

Features of International Students' Adaptation (on the Basis of a Russian Higher Education Institution)

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ABSTRACT

The growth of students' international mobility and difficulties which international students meet, state of maladjustment manifested, first of all, at the psychophysical level suggests the relevance of the paper. In this regard, the paper is aimed to reveal features of international students' adaptation (in case of students from India) in comparison with native students. The leading method to the research is experimental-psychological testing aimed to identify features of international students' adaptation according to the following criteria: level of stress, qualities of life and indicators of psychological-symptomatic status. The paper covers features of international first-year students' adaptation: low degree of stress load (with tendency to threshold resistance); higher values of quality of life indicators and adaptation indicators in comparison with control groups. Analysis of psychological symptomatic status revealed a tendency to "somatization". Indicators of adaptation are directly connected with the state of mental and physical health. Materials from the paper can be useful in practical and theoretical work of teachers, heads of educational institutions; specialists in educational and social work, psychologists participating in programs of psychological and social support of international students.

KEYWORDS

Adaptation, quality of life, mental health, physical health, international student, medical student

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Introduction

Relevance of the subject

One of guidelines of Russian universities activity is to promote expansion of academic mobility of foreign countries into Russia which is favourable for the process of inclusion into international education system. According to the Institute of sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences the number of foreign citizens

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trained in Russian higher education institutions is constantly increasing; in compliance with the forecast the number of international students will make more than 400 thousand by 2030 (The number of trained, pedagogical and professorial personnel, number of educational organizations of the Russian Federation, 2015). Courses of pre-university preparation for foreign students are traditional for Russian higher education institutions; they teach the Russian language and disciplines corresponding to a profile of higher education institutions. Now, Russian higher education institutions actively realize students' training in English; foreign professors are invited, comfortable conditions for accommodation are created, cultural leisure and sports activities are organized to promote international students' adaptation. At the same time the issue of international students' adaptation in Russian higher education institutions remains urgent due to the increasing number of foreign students representing different countries, cultures and religions.

Russian science experiences stable interest in the problem of international students' adaptation in educational environment of higher education institutions; researches are conducted in various directions: social, social-psychological, sociocultural, pedagogical, medical-biological. There are joint scientific developments with scientists of technical specialties, in particular, information technology containing decisive rules for the formation of classification on the basis of entrant's personal data comparison to a set of psychological qualities necessary to assess international students' adaptation is offered. (Shevelyov et al, 2012).

The phenomenon of international students' adaptation to a higher school in Russia is researched within social-psychological context: according to the model of adaptation process to systematize problems of this process in time sequence (Ivanova, 2001), psychological features of motivation dynamics of international students' educational activity in the course of adaptation (Kravtsov, 2008); ethno-psychological determination of interaction and behavior of international students (Loginova, 2006); criteria of sociocultural adaptation of international students (Dorozhkin & Mazitova, 2007); sociocultural adaptation within the process of subject's interaction with environment in daily occurrence (Londadzhim, 2012); emotional-personal factors of international students' adaptation (Kostales, 2013); cross-cultural features of personality regulatory structures, value-meaning regulations, perception of values realization in life (Salikhova, 2015).

Pedagogy studies international students' adaptation from the following positions: sociocultural support of international students as a special type of intermediary pedagogical activity aimed to develop elements of Russian culture through international students' participation in different types of socially important and art-creative activity for their successful adaptation (Yazvinskaya, 2009); pedagogical conditions of international students' communicative development: in case of students from countries of the Asia-Pacific Region trained in Russian higher education institutions (Kopyt'ko, 2006); significance of educational system in a pedagogical higher education institution in Russia for social adaptation: in case of Chinese students (Chen, 2015); pedagogical principles of international students' adaptation support in higher education institutions within higher school educational environment as spaces of valuable orientations of international students' adaptation (Grebennikova, 2010). However, scientific works devoted to medical-biological adaptation of international students are insufficiently presented.

