

# PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR ADAPTATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS A FACTOR OF RAISING THEIR SOCIAL COMPETENCY

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Article History: Received on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, Revised on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020, Published on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** The paper is devoted to the study of the problem of psychological support and follow-up for adaptation of international students as a factor in increasing their social competency.

**Methodology:** We have carried out diagnostic tests of the level of socio-psychological adaptation among international students of RUDN University, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, The Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation using the following methods: the multi-level personality questionnaire "Adaptability" designed by A. G. Maklakova and S. V. Chermnyanin (2001) and the technique for the diagnosis of socio-psychological adaptation developed by C.R. Rogers and R.F. Diamond (1954). The study involved students from neighboring countries: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan. Of them, 150 girls and 150 boys. From foreign countries - African countries: Ghana, Zambia, Guinea - Bissau. Of them, 100 girls, 100 boys. All the subjects are students of RUDN University, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, The Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation at the age of 18-22.

**Results:** It contains the results of theoretical and empirical studies. The conclusions have been drawn that differences in the level of behavioral regulation and personal adaptive potential among international students from neighboring and far abroad countries are characterized by both the commonality of cultures and different levels of claims in relation to the prospects for future life. It has been proved that the work on psychological support for social and psychological adaptation of international students should be organized in the following areas: 1) the work of the psychological service: providing assistance in resolving conflict situations, adopting one's new position, in studying strategies and mechanisms for coping with stress and techniques for reducing anxiety; 2) the activity of Russian students - native speakers is to give a glimpse into the culture of Russia, traditions, customs, assistance in homework, supervision; 3) the activity of the university administration is to prevent the most common mistakes and contradictions in the organization of the educational process and search for possible ways to overcome them, ensuring the safety of the stay of international students in Russia; 4) the activity of the international student himself: constant involvement in self-development, the formation of skills and abilities to overcome stressful situations, reduce anxiety.

**Application of this study:** According to the results of the

**Keywords:** *Social Competency, Adaptation, International Students, Psychological Support, Hardiness.*

empirical study, a program of psychological and pedagogical support for socio-psychological adaptation of international students at the university has been designed. The program is aimed not only at helping students to adapt to the new sociocultural environment, but also at developing their social competency, as an important factor in their readiness for professional activity. Implementation of work under this program involves the active participation and interaction between all its participants: the psychological service can advise not only international students themselves, but also the supervisor of students on the organization of the most productive interaction between “student and mentor”; international students should be able to consult with the university administration on various issues.

**Novelty / originality of this study:** We determined representative (most significant, complex) indicators of the stability of students’ orientation in the educational process - this is the conformity and change in the quantitative and qualitative results of educational activities, the ordering of needs and motives, the content of professional intentions and social identity, the level of professional self-esteem, emotional satisfaction with the choice of a profession, and also the development of self-regulation skills. The idea of personality as a complex self-determining, self-developing system allows us to state that the universal principle of self-regulation of a system to maintain its state or sustainable development can be the basis for considering the stability of orientation.

## INTRODUCTION

At present, international contacts in the field of education are becoming more and more intensive: a large number of international students’ study at Russian universities, and researchers from abroad are involved in various exchange programs. Moscow State Universities, as ones of the pre-eminent universities in the country, admits a large number of students from neighboring countries and far abroad. In the vocational training of international students, the formation of their social competency is of particular importance which is one of the most important competencies of a specialist. Social competency, in turn, depends on the development of adaptation mechanisms to the new sociocultural environment. In this regard, it is important to study specific features of adaptation of international students to the sociocultural learning environment and the development of strategies for psychological assistance to students in the adaptation process. Many well-known scientists and researchers both domestic and foreign ones dealt with adaptation, maladaptation and readaptation (Belicheva, 1993; Nalchajyan, 1988; Miloslavova, 1973; Aleksandrovsky, 1976; Lebedev, 1980; Kuznetsov, 1971; Gordon, 1994; Efimova et al., 2019; Lekareva et al., 2018; Erofeeva et al., 2019).

The scientific and methodological approach revealing the features and mechanisms of maladaptation and activation of the process of a person’s adaptation is based on the conception of development of socio-psychological and educational work. The essence of this approach consists in studying and implementing psychological correction of personality characteristics and behavior in general with the aim of forming productive adaptation and preventing destructive phenomena (Salakhova, 2011). Along with this, the study of an individual’s personality in the period of adaptation to new, changed conditions of life is of particular importance.

