

Foreign Students' Adaptation to the Social and Educational Environment of a Small City as a Condition of Undergraduate Teachers' Cultural and Professional Competency Formation

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Abstract

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The modern global trend in education is determined by globalization of scientific knowledge and pedagogical technologies. As a consequence, a huge number of people who seek to get a good education flow from the countries with a less developed level of science and technology into those where qualitative indicators of social advancement are higher. A similar situation is observed in Russia, where young people from Central Asia come to get a University education.

In quite a different socio-cultural and educational environment, foreign students are experiencing serious ethnic, cultural, household, etc. difficulties. In a megalopolis, these problems are hardly noticeable, aided by a tolerant environment. Foreign students are in a more difficult situation trying to adapt to the social and educational environment of a small city (Elabuga).

It is possible to resolve the ensuing problem through a set of measures that enable foreign students to get accustomed to the state education system by means of establishing joint education. In this regard, our research aims to study the ways of foreign students' adaptation to the social and educational environment of a small city, formation of undergraduate teachers' professional competencies, to analyze the tasks set for them, the university and the city, and find ways to solve the ensuing problems.

The results of the study show the importance of working out a strategy of effective integration of foreign students into the educational and socio-cultural environment of the Institute with the aim of forming their social, personal, and professional competencies and tolerant attitude to them.

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Keywords: Small city; educational environment; adaptation; foreign students.

1. Introduction

The modern global trend in education is determined by globalization of scientific knowledge and pedagogical technologies. As a consequence, a huge number of people who seek to get a good education flow from the countries with a less developed level of science and technology into those where qualitative indicators of social advancement are higher. A similar situation is observed in Russia, where young people from Central Asia come to get a University education.

In quite a different socio-cultural and educational environment foreign students are experiencing serious ethnic, cultural, household, etc. difficulties. In a megalopolis, these problems are hardly noticeable, aided by a tolerant environment. Foreign students are in a more difficult situation trying to adapt to the social and educational environment of a small city, such as Elabuga. Elabuga is a district centre and a historical city with a population of nearly 80 thousand people, and it is hard for its residents to accept “strangers” or immigrants, disrupting a habitual way of provincial life, despite the fact that here are located Alabuga Special Economic Zone and Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University, the modern development vector of which determines an increase in the number of foreign students in its educational process.

It is possible to resolve the ensuing problem through a set of measures that enable foreign students to get accustomed to the state education system by means of establishing joint education. In this regard, our research aims to study the ways of foreign students’ adaptation to the social and educational environment of a small city, formation of undergraduate teachers’ professional competencies, to analyze the tasks set for them, the university and the city, and find ways to solve the ensuing problems.

2. Research methods

To identify the level of adaptation of foreign students, modern researchers use both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative approach is a traditional one and it represents the performance of mass surveys and questionnaires aiming at obtaining statistical data on the basis of which scientists draw conclusions about the process of adaptation of foreign students in a new socio-cultural and educational environment, what challenges students face and how they overcome the difficulties.

Quantitative approach to studying of the peculiarities of foreign students adaptation in a different environment presents a number of techniques, among which I.A. Sholokhov’s questionnaire (Sholokhov, 2002), aimed to determine both general adaptation of students to life and study in unfamiliar environment and their attitude towards the representatives of the host culture; L.V. Yankovsky’s test (Sonin, 2004) allowing the identification of not only the level but also the type of adaptation of an individual to a new socio-cultural environment; methodological development by I.A. Mnatsakanyan (Mnatsakanyan, 2004), focusing on the analysis of the level of culture shock accompanying the process of adaptation; methodology of A.I. CostalesvZavgorodnyaya (CostalesvZavgorodnyaya, 2013) aiming at study of emotional and personal factors of adaptation of foreign students, and many others. Most of these techniques are based on the questionnaires of the

closed type, with three options for answer: "Yes", "No", "I don't know". Some of the questionnaires are structured in blocks, but in general, the questions in the questionnaires are not differentiated.

The qualitative approach in the study of adaptation of foreign students is designed to study adaptation from the perspective of the individual. This approach is achieved primarily at interviewing students, when it is possible to get a detailed answer to the question. The choice of qualitative approach when conducting research is determined by an effort to get an insight about a particular phenomenon, a desire to study the phenomenon from the position of the object of study, and to collect information about the little-known phenomenon or to take a fresh look at the previously discussed object (Drozhzhina, 2013).