These scientific researches are focused on studying the degree of international students' adaptation to physical loads, dynamics of international students' psycho-physiological state during their training in a higher education institution, development of criteria to evaluate the level of adaptation to academic and physical activity, impact of psycho-social factors in foreign-language environment (Mironova, 2000). Structure-dynamic characteristics, mental capacity and features of vegetative reactions of international students during the initial stage of studies at a higher school were analyzed in the scientific work focused on the research of psycho-physiological status and quality of international students' life. (Sakharov, 2005).

Problem statement

Adaptation is a dynamic process when an organism adapts to changed living conditions. Excessive tension of adaptable mechanisms can lead to violations of mental and physical health, and as a result, to the development of maladjustment (psychological and psychosomatic frustrations). Therefore, problems of stressful impacts of new sociocultural and socio-pedagogical conditions, their consequences, and support of the level of international students' mental and physical health necessary for successful education activity are urgent. Informative criteria to evaluate the level of international students' adaptation to training conditions in Russian higher education institutions are expressiveness of stress level, indicators of life quality and psychological symptomatic status.

Paper objective

To reveal features of international students' adaptation to a higher school of Russia in comparison with Russian students (from other regions and living in this region).

Methodological Framework

Research methods

Questioning and testing with application of the following techniques were used in the empirical research: methods for determining stress-resistance and social adaptation of Holmes and Rache; technique to diagnose social-psychological adaptation by Rogers-Diamond; SCL-90-R (Russian language variant adapted by Tarabrina within research in the laboratory of post-traumatic stress and psychotherapy psychology at the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences); technique "General Health Questionnaire SF-36". The questionnaire contained questions of social and demographic character. Obtained data were processed with application of descriptive statistics procedures; statistical comparison was carried out according to Student's t-criterion for independent samples; correlation analysis was performed in compliance with Pearson's formula.

Experimental base of research

Experimental work was carried out in Kazan State Medical University (KSMU). International students of this higher education institution choose education either in English or in Russian. Students trained in English took part in our research; as a result, their training process was arranged according to the principle of international and Russian students' division.

Research phases

The research was conducted on a voluntary basis in 2015; it included three stages:

- during the first stage – a preparatory stage – anonymous questioning to select testees to achieve maximum uniformity of samples was carried out (e.g., students who earlier studied in other higher education institutions were excluded). 127 questionnaires were analyzed, and 3 groups of testees (n=76) were established.
- during the second stage – the main stage – participating students were tested by means of experimental and psychological techniques;
- during the third stage – the final stage – statistic processing of obtained data and generalization of research results were carried out.

Questioning and testing of international students was held in English.

25 students from India made the experimental sample. Two control samples were organized: sample 1 - 25 nonresident students who arrived from other regions of the Russian Federation; sample 2 - 26 residents of Kazan. Testees of all groups are male first-year students, aged between 18 - 22 years, single. International students notified in the questionnaire that they communicated within educational groups and accommodation groups.

Results

Analysis of mean values of experimental and psychological techniques indicators.

Table 1. Average values of stress load level (technique to determine stress resistance and social adaptation).

Name of indicators	International students	Non-resident students	Students from Kazan
Stress level	186.68	259.68	173.28

Table 1 shows that in group of international and Kazan students the level of stress load according to normative data of interpretation corresponded to a low degree of stress load, but with a tendency to threshold resistance. Stress level in non-resident students indicated threshold resistance – average degree of stress load.

Table 2. Average values of adaptation indicators (diagnostic technique of social - psychological adaptation of Rogers and Diamond).

Name of indicators	International students	Non-resident students	Students from Kazan
Adaptation	59.32	47.40	54.28
Acceptance of others	63.92	49.36	54.24
Internality	47.84	50.56	57.16
Self-acceptance	54.96	49.40	54.68
Emotional comfort	63.80	44.48	49.92
Aspiration to dominate	43.56	56.80	45.12

According to "Social-psychological adaptation" indicators of all scales were within the "corridor" of standard variation. However, it should be noted that such indicators as "Acceptance of others" and "Emotional comfort" were more expressed in international students. The adaptation indicator "Aspiration to dominate" prevailed in nonresident students; that testifies to the availability of particular ambitions, aspiration to reach a leading position in new social groups.

