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DEVELOPING ETHNIC IDENTITY AS A CONDITION OF
FOREIGN STUDENTS' LEARNED HELPLESSNESS
CORRECTION

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Abstract

Academic mobility in the modern multicultural educational space is a factor of increasing the education competitiveness; it contributes to the improvement of educational and scientific productivity is a tool for building a network of interactions, development and innovation. However, university students' adaptation to foreign culture requires additional personal resources. The issue of a state of learned helplessness correction in the context of academic mobility, when a young person moves to another country to receive education, is of particular relevance. The new social and cultural environment, uncontrolled stressful events associated with moving, have unpredictable and uncontrollable impact on migrants, causing the complexity of the adaptation process and the emergence of a state of learned helplessness. The research objective is to develop practical recommendations for psychological services of educational institutions to work with foreign students, aimed at preventing and correcting the state of learned helplessness through the development of positive ethnic identity. The leading approach to the study of the problem was the systematization of theoretical and empirical data on positive ethnic identity and learned helplessness. The study resulted in understanding of the relationship of learned helplessness and positive ethnic identity, which allowed offering general practical recommendations for the organization of a multicultural educational space in the university in order to develop foreign students' positive ethnic identity, and exactly the prevention and correction of learned helplessness.

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Keywords: Learned helplessness, ethnic identity, positive ethnic identity, academic mobility, foreign students.



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1. Introduction

The formation of the international educational space and the market of educational services, the trend of globalization and internationalization of the education system, the need to prepare university graduates to work in a multicultural environment and transnational organizations are the impetus for the development of academic mobility among students. Academic mobility is a factor of increasing the education competitiveness; it contributes to the improvement of educational and scientific productivity being a tool for building a network of interactions, development and innovation.

There is no unambiguous definition of the term "academic mobility", different authors interpret this concept in different ways (Martynenko & Zhukova, 2008). According to Martynenko and Zhukova (2008), academic mobility is an opportunity for students, teachers, administrative and managerial personnel to visit other educational institutions in order to exchange experience, gain knowledge, skills, overcome national isolation and acquire a pan-European perspective. Brinev and Buyanov (2006) consider academic mobility as the student's limited period of study in the country, which is not the student's country of citizenship.

Thus, academic mobility is a tool to motivate students and improve the education quality, strengthen and expand international cooperation, is an effective way to develop educational opportunities for students. This form of students' learning process organization involves moving to another university for a limited time period. In the context of academic mobility, foreign students can feel like citizens of another country, which stimulates cultural and professional development, improves communication skills and affects value orientations and attitudes.

Being in a different ethno-cultural and linguistic environment, one category of migrants effectively orientates in the new situation, shows independence, optimism, whereas the other experiences psychological difficulties, demonstrates passivity, helplessness and indifference. The new social and cultural environment, uncontrolled stressful events associated with moving, have unpredictable and uncontrollable impact on migrants, causing the complexity of the adaptation process and the emergence of a state of learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is commonly regarded as a condition that occurs as a reaction to uncontrolled events and manifests itself in anticipation of the uncontrollability of future events and results of activities (Seligman, 1975). Human behavior in a state of learned helplessness is characterized by three deficits: motivational, cognitive and emotional (Seligman, 1975). Motivational deficit manifests in the reduction of attempts to actively intervene in the situation, it is characterized by a lack of initiative, perseverance, tenacity in achieving goals. Cognitive deficit involves difficulties to learn that, in a similar situation, the action can be quite effective. Emotional deficit is characterized by dismal, sometimes depressed, mood, reduced self-respect, increased anxiety, depression, arising from the ineffectiveness of their own actions.

2. Problem Statement

The issue of a state of learned helplessness correction in the context of academic mobility, when a young person moves to another country to receive education, is of particular relevance.

3. Research Questions

Can be the development of ethnic identity as a condition of foreign students' learned helplessness correction within academic mobility?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research objective is to develop practical recommendations for psychological services of educational institutions to work with foreign students, aimed at preventing and correcting the state of learned helplessness through the development of positive ethnic identity.

