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Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

DIALOGUE OF CULTURES AS THE BASIS FOR PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The article considers the aspects of professional socialization of international students during training at a regional university in Russia and adaptation of students to the new learning conditions. The organization of the educational process at a university based on dialogue of cultures enables to solve important problems of professional socialization of international students. Learning conditions at Russian universities are more or less different from those that exist in students home countries. Professional socialization is considered as an organized educational process of inculturation, which represents a unity of three components: the targeted transmission of culturally set values, moral standards and forms of behavior adopted by a culture; establishing the conditions that ensure acquisition of these standards by students; exercising these standards in social environment. The problems emerging during the process of adaptation are defined as several types of barriers: cultural, social, didactic, and professional. The article analyzes the case of the Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University, and offers methods to solve the problems of professional socialization of international students based on the concept of the dialogue of cultures.

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1. Introduction

The social nature of man, his entry into society, introduction to cultural norms, principles of ethics and morality demand the continuity of the socialization process. Socialization is a two-way process, which includes, on the one hand, the inculcation of social experience by an individual via entering the social environment; on the other hand, the active reproduction by an individual of a system of social relations due to one's own dynamic activity and inclusion in the social environment. Thus, socialization includes both the adaptation to life and activity in a particular social environment, and the individualization and development of a person. One of the most important mechanisms of socialization is institutional socialization, which takes place in various social institutions. A higher educational establishment is one of the main institutions of socialization, and the process of professional training at a university is an important part of professional socialization. Professional socialization is not limited solely to socialization while obtaining a profession, however, it is reasonable to consider university education as a process and result of professional socialization of a young professional. Accordingly, the university's learning environment may be described as a combination of factors and conditions that contribute to the development of personal and professional qualities of a future specialist in a particular field.

Thousands of international students enroll at Russian universities annually. The Russian Federation has a long history in this sphere. During the time of the Soviet Union, educational migration was quite large-scale. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Soviet Union ranked 3rd by the number of international students, which was around 126 thousands. Although the leading position of Russia as a recipient country for training international students has weakened over the past decades, the attractiveness of Russian education for international applicants has maintained. Upon arrival in Russia, international students face certain difficulties in the social, household, cultural, and educational areas that affect the process and outcomes of professional socialization. One of the effective mechanisms for the socialization of international students, including professional socialization, is the concept of the dialogue of cultures.

2. Problem Statement

In the article (Solovtsova et al., 2019) we claimed that the organization of the teaching and learning process at a university based on the dialogue of cultures enables to solve current issues of professional socialization of international students. Among them are the issues of overcoming sociocultural and didactic barriers, understanding axiological foundations of professional activity, adapting to professional environment upon returning to one's homeland at the beginning of one's professional activity. However, these statements need to be specified, proved by relevant examples from the practices of higher educational institutions, including regional universities. Research on professional socialization in higher education has been conducted in nursing (de Swardt et al., 2017), pharmacy, teaching and law; on professional socialisation in tourism and hospitality education (Knight et al., 2020), etc. In this study, we consider the process of professional socialization of international students both in the aspect of general issues (relevant to any educational programme) and in the aspect of professional socialization of future teachers.

Nowadays there is a shortage of research in the Russian and world science that would contain practical guidelines on professional socialization of international students based on the dialogue of cultures. This article is intended to cover this issue to some extent.

3. Research Questions

We have identified two aspects of professional socialization of international students (Solovtsova et al., 2019): (1) adaptation to the learning conditions at a Russian university; (2) acquiring the values, knowledge, skills and behavior necessary for successful professional activity and interaction with representatives of a professional community. In this article, we discuss the problems of adaptation of international students to the educational conditions of a Russian regional university, since solution of these problems promotes efficient professional socialization both at the stage of university training and at the initial stage of professional activity of a graduate upon return to his or her native country.

This study examines the professional socialization of international students at regional universities. Nowadays the distribution of international students studying in Russia is characterized by a certain geographical unevenness, since the most popular are metropolitan universities. The problems associated with adaptation of international students to the learning conditions of a foreign environment are analyzed using the cases of large universities, such as the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in Moscow. However, a significant number of international students are enrolled at regional universities, which is due to certain factors related to the student's homeland and the region of Russia. In this regard, it is important to study the process of international students' adaptation to the learning conditions at a Russian university on the data of regional universities.

