

# opción

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# Psychological and cultural adaptation of foreign students to the new educational environment

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## Abstract

The study aims to investigate issues of psychological and cultural adaptation of foreign students to the new educational environment via comparative quantitative research methods. This work demonstrates that in order to diminish the intercultural gap it is necessary to change the perception of the cultural gap. The results of the study have incorporated the totality and interconnection of all semantic concepts of the psychological adaptation of a foreign student.

**Keywords:** Psychological, Adaptation, Foreign, Students, Barriers.

# Adaptación psicológica y cultural de los estudiantes extranjeros al nuevo entorno educativo

## Resumen

El estudio tiene como objetivo investigar cuestiones de adaptación psicológica y cultural de los estudiantes extranjeros al nuevo entorno educativo a través de métodos de investigación cuantitativa comparativa. Este trabajo demuestra que para disminuir la brecha intercultural es necesario cambiar la percepción de la brecha cultural. Los resultados del estudio han incorporado la totalidad y la interconexión de todos los conceptos semánticos de la adaptación psicológica de un estudiante extranjero.

**Palabras clave:** Psicológico, Adaptación, Extranjero, Estudiantes, Barreras.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study was initiated by scientists at Sechenovskiy University (Moscow), which organizes and coordinates training at the University of foreign citizens, including citizens from the CIS countries and Ryazan State Medical University. The medical sphere of education in Russia is quite authoritative in the world. Therefore, the number of foreign students in the medical field is always very high. The experiment was held on the basis of the campuses of both universities according to a jointly developed plan. Given that the issue is directly related to these universities, scientists were able to conduct an experiment under the supervision of psychologists, sociologists, pediatricians (OSLER, 2011).

The flexibility of the modern world offers opportunities to strengthen intercultural communication. A qualitative indicator of this process can be deemed student migration (HAMDAN & MARTINEZ, 2000), which indicates the progressiveness of young people, the desire to master and overcome any obstacles. Youthful maximalism is unlimited in its desire to win, it does not yet know the post-euphoric syndrome, feelings of rejection, loneliness, disorientation, and others (KUZNETSOVA & SOLOVYEVA, 2018). The first physically visible signs of the post-euphoric syndrome are noticeable after 2-3 months of training.

The expected results can significantly change or make issues easier in the process of reorganizing psychological stereotypes in the following aspects: linguistic, conceptual, moral-informational, household, communicative, physiological (HYUN, QUINN, MADON & LUSTIG, 2007). Some studies determine that the psychophysiological difficulties of the adaptation period always result in negative consequences on students' health (BANJONG, 2015). As a result, academic performance may be higher.

Contemporary globalization transformations have changed the educational system to some extent. Today, the Internet plays an important role in the educational system (GAKHAL & WILSON, 2019). Online libraries, online communications with teachers, online group consulting and many other activities have made life easier for students and teachers (ZHILBAYEV, MOISEEVA & BARSANOVA,

2018). We could not ignore the importance of communication in social networks, which are very popular among young people. Students' accounts on Instagram and VKontakte were analyzed for the presence of Russian-speaking friends in subscribers. It was supposed that there will be an increase in the number of Russian-speaking friends on Instagram among foreign students and registration of new accounts in VKontakte as a popular Russian social network (MESIDOR & SLY, 2016; MUYAMBIRI & CHABAEFE, 2018).

The purpose of the study: To develop a mechanism of assistance and self-regulation by behavioral guidelines during the period of the adaptation of foreign students. In addition, the possibility of creating more comfortable conditions at the junction of ethno-psychological and socially oriented contacts, within a total immersion into the new culture (YEH & INOSE, 2003).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The survey took place in two stages among foreign students of the first year of study. The first stage is after two months of study, and the second stage is at the end of the school year. At the first stage there was a written questionnaire; benchmarking academic performance; analysis of social networks. The second stage was held at the end of the school year. The analysis of social networks

Instagram, Kontakte was carried out, where the activity of foreign students was traced (KUZNETSOVA & SOLOVYEVA, 2018).

155 foreign students took part in the survey. Among them, there are male - 97, female 58. The age of respondents is 19 - 22. The acceptable fluctuation scale makes up 6%. The questionnaire was compiled by psychologists, taking into account pedagogical and sociological criteria (MORI, 2000).