Monitoring of foreign students' adaptation of Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University was based on the methods of observation and interviewing. Research methodology is rather different from previously conducted ones. Firstly, the structure of the questionnaire was created with regard to both quantitative and qualitative approaches, as it included not only responses of the closed type ("Yes", "No", "I am not sure"), but contained an opportunity to give their own answers, in detail. Secondly, the content of the questionnaire is clearly differentiated by blocks of one dimension, which greatly facilitates the processing of the material. Thirdly, the differentiation of the questionnaire blocks was performed taking into account the following criteria for determining the degree of foreign students' adaptation: language proficiency, adaptation to new educational environment, adoption of social and cultural values of host society, professional orientation. Fourthly, the essential difference of the developed methodology is that with its help, adaptation is studied in close connection with the development of a number of competencies stipulated by the Federal State Educational Standard 3+ (FSES 3+).

As it has already been mentioned, monitoring of adaptation was conducted on the basis of Elabuga Institute of Kazan (Volga region) Federal University. The survey was attended by first- and second-year students of the Faculty of Russian Philology and Journalism (39 students), of the Faculty of History and Law (11), the Department of Economics and Management (3). In total, 53 people participated in the survey. The audience was heterogeneous in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. The respondents were 30 females and 23 males, 38 of them are citizens of Turkmenistan, 12 are citizens of Uzbekistan and 3 are citizens of Tajikistan aged from 17 to 32, enrolled in bachelor training programs in Pedagogical Education.

3. Findings

The study has shown that most of the foreign undergraduate students of Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University do not possess common cultural and professional competences, what indicates a low level of adaptedness of students in social and educational environment of a small city.

Table 1. The Results of the Poll

Dimensions	Percentage
Oral and written communication skills in the Russian language	50.9 %
Professional self-determination	64.2 %
General cultural and professional competencies acquisition	37.8 %

The analysis of the material has shown that 27 people (50.9 %) speak the Russian language (learning language), understand it, write, and read in Russian, 26 of the respondents (49,1%) have problems in communication in Russian. Taking into consideration the fact that the students attended special classes of the Russian language, 8 respondents (15%) admitted that they hardly understand the information delivered at lectures, and 9 of the students (16,9%) do not understand the contents of the lecture material. Meanwhile, a big portion of the respondents do not practice speaking skills in Russian with their compatriots after the lessons, believing that living together with Russian-speaking students will enhance their communication skills in Russian. It should be noted that the biggest difficulties are revealed in mono-groups, consisting solely of students-countrymen.

Thus, almost half of the respondents are unable to communicate in oral and written forms in Russian to fulfill interpersonal and cross-cultural interaction tasks (General Cultural Competence 4) while it is a significant part of a foreign person's adaptation to Russian social and cultural environment.

Further survey has shown that 38 recipients noted that the education system of their country is significantly different from the system of education in Russia that leads to certain difficulties. Evaluating the lessons from the position of students, a significant part of students would like the teachers to somehow change the format of the classes, apply additional methods and techniques, but the lack of professional competence has not allowed them to clearly answer the open question: "What would you change in your lessons?".

15 people (28.3 %) answered negatively to the question "Do you want to become a teacher?", 4 of them (7,5%) found it difficult to give a definite answer, this implies that about one third of students studying in pedagogical direction, have no professional determination, and the teachers of the University should assist them in it, in particular through the formation of readiness for realizing social importance of their future profession, to motivate them to implement professional activity (General Professional Competence 1). 30 of the respondents (56, 6%) fully agreed with the statement that the teacher should be able to work in a team, to be respectful to a different culture, to be able to deal with the representatives of other nationalities, take interest in the history of his/her country and of other countries, to understand the political situation, know the law, as well to be a master of the subject he teaches, and constantly improve his/her professional skills. However, 12 respondents (22.6 %) believe that the teacher should not necessarily be good at politics, 4 of them (7,5%) doubt that a teacher should know history, 2 of the recipients believe that the teacher is not obliged to teach children to be respectful to a different culture, and 3 students (5,6%) are not sure that the teacher should be able to deal with the multicultural audience. In addition, 5 people (9,4%) doubt that a teacher is an authority for students, 4 students (7,5%) do not see the need for the teacher to study the literature on his speciality.

Several of the respondents do not think the teacher should know his subject, the law and be able to work in a team. The results of the survey indicate that foreign students still do not have a number of common cultural competences prescribed in the Federal Standard 3+, such as the ability to analyze the main stages and regularities of historical development to form citizenship (GC-2); basic knowledge of professional ethics and speech culture (GC-4); ability to work in a team, to be tolerant to social, cultural and personal differences (GC-5); ability of self-organization and self-education (GC-6); ability to use the basic legal knowledge in various activities (GC-7).