5. Research Methods

The main method at this stage of the research is a theoretical review of literature sources, as well as methods of graphical representation of the results. Recommendations elaboration will be based on a detailed analysis of symptoms and manifestations of foreign students' state of learned helplessness, deficits of learned helplessness and components of ethnic identity (cognitive and affective ones). We believe that the development of positive ethnic identity can be a sufficient condition for correcting the learned helplessness of foreign students.

6. Findings

The state of learned helplessness results from failure, a traumatic event (Tsiring, 2010). However, as M. Seligman notes, some people are more prone to depression and anxiety than others (as cited in Volkova, 2013). Some people can experience the state of learned helplessness and as a result of the slightest failure, whereas the others due to repeated traumatic events of high intensity. The risk factor of the state of learned helplessness is, according to some researchers, pessimistic attributional style (Tsiring, 2010; Seligman, 1975). The process of learned helplessness deficits is outlined in figure 01.

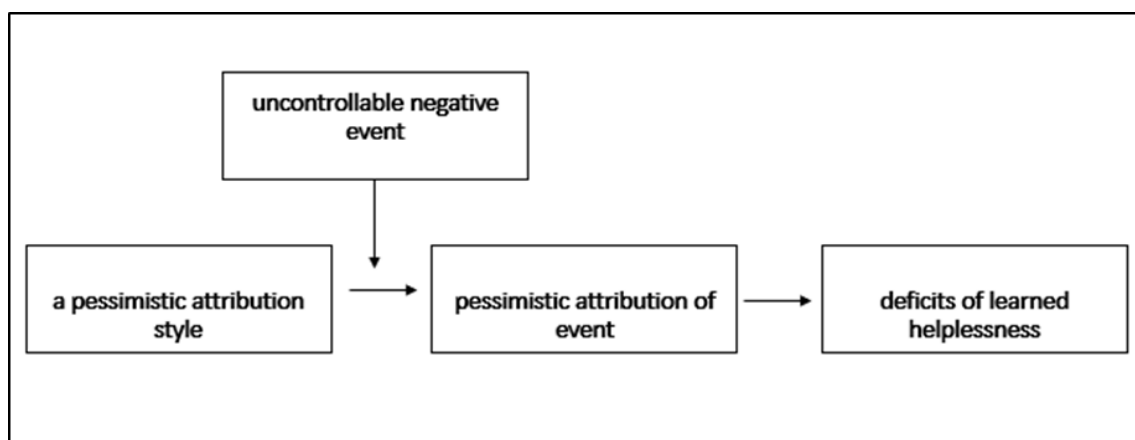


Figure 01. The process of learned helplessness deficits

The pessimistic attributional style is characterized by the explanation of adverse events and failures by internal, personal characteristics, and favorable events and successes by external factors related to a particular sphere (Dalgatov, 2009). The optimistic attributional style characterizes a person who tends to connect failures with coincidence happened at a certain point, and to perceive success situations as permanent, universal, caused by internal personal reasons (Dalgatov, 2009). Thus, according to Seligman (1975), the style of attribution allows filtering the experience of helplessness: in case of optimistic attributional style, the role of negative experience is downplayed, in case of pessimistic attributional style it is exaggerated.

It is important to note that not only the individuals with pessimistic attributional style can experience the state of learned helplessness. An uncontrollable negative event of high intensity or recurring uncontrollable negative events can cause deficits of learned helplessness of people with any style of attribution. This version of the learned helplessness origin is outlined in figure 02.