Table 3. Average values of psychological symptomatic status indicators (SCL-90-R)

Name of indicators	International students	Non-resident students	Students from Kazan
Somatization	0.97	0.98	0.90
Obsessive - Compulsive	0.75	0.76	0.75
Interpersonal Sensitivity	0.80	0.77	0.82
Depression	0.55	0.81	0.74
Anxiety	0.78	0.80	0.68
Hostility	0.62	0.65	0.64
Phobic Anxiety	0.55	0.75	0.66
Paranoid Ideation	0.50	0.62	0.75
Psychoticism	0.48	0.61	0.60

Analysis of average values of SCL-90-R technique indicators was carried out on standard indicators proposed by the authors of approbation (Tarabrina, 2001). It was possible to note a tendency to manifestation of somatization in all groups of students. Significantly higher risk of depressive tendencies emergence was noted in nonresident students. Higher rates of anxiety were specified in international and non-resident students.

Table 4. Average values of physical and psychological health indicators ("General health questionnaire SF-36 ")

Name of indicators	International students	Non-resident students	Students from Kazan
Physical functioning	62.56	47.36	45.80
Role functioning	47.92	46.12	45.84
Pain	43.84	33.88	38.04
General health	63.68	46.84	47.44
Vitality	63.32	48.12	47.08
Social functioning	47.44	52.16	45.40
Emotional functioning	54.96	36.80	47.40
Mental health	56.16	50.68	47.32

Analysis of results according to "Questionnaire of general health" technique was carried out on standardized population indicators of SF-36 scales for 7 age groups of male population (Amirdzhanova et al., 2012). Value of scales in all groups corresponded to a norm range. However, it should be noted that international students' indicators were higher in comparison with the group of non-resident and

Kazan students, except the scale "Social functioning". The indicator of "Emotional functioning" was on the lower bound of age norm in group of non-resident students.

Comparative analysis of adaptation, quality of life, psychological symptomatic status indicators.

Table 5. Comparative analysis data and reliable values of stress load, adaptation, psychological and physical health, and psychological symptomatic status indicators

Name of indicators	International students	Student t-criterion	Non-resident students
Stress level	186.68	t= - 4,47, P=0,001	259.68
Adaptation	59.32	t=3,47, P=0,01	47.40
Acceptance of others	63.92	t=5,2, P=0,001	49.36
Emotional comfort	63.80	t=6,17, P=0,001	44.48
Aspiration to dominant	43.56	t= -2,85, P=0,01	56.80
physical functioning	62.56	t=4,9, P=0,001	47.36
Vitality	63.32	t=4,62, P=0,001	48.12
General health	63.68	t=4,60, P=0,001	46.84
Emotional functioning	54.96	t=7,71, P=0,001	36.80
Depression	0,55	t= - 3,68, P=0,001	0,81
Phobic Anxiety	0,55	t= - 2,74, P=0,01	0,75
Psychoticism	0.48	t= - 2,1, P=0,05	0,60

Table 6. Comparative data analysis and reliable values of adaptation, psychological and physical health, psychological symptomatic status indicators

Name of indicators	International students	Student t-criterion	Students from Kazan
Acceptance of others	63.92	t=2.78, P=0, 01	54.24
Internality	47.84	t= -2.85, P=0,01	57.16
Emotional comfort	63.80	t=3.92, P=0,001	49.92
Physical functioning	62.56	t=5.9, P=0,001	45.80
General health	63.68	t=4.94, P=0,001	47.44
Vitality	63.32	t=5.32, P=0,001	47.08
Emotional functioning	54.96	t=3.15, P=0,01	47.40
Mental health	56.16	t=3.95, P=0,001	47.32

Table 7. Comparative analysis data and reliable values of adaptation, psychological and physical health indicators

Name of indicators	Non-resident students	Student t-criterion	Students from Kazan
Stress level	259.68	t= 6,14, P=0,001	173.28
Internality	50.56	t= -2,44, P=0,05	57.16
Emotional comfort	44.48	t= -2,29, P=0,05	49.92
Aspiration to dominate	56.80	t= 2,52, P=0,05	45.12
Social functioning	52.16	t= 2,43, P=0,05	45.40
Emotional functioning	36.80	t= - 4,34, P=0,001	47.40

Tables 5, 6, 7 show that majority of quality of life indicators and indicators of adaptation "Acceptance of others" and "Emotional comfort" in group of international students is reliably higher than in groups of non-resident and Kazan students. Higher values of quality of life indicators in the experimental group are, perhaps, bound to a number of factors; 1) conditions of learning and accommodation. (groups of international students represented closed communities which in many respects limited a circle of contacts to the compatriots both at an educational institution and out of it); 2) restricted time of visiting another country, 3) setting on temporary stay in the country.