The adaptation of international students to the learning conditions at a regional Russian university depends on the profession that students aim to obtain. This article is focused on the professional socialization at a teacher training university involving international students studying for a teacher's degree. The research has been conducted on the case of the Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the effective methods of interaction between the subjects of the teaching and learning process at a university in the dimensions "teacher - international student", "international student - international student". These methods should comply with the conceptual frameworks of the dialogue of cultures theory developed by M.M. Bakhtin and V.S. Bibler and contribute to solving the tasks related to professional socialization of students during their studying at a university.

5. Research Methods

The research applied the theoretical method of analyzing conclusions and recommendations developed in the sociological and educational literature on the problems of professional socialization and socio-cultural adaptation of international students, which enabled to identify the barriers inhibiting successful adaptation to learning conditions at a regional Russian university (Solovtsova, 2018). The classification method was used to present in a structured way the data regarding these barriers.

The surveying methods (interviews, conversations) helped to reveal the factors affecting the attractiveness of various regional universities from the perspective of students from neighboring and far-abroad countries.

The overt observation of students at the Russian as a foreign language classes was the basis for identifying the special aspects of the structure of the dialogue of cultures that takes place when teaching Russian language at a regional teacher training university.

6. Findings

The global processes in education conditioned by inclusion of the Russian education system in the global educational space are closely connected with academic mobility. Thousands of international students enroll at Russian universities annually. According to the official data of the Federal Security Service featured by RBC, during the first two quarters of 2019, 181.5 thousand students entered the country. The countries where the majority of students came from were Kazakhstan, China and Uzbekistan - 59.3 thousand, 21.2 thousand, and 14 thousand respectively. Ukraine took the 4th position with 13.7 thousand enrolled students. Besides, Russian universities attract students from Iran, India, South and North Korea, Egypt, Morocco, Vietnam and the United States (1050 students, which makes the US one of the twenty countries where international students mostly come from). 767 students arrived from the UK, 99 students from Canada. 231 students arrived from Belarus, which took the 47th position. In total, international students from 174 countries are enrolled at Russian universities, including one student from Iceland and three students from Malta and Honduras.

More than 48% of international students studying in Russia are residents of the former Soviet Union countries, that have common history with Russia. Nevertheless, during the years of independence, the attitudes of citizens of the former Soviet countries have changed significantly towards the views on Russia, its traditions and culture. A whole generation (to which the majority of current students belong) were born and grew up in independent states and, accordingly, they have their own views on the history of their countries.

The attractiveness of Russian education for foreign citizens can be explained by several reasons, including its relatively low cost and a wide range of offered programmes. As a rule, traditional choice of an international student falls upon a technical or a medical university. However, it should be noted that there are certain priorities in choosing a university. The analysis of the enrollment rates in the Volgograd region shows the following tendencies. At Volgograd State Technical University the number of students from African countries and Vietnam has increased, since the educational system in the field of technical sciences is quite traditional. Among medical students there are many from India, South-East Asian and Arab states. The rapid development of agronomy and agriculture in the Arab countries has led to an increase in the number of international students at the Volgograd State Agricultural University; students from Africa and South Korea are enrolled in the programmes of economics and management. State scholarships fund students from Turkmenistan enrolled in the natural sciences and geography programmes. Qualifications in teaching arts, music, and Russian language, coaching team sports (basketball, volleyball, etc.) attract students from China.

The process of studying at a university refers to a specialized level of sociocultural reality, which includes study, work, socio-political, volunteering, creative and other activities. The professional socialization carried out during the learning process at a university also refers to the specialized level of sociocultural reality and is a multi-faceted process, featuring both professional training, and inclusion of students in the cultural context, self-identification towards the values of the society where professional socialization is carried out. For international students, this complex process is conducted as a dialogue between the native and the Russian culture. This dialogue must be organized in such a way that acceptance of the Russian culture aids to better understanding of the student's native culture, since international students will have to perform professional activities in their native countries on the basis of the socio-cultural norms and values established in it.

Perez (2016) considers the process of professional socialization from a general cultural perspective. Based on this thesis, one can argue that the degree of effectiveness of professional socialization depends on the degree of students' inclusion in the professional culture. We consider inculturation as an educationally organized process, uniting three components: the targeted transmission of culturally set values, moral standards and forms of behavior adopted by a culture; establishing the conditions that ensure acquisition of these standards by students; exercising them in social environment. Inculturation as a context for professional socialization of international students at regional universities is performed at the macro level (national culture, national educational culture, professional culture), at the meso-level (regional culture) and at the micro level (culture of a specific educational organization) with the leading role of professional culture. However, during professional socialization of international students, regarded as a process of inculturation, it is necessary to take into account the fact that students can understand the special aspects of professional culture only if they understand the general cultural concepts of the host country. While for Russian students the general cultural concepts are, as a rule, obvious, for international students deciphering the meanings contained in the phenomena of Russian culture (norms of interaction, rules of behavior, traditions, etc.) is another difficult task. In addition, the characteristics of the national culture are refracted through the cultural characteristics of the region where the student is studying. All these features should be considered when developing a regional model of professional socialization of international students.