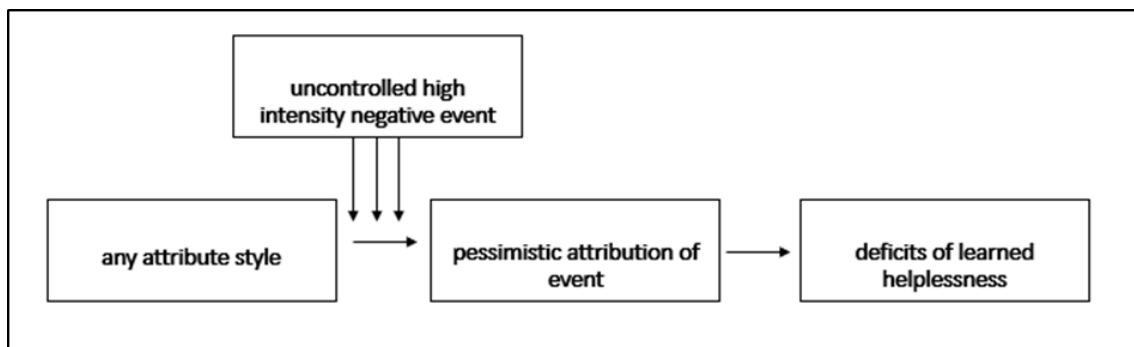


Figure 02. The learned helplessness origin

Thus, regardless of the peculiarities of explaining the reasons of what is happening, the individual may experience a state of learned helplessness facing an uncontrollable negative event of any intensity. The situation of moving to another country, the period of adaptation to new conditions by foreign students can represent a poorly controlled traumatic event. Young people who have come to a new country face a language barrier, most likely, do not have close people around who are able to help, support; they are exposed to a state of learned helplessness and its accompanying deficits. Ignoring this problem can lead to difficulties associated with the learning process, which is the main purpose of arrival, as well as adaptation in general.

One of the directions of foreign students' learned helplessness correction is the intentional development of positive ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is a structural component of a person's social identity, which consists in the awareness of one's own belonging to a certain ethnic community. There are two main components in the structure of ethnic identity: cognitive and affective ones (Stefanenko, 2006). A number of authors distinguish the third component in the structure of ethnic identity: behavioral component expressed in the observance (or non-observance) of human traditions of their ethnic group (Balyaev & Nikishov, 2017). The cognitive component includes knowledge and ideas about the features of their own ethnic group and self-identification as a member of this group on the basis of ethno-differentiating signs. The feeling of belonging to a group and the attitude to membership in it, the assessment of its qualitative characteristics make an affective component of ethnic identity.

The level of ethnic identity can be considered in three dimensions: an increased level, normal identity, a reduced level (Khabaeva, Abaeva, & Krupnov, 2014). Soldatova (1998, 2011) distinguishes five levels (types) of ethnic identity: ethnic nihilism, ethnic indifference, the norm, ethnic egoism, ethnic isolationism, ethnic fanaticism. An individual with strong ethnic nihilism prefers separation from own ethnic group and search for sustainable social and psychological niches not on the ethnic criterion. With ethnic indifference, ethnic identity is blurred, expressed in the uncertainty of ethnicity, the irrelevance of ethnicity. The "normal" level of ethnic identity (positive ethnic identity) implies a combination of positive attitude towards one's own people with positive attitude towards other peoples. This type of ethnic identity is typical of the vast majority of people and is an important condition for peaceful intercultural interaction in a multi-ethnic world. Ethnic egoism is the result of the perception of ethno-cultural interactions through the lens of the construct "my people" and "not my people", it involves tension and irritation in communication with representatives of other ethnic groups. Ethnic isolationism is manifested in the belief in the superiority of "one's own" people, the acceptance of the need for national culture "purification", a negative attitude to inter-ethnic unions and interactions. Ethnic fanaticism presupposes the individual's willingness to take any action in the name of ethnic interests, to recognize the priority of ethnic rights of the people over human rights, justification of any victims in the struggle for the well-being of one's own people.

Within the framework of present research it is supposed to develop "normal" positive ethnic identity. Positive ethnic identity, which consists in the subject's awareness of belonging to his/her ethnic group, assessing the importance of ethnicity, showing interest in the history and culture of one's own people, a sense of national pride, is the basis of effective socialization and professionalization, it contributes to successful personal and professional development (Khabaeva et al., 2014), as well as, according to the authors, levelling the deficits of learned helplessness (Figure 03).