Data correlation analysis in the group of international students revealed authentically significant interrelations

- stress level was positively interconnected with parameters – "somatization" ($r=0,56$; $p\leq 0,01$), "depression" ($r=0,56$; $p\leq 0,01$), "pain" ($r=0,87$; $p\leq 0,001$), it is inversely interconnected with indicators "physical functioning" ($r = - 0,54$; $p\leq 0,01$) and "mental health" ($r = - 0,55$; $p\leq 0,01$);

- the index "acceptance of others" is positively interconnected with indicators "role functioning" ($r=0,44$; $p\leq 0,05$), "general health" ($r=0,44$; $p\leq 0,05$), it is inversely interconnected with to the parameters "pain" ($r = - 0,44$; $p\leq 0,05$) "somatization" ($r = - 0,44$; $p\leq 0,05$);

- the indicator "internality" is directly interconnected with parameters of somatization ($r=0,40$; $p\leq 0,5$), "depression" ($r=0,43$; $p\leq 0,5$), inversely correlated with indicators "physical functioning" ($r = - 0,41$; $p\leq 0,5$), "general health" ($r = - 0,53$; $p\leq 0,01$), "social functioning" ($r = - 0,42$; $p\leq 0,5$), "mental health" ($r = - 0,46$; $p\leq 0,5$).

- the indicator "emotional comfort" is directly interconnected with indicators "physical functioning" ($r=0,43$; $p\leq 0,5$), "vitality" ($r=0,62$; $p\leq 0,001$), "emotional functioning" ($r = - 0,53$; $p\leq 0,01$), it is negatively interconnected with the indicator "pain" ($r = - 0,46$; $p\leq 0,5$);

- the indicator "physical functioning" is directly interconnected with the "Phobic anxiety" parameter ($r=0,50$; $p\leq 0,5$), it is negatively interconnected with parameters of "somatization" ($r = - 0,54$; $p\leq 0,01$) and "anxiety" ($r = - 0,41$; $p\leq 0,5$);

- the indicator "general health" is positively interconnected with the parameter "Phobic anxiety" ($r=0,52$; $p\leq 0,01$);

- "social functioning" is negatively interconnected with indicators "depressiveness" ($r = - 0,48$; $p\leq 0,5$) and "somatization" ($r = - 0,42$; $p\leq 0,5$).

Reliable correlation interrelations of indicators in group of nonresident first-year students:

- the indicator of stress level is negatively interconnected with adaptation parameters "acceptance of others" ($r = - 0,52$; $p\leq 0,01$), "self-acceptance" ($r = - 0,50$; $p\leq 0,05$), "physical functioning" ($r = - 0,61$; $p\leq 0,01$), it is positively interconnected by indicators "aspiration to dominate" ($r=0,47$; $p\leq 0,05$) and "somatization" ($r=0,44$; $p\leq 0,05$);

- "internality" is inversely correlated with the indicator of social functioning ($r = - 0,46$; $p\leq 0,5$);

- aspiration to dominate (7) is negatively interconnected with the "mental health" parameter ($r = - 0,50$; $p\leq 0,01$).

