implementation of the “Tutors’ psychological and pedagogical workshop” technology in the framework of a comprehensive program for professional development provides the process of education with the specialists who possess actual methods of educational work and pedagogical technologies that contribute to the successful academic and socio-cultural adjustment of international students in multicultural educational environment.

These findings are of pedagogical interest, they can serve as the basis for the implementation of the technological approach in the process of training specialists to support international students at various levels of higher education.

Acknowledgements

This research was financially supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research; grant 16-36-00022 “Ethno-cultural values of the individual in the conditions of the challenges of modern society”.

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