Research materials covered specific features associated with the transformation of personality in an unknown micro and macro environment. The first period of the so-called initial adaptation, when all features are especially sensitive and heightened, first of all, at the personal psychophysiological level. The second period of the so-called final phase of the adaptation is the end of the school year. Let us consider the main points of our study (see Table 1):

Table 1: The research trends, issues, and scope

<b>Trends</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Scope</b>
Relief of psychological discomfort, psychological support	Psychophysiological difficulties	Emotional overloading
Psychophysiological stress relief		Intellectual pressing
Arrangement of household comfort	Daily life difficulties	Psychological disturbances, as a consequence there are daily life difficulties

Assistance in perceiving of information flow	Communicative difficulties	Screening of information flow
Adaptation of medical support	Lack of information about rendered services	Regular medical examination, psychological support
Academic adaptation	Scientific and educational difficulties	Poor performance, misunderstanding of the material

We agreed in advance with the hostel management about the experimental resettlement of students, which could be useful in finding out the issues and possible means to solve this task. This was especially true for the second group (see below):

Group 1. Settlement within the same nationality. Settlement in monoculture students' rooms, dormitory floors, buildings where the micro atmosphere of their country is formed.

Group 2. The settlement of a foreign student among locals. Foreign students are distributed among local students, i.e. in one room no more than one foreign student, all the rest are local.

Group 3. Students living outside the hostel. As a rule, students live in privately rented apartments, hostels.

We offer a selection of questionnaire materials:

The language matter in the context of the adaptation is extremely important. Most respondents have confessed that they have issues answering the questions related to language restraint and the level of understanding of the academic guidelines. To determine the level of difficulties in the language restraint is equal to the understanding of academic guidelines, which, in turn, is equal to academic performance. The responses of all three groups of respondents were approximately the same (Table 2).

Table 2: Answers on a question about language restraint and the level of understanding of the academic guidelines

Understand, and can communicate, read	31%
Understand, and cannot communicate	23%
Understand only keywords	17%
Difficulties of understanding of academic teaching	29%

The questionnaire stipulated questions related to identifying the difference between the educational system in their country and in Russia. We understood that a freshman student could not give an objective assessment due to his/her incompetence. However, we expected to get the respondents' views on their perception of the structure of academic education in a radically different environment. The responses of all three groups of respondents were approximately the same (Table 3).



Table 3: Answers about the difference between the educational system in their country and in Russia

No difference	6%
Fundamentally different	46%
Different by academic structure	20%
Could not answer questions	28%

Communication difficulties for a freshman student are one of the most important among others. Taking into account the relevance of online communication among young people, the difference between face to face communication and online communication is very large. For some individuals is rather easier to establish online contact. But the matter is whether online contact may be transformed into face to face communication? In the majority of cases, a valiant behavior within online communication will disappear instantly during face to face communication. It was proposed to answer the question: What form of communication is more comfortable for you: live communication with peers or online communication? (See Table 4).

Table 4: Answers on a question about a preferable form of communication

Questions	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Live communication with native Russian speakers	8%	49%	11%
Live communication with native (foreign) speakers	47%	55%	61%
Online communication with peers native Russian speakers	29%	37%	31%
Have you met new friends, native Russian speakers, in live communication	7%	35%	15%

Have you met new friends, native Russian speakers, in online communication	26%	42%	33%
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First-year academic performance is an extremely significant issue and requires a special approach in its solving. To the question, with whom do you prefer to consult, if there is a need for additional consultation on the subject: teacher or peer? The students answered as follows (see Table 5):

Table 5: Answers on a question about preferences in getting help

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>
Prefer to ask teachers, Dean's Office employee	17%	23%	20 %
Prefer to ask elder native (foreign) speakers	28%	36%	32 %
Prefer to ask same-year students, native Russian speakers	18%	39%	22 %
Tries to solve the issue myself	22%	27%	32%

One of the most important adaptation matters is establishing contacts within the new communication environment, where local speakers of language and culture can contribute, creating a favorable atmosphere for foreigners. Questions as to wish to make new friends from fellow students, not of your nationality; have you managed to establish contacts with senior students, by your nationality would presumably show the psychological mood of freshmen (Table 6).