Reliable correlation interrelations of studied indicators in group of Kazan first-year students:

- the indicator of stress level has inverse relationship with parameters of "adaptation" and "acceptance of others" ($r = - 0,77$; $p \leq 0,001$) and "social functioning" ($r = - 0,72$; $p \leq 0,001$);

- the indicator "adaptation" is positively interconnected with "physical functioning" parameter ($r=0,66$; $p \leq 0,001$);

- the indicator "acceptance of others" is positively interconnected with the parameter "social functioning" ($r=0,58$; $p \leq 0,01$) and it is negatively interrelated with the parameter of "hostility" ($r = - 0,51$; $p \leq 0,01$);

- the internality is negatively interconnected with indicator "hostility" ($r = - 0,53$; $p \leq 0,01$);

- the indicator "aspiration to dominate" is positively interconnected with the indicator "physical functioning" ($r = - 0,51$; $p \leq 0,01$);

- "role functioning" is negatively interconnected with the parameters "interpersonal sensitivity" ($r = - 0,65$; $p \leq 0,001$) and "anxiety" ($r = - 0,57$; $p \leq 0,01$).

Correlation analysis in the group of international students showed that stress level, indicators "Acceptance of others", "Internality", "Emotional comfort" and "Social functioning" are directly interconnected with indicators of mental and physical health. In the group of nonresident students the stress level is interconnected with the human's ability to accept themselves as such as they are in reality and to accept people around, and degree of human's aspiration to dominate in interpersonal relations.

Discussions

The problem of international students' adaptation was considered by Russian scientists from the position of interrelation with individual-psychological features.

Individual-personal characteristics impact on the course of adaptation process and assessment of students' quality of life. According to data obtained, individual-personal features are on the first place in the hierarchy of factors able to affect quality of life assessment and, consequently, on successful adaptation and socialization of international students (Sakharova, 2005). The risk of mental maladjustment in international students with various accentuations of personality traits was studied. It was revealed that different components of adaptation system are broken (level of mental adaptation, social satisfaction, somatic indicators of health, and indicators of academic progress) in students with various accentuations of personality traits (Tyuryapina, 2014). Within research of emotional-personal factors of international students' adaptivity, their interrelation with types of adaptation to new sociocultural environment was studied. It was revealed that the greatest percent of psychosomatic and mental symptoms are specified in adaptation strategy "Alienation". (Kostales, 2013). However, heterogeneity of international students' groups according to their national sign should attract attention (Drozhzhina, 2013).

The problem of international students' adaptation is actively investigated by foreign scientists (Pitarch, 2015; Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; An & Chiang, 2015); from the position of stress level, depression and national identity of international students (Lee & Padilla, 2014; Meghani & Harvey, 2016), Predictors of international students' psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Ozer, 2015),

character and efficiency of online and social support of cross-cultural adaptation (Chen & Yang, 2015).

Besides the problem of students' adaptation to training process, in particular, influence of medical education on quality of life, mental and physical health of medical students is presented in foreign researches. The following factors reduce life level: high academic load, schedule of study, lack of time for leisure, features of future profession (pain, suffering of patients) and uncertainty concerning future profession (Tempski et al, 2012). In Dyrbye's research (Dyrbye et al, 2011) the assessment of emotional burn-out, levels of depression, stress, mental life qualities, chronic fatigue was carried out: the more violations of mental and somatic health in the student were identified, the more often there were suicide thoughts and thoughts to give up study. Increase of stress level in senior students was revealed in some researches (Compton, Carrera, & Frank, 2010; Hirsch et al, 2009).

Conclusion

The assessment of international students' adaptation to training conditions in Russian higher education institutions was carried out on the basis of stress level identification, indicators of life quality and psychological symptomatic status. The following peculiarities of international first-year students' adaptation were singled out in the course of the research: low degree of stress load (with a tendency to threshold resistance); higher values of quality life indicators, indicators of adaptation in comparison with control groups. Analysis of psychological symptomatic status showed a tendency to "somatization". Indicators of adaptation "Acceptance of others" and "Emotional comfort" are directly connected with the state of mental and physical health.

Based on the obtained results, a number of scientific problems and perspective directions demanding further consideration can be proposed: studying of adaptation dynamics throughout the period of training, gender features of international students' adaptation, attraction of students from other higher education institutions, countries for the purpose of further development of differentiated programs of international students' support.

Recommendations

Materials from the paper can be useful in practical and theoretical work of teachers, heads of educational institutions; specialists in educational and social work, psychologists participating in programs of psychological and social support of international students.

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