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In domestic psychology, the study of personality traits that determine effective adaptation and are responsible for coping with life difficulties has led to the development of the conception of personal adaptation potential (Aleksandrova,

2004; Muzdybaev, 1998; Lebedev, 1980; Aleksandrovsky, 1976; Leontiev, 2002; Sotnichenko, 2009; Bayanova et al., 2020).

The studies of the individual’s hardiness today continue the trend that has emerged in the psychological science and humanities in the mid-twentieth century. This is a tendency of transition to the consideration of the dynamic characteristics of the individual and social systems (such as optimality, stability, flexibility, potential opportunities), due to the need to predict behavior, prevent possible disorders during the negative impact of external factors, extreme situations.

“Hardiness” (hardy - steady, strong, able to resist destruction), one of the synonyms of “steadiness”. Today, domestic and foreign sources use a number of similar terms in meaning: “resistance”, “endurance”, “stability”, “adaptability”, “hardiness” (Russian), “resilience”, “resiliency”, “resistance”, “tolerance”, “sustainability”, “hardiness”. In addition to the prevailing use of terms in special areas (clinical, organizational psychology, etc.), an analysis of the studies revealed some discrepancies in the content of these concepts.

In foreign psychology, S. Maddi (Maddi, 1980; Maddi & Kobasa, 1984), developing the problem of the personality’s creative potential and stress regulation, created the theory of a special personal quality of “hardiness” (Sotnichenko, 2009). Hardiness, according to S. Maddi (1990), comprises two components - psychological and activity. The motivational nature of the individual underlies one and the other component. The activity component contains actions and operations required for a person to achieve goals. The actions and operations carried out by the person are aimed at coping with certain difficulties and include constant care for their psychophysiological health. These actions and operations thus give the individual the possibility of receiving feedback from the individual’s ideas about himself and about the reality surrounding it. The surrounding reality cannot be changed without the active activity of the individual. The person, being the subject of activity, is always in interaction with the world, thereby changing it and himself. This activity requires psychophysiological resources, stamina, endurance

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and responsibility for actions and deeds, and it is hardiness that provides the opportunity to implement activity (Sotnichenko, 2009).

In Russian psychology, the concept of “hardiness” introduced by S. Maddi (1987) is interpreted as “stamina” or “resilience” (Leontiev, 2002). L.A. Aleksandrova (2004), studying the problem of coping with difficulties in life, gives the following definition: “Hardiness,” or resilience — a property or quality of personality that contains attitudes of commitment, control, and challenge that allows a person to simultaneously develop, enrich his potential, and cope with stress (Sotnichenko, 2009).

In our opinion, the following psychological categories are most similar to the concepts of hardiness proposed by S.R. Maddi (1998): the meaning of life (Chudnovsky, 1993, 1999); subjectivity (Ananyev, 2001; Leontyev, 1977; Rubinshtein, 1995; Petrovsky, 1996); life-creativity (Leontiev, 1998); personality-situational interaction (Korzova, 2002); personal self-realization (Korostyleva, 2000). The similarities are represented by stylistic patterns (Libin, 2000) as differences in the ways people interact with the outside world and with each other. The concept of “life creativity” considered by D.A. Leontiev (1998) is more general in relation to the concept of “hardiness”. Life creativity is a personality-oriented mechanism for expanding the boundaries of the world, life relations, as well as a resource for developing and correcting relations with the world.

In foreign studies, the phenomenon of hardiness was considered mainly from the point of view of coping with difficult life situations in connection with the adaptation of the person to stress. The result may be the adaptation of the individual to changing conditions, the restoration of systemic functioning (post-traumatic recovery, overcoming stressful situations). Another result may be the formation of a systemic, integrative, sustainable personal quality, personality trait (Maddi, 1990), personal potential (Leontiev, 2002), a system of interaction with the world, and the integral ability of a person (Aleksandrova, 2004).

G. La Greca (1985) considered the psychological factors of coping with stress, among which the adaptation of childhood, individuality - hardiness (persistence), and the expectation of stress, splitting up internal stress experience, social support, and the environment play an important role. M.F. Scheier & Ch.S. Carver (1989) studied the effects of expectation on a person's physical well-being. The quality of “hardiness”, which may be associated with optimism, the authors propose to consider as a personality trait that is the barrier against the adverse physical effects of stress (Sotnichenko, 2009).