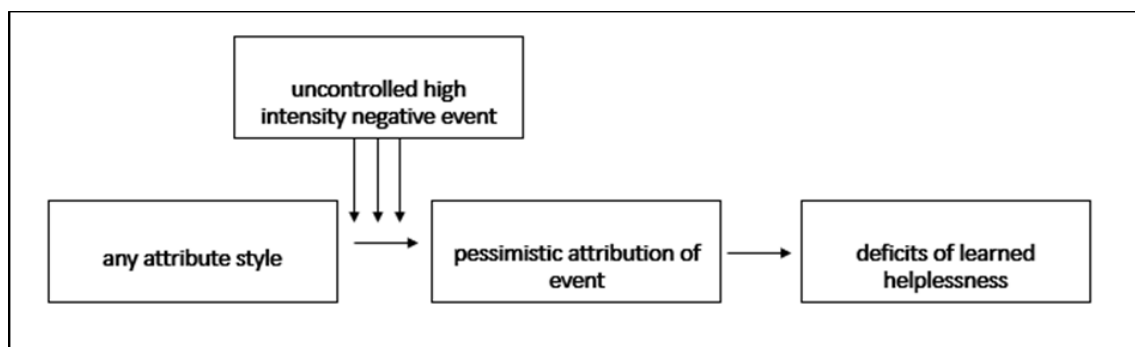


Figure 03. Levelling the deficits of learned helplessness

Positive ethnic identity in a difficult situation, in conditions of life outside home gives a person a sense of psychological security and stability (Stefanenko, 2006). Experiencing a feeling of helplessness in conditions of uncontrollability, an individual with a positive ethnic identity is able to feel unity with his native ethnic group, realize his belonging to a certain culture, focus on ethnic communities and is often inclined to exaggerate the positive differences of his community from others. In a situation when a person is in another country, the lack of guidance, a sense of "We", conditional psychological security can aggravate the adaptation process. The individual needs to feel a part of "we", and the ethnic group is one

of the support groups, stable in composition and stable in time, unlike other groups (family, party, religious organization, etc.). Once in a crisis situation (when changing the country of residence), a person through awareness of his/her ethnicity seeks to find a way out of the current conditions, from the state of social loneliness, seeks to feel a part of a stable community.

It should be noted that negative ethnic identity, accompanied by a sense of inferiority, disadvantage and shame for the representatives of their ethnic group, can also contribute to the emergence of deficits of learned helplessness (Stefanenko, 2006).

Formation of a positive ethnic identity depends on many factors. The most significant are the following: symbols of the people, language, community of historical destiny, territorial community (Kadykova, 2014). In the process of socialization, a person gets a certain idea about historical events, national heroes, gets acquainted with the state symbols (the state flag, the state emblem, the national anthem), which contributes to formation of a sense of pride, empathy, and also ensures the coordination of the interests of the community (Kadykova, 2008; Stefanenko, 2006). Knowledge of the mother tongue contributes to the group identity formation (Kadykova, 2008; Stefanenko, 2006). It is important to note that "in modern conditions of ethnic cultures unification, along with a steady reduction in the number of ethnodifferentiating factors, the role of common historical destiny as a symbol of the unity of the people" (Kadykova, 2008, p. 207).

7. Conclusion

Thus, in the context of academic mobility, providing the student with the opportunity to gain access to recognized centers of education and science, special attention should be paid to the period of adaptation to new living conditions. There is a high risk of formation of learned helplessness in a foreign environment as a state-reaction to uncontrollable traumatic events. Learned helplessness can be accompanied by deficits that make it difficult for a foreign student to adapt to a new culture. Therefore, it is important to carry out work aimed at prevention and correction of learned helplessness. According to the authors, one of the effective directions of psychological correction of learned helplessness can be the intentional development of positive ethnic identity among foreign students. In the course of the theoretical study, we have found theoretical prerequisites pointing to the close connection of positive ethnic identity with phenomena related to learned helplessness (optimism, depression, anxiety, self-esteem). The organization in the educational environment of the university of polyethnic space aimed at the development of cognitive, affective and behavioral components of ethnic identity can be the basis for the formation of positive ethnic identity and, as a consequence, of the correction of learned helplessness. The proposed general recommendations on the development of positive ethnic identity require a detailed study and experimental verification, which is the prospect of further research.

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