Table 6: Answers on a question about establishing contacts within the new communication environment

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>
Wish to have contacts with Russian speaking students	27%	44%	31%
No time for new contacts	13%	11%	23%
In the process of communication, I feel discomfort with native Russian speakers	36%	32%	29%
I prefer to establish contacts among senior students of my nationality	48%	37%	46%

The following question was supposed to show the attitude of Russian students towards foreigners, the desire to help during the adaptation (Table 7).

Table 7: Results of question were there any manifestation of hostility/hostility from students, native speakers?

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>
The attitude is very friendly and open	11%	17%	8%
None manifestations	10%	7%	16%
I notice the hostility from fellow students, native Russian speakers	34%	45%	29%

Living conditions play an equally important role in the social adaptation of the individual. Comfort/discomfort at the household level determines some skills that stimulate self-organization. The

students answered the questions as regards new living conditions and their comfort as follows (Table 8):

Table 8: Answers on a question about living conditions

Questions	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Yes, fully satisfied (by) living conditions	9%	5%	14%
Living conditions crucially differ from those that I have been accustomed to	45%	56%	37%
Want to have more comfortable living conditions	32%	45%	29%

To orient within the metropolis for foreign students is a kind of shock. It is worth noting that the word hostility was not used in the questions but in the answers, there were provocative ones. All three groups showed the following results (Table 9):

Table 9: Results of the question what difficulties do you experience within the city (using transport, shops, cash transactions)?

I feel the hostility from the residents of the city in transport	35%
I feel the hostility from the shops' workers	39%
I have not felt the hostility from the residents of the city	27%

The academic performance of foreign students was performed by a comparative analysis of the initial data on academic performance and the actual results of the modular results of the academic performance. In the second stage, the initial data, the modular results

and the results of the certification of the academic year were compared.

### **3. RESULTS**

How to improve live communication at the junction of different cultures and psychological discomfort for a foreign student in a critical state? Our experiment showed that the maximum immersion in the environment of a new country, the way of settlement where a foreigner lives with the Russians, can be an effective method to improve the live communication. We observe that the live communication in Group 1 is more successful than in Group 2; the respondents of Group 3 have had, eventually, much more friends among the students of their nationality. However, Group 2 has gathered most of the friends, native Russian speakers of the Russian language, both friends on social networks and in physical communication.

The academic education in the Russian Federation has its own consistent structure, which meets standards of the global educational process, but has some differences from the countries of Asia, Africa, and others. Not many students have stated that the education system in Russia is similar to the one in their own country by 6%, mainly they are the students from the CIS countries. Critical differences have been recognized by 46%. 20% of respondents have seen the differences in

academic structure. 28% of respondents could not answer the question.

The skills of first-year students to work independently have been formed under the influence of the general atmosphere of the University. In most cases, additional consultations during the early education period are very necessary, but first of all, sometimes students show less interest in such activity. The psychological barrier holds back the desire to ask more questions, an even clearer understanding of the usefulness of this activity. Respondents from Groups 2 and 3 have shown approximately the same answers (36% and 32%) to the question about consultations with senior compatriots. We can affirm that the authority of senior compatriots, not as professional, but as such, which is more comfortable for a freshman. As for consulting by Russian-speaking students Group 2 was mostly active by 39%. We have commented it, to the greatest degree, by their participation in the Russian-speaking circle. Groups 1 and 3 have shown 18% and 22% respectively, proving that shared accommodation among compatriots slows down the initiative. Group 1 - 22%, Group 2 - 27%, Group 3 - 32% will independently solve the issue. We can affirm that the results are still quite high, which can be perceived as the remnants of a euphoric freshman syndrome that has not yet completely disappeared.

The establishment of communication for many international students has become one of the most difficult tasks. All three groups

have experienced discomfort in communication with Russian speakers – in average makes up 32%, while all respondents want to establish contact: Group 1 - 27%, Group 3 - 31%; Group 2 has shown a significant result - 44% (presumably, being among Russian-speaking peers as they feel an urgent need from hopelessness). The preferences in establishing contacts at the level of mono-ethnic communication (48%, 37%, 46%) are evidence of nostalgia, as well as compensating for home-sickness by communicating with someone older, authoritative, who has already overcome this crisis (within the same nationality). The respondents, who answered that they do not have time to make new contacts, are supposed to feel severe emotional crises during adaptation.