Educational conditions in Russian universities are more or less different from those that exist in the students' home countries. This fact is especially significant to international students who enroll at Russian universities after studying for some time at a university in their native country. But no less important are these differences for students entering a Russian regional university as their first choice, since values, conceptual foundation, approaches, principles of organization, norms and forms of interaction between teachers and students are, as a rule, uniform for the Russian educational system and function at universities, as well as schools. The differences between the educational process at a university and at school usually comprise teaching methods and forms, but they do not include the fundamental rules which are the basis for the country's education system.

The analysis of the conclusions in the scientific literature on professional socialization at universities (Perez, 2016; Rudenko, 2016), and the study of the teaching and learning process at the Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University have revealed a number of barriers for professional socialization. The first

group of barriers that students face at the initial stages of socialization are *social barriers*. They include household issues (paying bills, equipping dormitories, etc.), medical care (purchasing medicines, visiting a doctor), nutrition issues (food and cooking, food products of one's native cuisine), climatic and weather conditions, ecological situation, leisure activities.

Cultural barriers are associated primarily with the differences in the Russian culture and the culture of the student's native country, including customs, traditions, norms and forms of behavior that can significantly vary from those that exist in the students' native cultures.

The cultural barrier is closely associated with the *language barrier* (some researchers regard it as a cultural barrier). Absence of knowledge or poor proficiency in the Russian language causes serious stress to students. Conversations with international students revealed that even those who speak colloquial Russian, have significant difficulties in studying (especially when mastering professional terminology, terms related to the organization of the learning process at a university), as well as in various communication situations: during paperwork, at a bank, when purchasing technical devices, when talking on the phone. In a multicultural group, the language barrier can be strengthened due to the semantic differences of the same words that exist in different languages.

The *didactic barriers* are associated with the teaching methods and modes that are different from those exercised in students home countries, different understandings of the same professional terms (for example, in Chinese there are no separate words for the concepts "education" and "upbringing"). Here the didactic barriers overlap the language and cultural barriers, including the different styles of interaction between teacher and students, students with each other, the different ways of organizing the teaching and learning process (Ovsyannikova & Tereshchenko, 2018).

The professional barrier relates to different understandings of profession, its prestige, professional education, differences of the teaching models applied in Russia and one's home country. This barrier comprises stereotypical ideas about the level of educational services, the necessary and sufficient level of knowledge and professional competence, professional culture, including the values of the professional community, the norms of interaction and the rules of behavior in the professional community. Regarding the professional barriers, students of teacher training universities are in a winning position, since they have an opportunity to both observe special aspects of professional activity and interaction in a professional community, and to be insiders to this community, which results in mastering the models of professional behavior during the educational process.

For efficient adaptation to the educational process at a regional Russian university, the priority must be given to the cultural barriers that are most important of others. The basis for effective modeling and designing of the process of adaptation of international students to the educational conditions at a Russian university is the concept of the dialogue of cultures.

Bibler (1994) stated that culture emerges only when there are at least two cultures, and a dialogue between them. He noted that in the modern world, the dialogue becomes a polylogue of cultures. This theory is especially relevant for regional universities, where monocultural groups of international students previously dominated; today teachers increasingly have to deal with multinational, multicultural groups.

In today's educational practice, the ideas of the dialogue of cultures acquire special significance. It is one thing when the acquisition of professional values, norms and modes of professional interaction takes

place in a mono-ethnic group, i.e. people of one culture with similar spiritual values enter a dialogue of cultures in a multidimensional multicultural space. And it is another matter when this process is carried out in a multi-ethnic space, when students of different nationalities and cultural environments have to understand representatives of the Russian culture, as well as each other, accept certain concepts that seem alien to them and do not comply with the principles and rules of their life. In the latter case, the process of adaptation to the educational conditions at a Russian university is much more complicated. International students arriving to study in another country become participants in the polylogue of cultures within the educational space. Along with entering the Russian cultural and educational space, they become part of the inter-ethnic and international relations that emerge in multicultural groups where they study. The quality of their professional training and the effectiveness of socialization depend on how positively international students perceive the values and norms of the professional culture characterized by the local specificity.