In addition, the lack of the above mentioned competences in foreign students complicates formation of professional competences in pedagogical activity, such as the ability to solve problems of upbringing, spiritual and moral development of students in curricular and co-curricular activities (Professional Competence 3); willingness to interact with participants of the educational process (PC-6), the ability to carry out pedagogical support of socialization and professional self-determination of students (PC-5) and others.

In our opinion, the reason for that is lack of adaptation of foreign students in social and educational environment. So, 23 respondents (62,2%), living quite a long time on the territory of the Russian Federation, have not got acquainted with Russian culture, with the traditions of Russian and Tatar people, 30 people (56,6%) have not studied the history of Russia, 17 recipients (32%) do not know and do not celebrate Russian national festivals. It is necessary to mention that 10 respondents (18.8 %) feel ill at ease to live in a multicultural city, and 23 students (43,3%) doubt that Russia could become their second homeland. So, the administration and staff of Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University solve problems of foreign students' adaptation and forming their general cultural, general professional and professional competences.

The results of the study indicate the need of developing a coherent strategy for integration of foreign students in educational and developmental environment of the University to form their socio-personal, cultural and professional skills.

In the framework of this approach, it is recommended to work out a set of pedagogical conditions. One of them is to prepare teachers for work with foreign students, especially important for our University, which was previously unavailable to students. Actually, we must say that the problem of interaction between the teacher and the foreign student is rather relevant for the modern stage of higher education.

In the construction of pedagogical and intercultural communication, the initial stage of training foreign students is of great prominence, as it is a difficult adjustment period. Its distinguishing features include a new sociocultural environment, psychological, emotional and physical stress, intensive character of training, professional orientation of training, a significant engagement of students in training, etc.

The foreign students of our Institute are at this initial stage of learning. As it has been said, they are residents of Central Asian countries that were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) earlier, and now they are in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with students from Turkmenistan prevailing. They all studied the Russian language in school to this or that extent. Some of them, being city-dwellers, may have been in contact with Russian speaking people, and then their

level of Russian proficiency or understanding of Russian vocabulary is bigger than that of rural-area dwellers, for whom the Russian language is absolutely foreign. This imbalance in the level of Russian language proficiency complicates training and communication of the teacher and the student. The complexity lies in the fact that introductory course of the Russian language is not provided in the Institute. Students are immediately immersed in the Russian environment and educational process (though, during the educational process, foreign students do a 300-hour course of Russian language). Therefore, formation of teacher-student communication is of great importance and efficient and effective. It depends on many factors: the proper construction of the educational process, the degree of educational, socio-psychological adaptation, contact of students with the teacher, other students and people around them, the availability of educational materials, and especially qualified specialists. The literacy of the teacher consists in the fact that in training of foreign students he/she should use all means of emotional and psychological influence to create a normal atmosphere in the learning group, to avoid pressure and moralizing, and authoritarian tone in communicating with the students. According to Filimonov and Romanyuk, the technology of training aimed at academic, socio-psychological and sociocultural adaptation of foreign students, which would contribute to successful interpersonal, intercultural and professional communication is of great demand (Filimonov and Romaniuk, 2012).

For mastering such a technology and successful teaching and intercultural communication, especially at the initial stage of training foreign students, it is very necessary to perform psychopedagogical training of teachers to develop foreign students' skills of intercultural communication. Personal qualities of a teacher dealing with a foreign audience play a certain role (communication skills, ability to cope with stress, overcome psychological barriers in communication, etc.). To implement this training, the teachers of our Institute, especially having little professional experience, do courses of qualification improvement of Russian as a foreign language at Moscow State University and Russian University of Peoples' Friendship.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study have shown that most of the foreign undergraduate students of Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University do not possess common cultural and professional competences, what indicates a low level of adaptedness of students in social and educational environment of a small city.

We assume that these competences are formed in the process of educational and extracurricular activities of the students (research) and teachers (conducting special courses, implementation of various cultural and educational projects, preparing the teacher to work with foreign-language audience). Work on psychological and pedagogical adaptation of students to the Russian socio-cultural and educational environment and enhancing their use of information technologies may give positive results.

Thus, enhancing communicative and professional skills in a multilingual and multicultural environment (Elabuga Institute enrolls Russian, Tatar, Udmurt, Chuvash, Mari) of foreign students contributes to their interaction with the socio-cultural and intellectual environment of the Institute and

with the support of Institute and city administration. It is a complex cultural and educational activities aimed at the formation of the above competencies of future teachers and is able to provide an effective process of integration of foreign students in educational, social and cultural environment of the city and of the region and their professional development in the context of higher education institutions with pedagogical specifics.

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