The information pressure of a foreign student has been tremendously deepened in a new environment in all aspects. First of all, there are an understanding and learning of academic material. At the first stage, the input data on academic performance at admission and the results of academic (current) performance were compared. In the second stage, the initial data, the results of a modular knowledge and the results of the exam session at the end of the first school year have been compared. All three groups have shown a sharp decline in performance at the first stage, and a significant increase in performance at the second stage. In the drawing below you can observe the following dynamics:

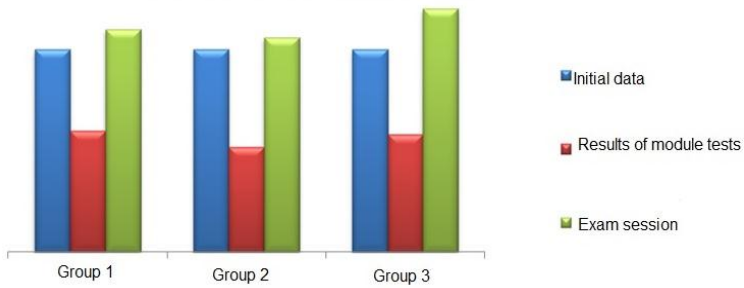


Figure 1: Results of academic performance

These results state a critical adaptation period was passed by the end of the first year of study, as evidenced by the stabilization of the quality of academic performance. The student’s performance is extremely important in the educational process, which can testify about psychological comfort or personal discomfort. As a result, we can affirm that teaching foreign students has its own specifics, which can be used under an integrated approach. Experimental resettlement showed in Table 10:

Table 10: Results of the experiment for each group and stage

<b>Group 1.</b>	I stage	This group experienced the least stress; therefore, at the first stage of the performance analysis, it overtook other groups.
	II stage	This group is in second place by adding friends on social networks Instagram, VKontakte.
<b>Group 2.</b>	I stage	Foreign students settled among domestic students so that there was only one foreign student in one room.



	II stage	This group added many more friends in the social networks Instagram, VKontakte among Russian-speaking peers and succeeded in establishing communication. More involvement in the Russian-speaking environment led to more established contacts.
<b>Group 3.</b>	I stage	This group of foreign students lived outside the hostel, mainly in rented apartments of several people within the same nationality.
	II stage	This group is in the third position upon adding friends to Instagram, VKontakte.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The fact that adaptation issues are turned out on a psychological basis, unfortunately, is inevitable. One of the means to alleviate this period is to apply the proposed scheme of resettlement of foreign students to university authorities. According to the results of our study, the academic performance after a significant drop in the period of the first months of study (averagely 35%) reached the initial performance by the end of the first year of study.

We cannot say that resettlement 1 or 3 is better than 2. The results of different aspects are different. If the academic indicators are better for Group 3, then communication fulfillment is better for Group 2. Furthermore, irrespective of the lack of clear recommendations, we can assert with certainty that the scheme works in a positive dynamic. We should not only emphasize academic indicators. It is not worth to

neglect factors that are less significant. The current conditions of intercultural communication define certain rules when a young foreign specialist must be socialized diversely, while not losing the wealth of his own national identity.

Understanding that knowledge of the language is a necessary skill for passing the adaptation period more gently. It should contribute to the implementation of preventive forms of work. For example, if you were planning to study, then you should purposefully study the language of the country where the applicant intends to study. In addition, studies in preparatory courses should not be ignored, the curriculum of which is best designed to bridge linguistic gaps. You can also attract foreign students as volunteers, in international conferences on the basis of universities, or at cultural international events outside the university, as a good example of indirect help, when the sense of significance of the personal self is strengthened, which stimulates and supports a foreign student in a difficult period of adaptation.

The number of foreign students in Russia is increasing every year. Therefore, it is necessary to make every effort for ensuring that foreign students, who come to our country, are undergone social and psychological integration with the minimum impact of all adaptation issues on by saving their potential on academic performance. Only in this case can we ascertain the true adaptation. The objective of the educational system is not only to teach, but also to educate; not only

to issue diplomas for statistics but, first of all, to graduate a successful graduate, which raises the credibility of our state at the international level.

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