The concept of the dialogue of cultures becomes especially significant when teaching Russian as a foreign language. At the Russian language classes, the dialogue of cultures is expressed as interpersonal communication, which aids to dissolving stereotypes that have been developed and solidified in one's socio-cultural environment, as well as contribute to rethinking and embracing the new worldview. After a period when intercultural education more resembled a social movement (Dietz, 2009), it now enjoys strong institutional recognition at least in a number of Western countries. At the European level, for example, the European ministers of education have issued the "Declaration on Intercultural Education in the New European Context" (Council of Europe, 2003). At the international level, UNESCO (2006) has issued guidelines for intercultural education consisting of three principles that are considered to go beyond regional and national differences. It is assumed that by following these principles teachers will acquire the intercultural competences (Portera, 2014).

As a rule, international students begin their studies at the preparatory faculty in an international group. On the one hand, students represent a single community that must accept new values, adapt to a different educational and professional culture. If this does not happen, the learning process will eventually be interrupted, because few people can manage living in a foreign country under stress caused by lack of understanding of the local culture and other reasons connected with the barriers. A teacher acts as a representative of the country where international students study. Faced with phenomena that cause distrust, rejection, negative emotions, a student tries to resolve these issues with the help of a teacher, therefore entering a dialogue with teacher in search of answers to questions. As a rule, if a group consists of representatives of the same nationality, groupmates express solidarity and support their peers. If a group consists of representatives of different countries, nationalities or cultures, some students may feel bewilderment, misunderstanding, irony or rejection toward the local behavioral and educational patterns, traditions, customs, etc. while others may see nothing that would contradict their worldview.

At the Russian language classes, we have repeatedly witnessed that students violently uphold their positions regarding the national mentality, culture, traditions, even if deep inside they do not really like certain cultural phenomena of their own countries.

A comparative analysis of the influence of the national mentality on the education of China and Russia was conducted by Bokova and Huaiying (2019). Referring to the work of Jin Li (2015), the authors noted that the educational process in China is oriented toward virtue, while the European process is built

upon reason. The key difference lies in the role of a teacher at a university. Teacher's status is very significant in China, where teacher has unquestioned authority, which all students have to obey. The attitude towards teacher as superior in age and status has shaped in China based on Confucianism. Respect puts the student-teacher relationship within the following framework: a teacher does everything possible to teach a student, while a student does everything possible to learn from a teacher who is regarded not as an employee who fulfills his contractual duties, but as a mentor in morality who transfers objective and scientific knowledge (Li, 2015).

One of the most important attributes of education in many countries is compulsory school uniform. For example, schools in Turkmenistan have very strict school uniform. The color, length (floor-length), and design of the uniform, hat, hairstyle, embroidery, etc. are strictly fixed. Moreover, teachers also wear uniform, as it emphasizes the fact that teachers and students are participants of the common teaching and learning process, performing common meaningful work. We assume that students from Turkmenistan did not like the uniform during their school years, but they all fiercely defended it, based on the deep-rooted mental concept that their native culture, traditions and customs must be protected in front of representatives of different cultures. Azerbaijani schools also have uniform, but it is not as strict. A teacher can wear a hijab, though it is not welcome. In Cameroon, girls wear long blue dresses with a white collar, while boys have a freedom of choice. Therefore, the girls from Cameroon do not actually like the uniform, but the boys like it, because they are not obliged by it. School uniform is a part of school culture in many countries. When students study the topic "Education System", they exert a great interest to school uniforms in other countries, they comment, argue, and express their opinions. Students enter a discussion where they try to justify the type of school uniform in their countries by climatic conditions, traditions, and history. This is a polylogue, which helps students to better understand themselves, their culture, and simultaneously learn about the culture of different countries. Cultural diversity and differences are understood and applied in educational approaches in different ways, regardless of whether they are marked as multicultural or intercultural, the definitions vary depending on national and local school conditions, as well as the practices of individual teachers (Ogaya & Edelmannb, 2016).

The topics related to education, especially important to students of a teacher training university, provide opportunities for cultural and national self-identification, on the one hand, and on the other, open entry to a multicultural space. At what age is it better to start learning? How is this process organized? What are the pros and cons of education in one's country? What aspects are interesting in the education systems of other countries? When is the best time to start education: at 7 or 4 years of age? Why the teacher authority is high in some countries but not in others? How much attention is paid to learning the native language? What is the role of family in personality development? Who is upbringing a child in the family? And many more questions that representatives of different countries have to answer, prove their point and show that they know well the educational system, traditions, culture and people of their own countries. Students are impelled to show that they see the pros and cons, but are proud of their country and wish it prosperity, and at the same time, accept a different culture, understand that all cultures in the world are interconnected, their representatives can hear and trust each other, ask and answer. Only in this case the space of dialogue and polylogue will be constructive, and the communication process will be based on cooperation and partnership.

When organizing a dialogue (polylogue) of cultures among international students studying at a teacher training university, one should take into account the cultural characteristics of students' native countries, which are relevant both in terms of organizing the educational process and correct arrangement of relations between teachers and students.

Education.

Turkmenistan. Children start going to school at 7. Usually they finish 9, less often 11 grades. The education system is similar to the Russian system. Much attention is paid to the native language. Teachers are highly respected. It is a very prestigious and fairly well-paid job. A very large percentage of male teachers work in schools. Higher education is prestigious, but receiving it in Turkmenistan is very expensive. If one received a teacher training abroad, one must enroll in continuing education courses and pass exams. If one passes the exams, the salary is the highest, if one fails the exams, the salary is lower. Most often, students go to Russia and Turkey to receive higher education. Young men must necessarily serve in the army. It is difficult to find a job at any state department without having served in the army.

African countries.

Cameroon. Children start going to school at 3. They spend at school all day. From 7 to 19 years old, they study at colleges or lyceums, where they receive their first vocational training (similar to vocational training facilities of the Soviet Union). The authority of the teacher is very high. Teacher is a very respected person. After finishing a lyceum or college, young men go to the army. Then they enter a university. Higher education is very prestigious. After graduation, one can get higher positions in society. Students are very interested in receiving education of high quality. The most popular areas are economics, agriculture, and technical sciences. In case students go to Russia, they usually enroll at smaller universities, not metropolitan, where they can receive more attention.

Senegal. Children start going to school at 6. At 12 they enter college, where they study during 4 years. At 16, they enter a lyceum, and study for three years. After that, young men serve in the army, and then enter university.

Parenting.

Turkmenistan. In Turkmenistan mothers are usually engaged in upbringing, as most often women do not work and are engaged in household duties, raising children, while men provide for the family. Such qualities as industriousness, honoring one's elders, caring for younger people are valued.

African countries. Upbringing is very strict. Children ought to obey their parents. Men have special authority. Any adult can tell off a child, even use corporal punishment in case a child disobeys parents or answers rudely. For bad behavior a student can be expelled from any educational institution. Respect for elders plays a special role. Boys, teenagers, and men cannot sit in a public place, in transport, in presence of a woman. They offer help to carry heavy bags, or find directions even to strangers. A word of a man has the strongest power. A woman cannot disobey a man, cannot be rude to him.

Traditions.

Turkmenistan. The most important tradition of Turkmenistan is the celebration of Nowruz. The Turkmen gather together, cook national dishes, and dress up in national costumes. Other traditions are very similar to the Russian traditions.

African countries. Africa is rich in tradition. For example, on a hot day it is very important to share a glass of water with anyone. Also, in Africa, it is customary to live in large families, including several generations.

In Senegal, to this day there is a tradition of gathering at table at the same time every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is a rule. All family members must be at home at this time.

Students from African countries usually get surprised when they discover that Russians spend very little time with their relatives, and rarely celebrate holidays with the whole family (not only relatives who live together, but remote relatives as well). The support and approval of the family is important for them. Holidays are celebrated together, they go church or mosque together, even to nightclubs (on holidays) they also go together. They are respectful to other religions.

Great importance is attached to national costumes. that are worn on a daily basis as well as on holidays. It is their pride.

They are very surprised by detachment of Russians, unwillingness to help, absence of smiles and great psychological distance between people.

7. Conclusion

The study resulted in the following conclusions.

(1) The understanding of professional socialization as a educationally organized, targeted process of inculturation is the theoretical basis for modeling and designing the process of professional socialization of international students based on the conceptual foundations of the dialogue of cultures theory.

(2) During professional socialization of international students regarded as the process of inculturation, it is necessary to take into account the fact that students can understand the special aspects of professional culture only if they understand the general cultural characteristics of the host country.

(3) The adaptation process of international students to the educational conditions at a regional Russian university, which is an integral part of professional socialization, may be hindered by the following types of barriers: cultural, language, social, didactic, professional.

(4) The concept of the dialogue of cultures is particularly significant during the process of teaching Russian as a foreign language. At lessons, the dialogue of cultures is performed, as a rule, at the level of interpersonal communication, which helps to dissolve the existing stereotypes, and enables to overcome the described barriers.

(5) In multinational, polycultural groups, the dialogue of cultures is performed as a polylogue of cultures (V.S. Bibler). At a teacher training university, topics related to education offer the best opportunities for students to adapt to the learning conditions of a Russian university.

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