The studies conducted by I. Solcova and P. Tomanek (1994) were aimed at exploring the role of “hardiness” in overcoming situational stress experiences. The authors consider “hardiness” as a personality trait that can provide psychophysiological protection of the organism in stressful situations. In their works, I. Solcova and P. Tomanek (1994) proved that “hardiness” affects the effectiveness of a person's coping strategies and increases the self-efficacy of a person in stressful situations. With high values of “hardiness” indicators, a person has high social competency, a cognitive assessment, and more universal coping strategies with difficult life situations.

In addition, a theoretical and methodological analysis of both domestic and foreign studies showed that “hardiness”, in addition to health, values and meanings of life, is also positively associated with low anxiety, self-realization and social interest. In this regard, hardiness is also necessary in an objective assessment of reality. For instance, people with high hardiness indicators evaluate difficult situations as less threatening, respond to them with more positive emotions, adapt more quickly and find ways to cope with difficulties.

Social interest, in turn, determines the maximum involvement of the individual in social relations with others and in life events, thereby ensuring the development of the personality with social competency (Sotnichenko, 2009; Kalinina, 2011; Latysheva et al., 2018; Romanova et al., 2019).

The conclusions of the researchers that the formation of hardiness and stability are influenced by both innate characteristics (neuropsychic stability, constitution, temperament), and the level of cognitive development, socially determined personal qualities, self-regulation skills, strategies, learned behavior algorithms are of great importance. Among the studied factors of manifestation of hardiness, certain social attitudes, basic beliefs, needs and personal meanings are identified - i.e. constituent parts of individual orientation of the personality.

The formation and maintenance of a high level of hardiness of a person is impossible without assessing adaptive abilities and identifying those components in the personality structure that in one way or another have an effect on the success of this process (Sotnichenko, 2009).

When habitual living conditions change, factors appear that in a certain way contribute to disorganization in mental activity that regulates human behavior. There is a necessity for new mental reactions to new stimuli presented by the changed conditions for the most optimal interaction of the individual with this environment and the effectiveness of activities in accordance with the external and internal changes. Relative disorganization of mental functions - there is a signal to activate the mechanism of regulation and compensation, the end result of which is the organization of a new level of mental activity in accordance with the changed environmental conditions. Adaptation can be defined in two meanings:

1. As a process of transition from a state of stable mental adaptation in habitual conditions to a state of relatively stable adaptation in new unusual (changed) conditions of existence;
2. As a result of this process, which has successful significance for the person and his mental activity (Salakhova, 2011; Goloshumova et al., 2019; Sotnichenko, 2009; Voronov, 2003; Karpenko & Kulikov, 2010).

Speaking about the problem of adaptation, it must be kept in mind that this process is aimed at achieving adaptability in changed, unusual conditions of existence. The adaptation process is associated with a change in the conditions of existence, accompanied by the restoration of the processes of reflection, the system of relations and coordination of movements, adequate for ordinary living conditions. The adaptation of a person is accompanied by complex psychophysiological, psychological and social mechanisms, as a result of which a new functional system arises, activity is reorganized, and new behaviors are formed (Salakhova, 2011).

The success of the adaptation process should depend on a number of factors: understanding the meaning and need for change; awareness and acceptance of their new socio-psychological role; inclusion in activities to find ways that could facilitate adaptation and prevent maladaptation (Salakhova, 2011; Telysheva et al., 2019).

Thus, the mechanisms of personal adaptation in changing conditions of existence should be a set of measures aimed at normalizing the socio-psychological state of the individual in order to create the basis for the reintegration of this individual into a new society for him. In addition, this complex should provide psychological and pedagogical conditions that determine the structure of the interaction of a person with changing conditions as a subject of activity and communication (Ananyev, 2001).

We determined representative (most significant, complex)

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indicators of the stability of students' orientation in the educational process -this is the conformity and change in the quantitative and qualitative results of educational activities, the ordering of needs and motives, the content of professional intentions and social identity, the level of professional self-esteem, emotional satisfaction with the choice of a profession, and also the development of self-regulation skills.

The idea of personality as a complex self-determining, self-developing system allows us to state that the universal principle of self-regulation of a system to maintain its state or sustainable development can be the basis for considering the stability of orientation.

The classics of the activity and subjective approach (Leontiev, 1977; Bozhovich, 1968) studied the path that leads from the first impulse through the process of internal transformation, internal actions to the formation of motive as a goal, intention, meaning. Domestic and foreign researchers noted the influence of various internal and external factors on the process of converting needs, potential motives (dreams, ideals) into motives-incentives for real activities (Arkes & Garske, 1982; Nuttin, 1984), as well as the possibility for an individual to gain certain skills, habits, habits of motivation formation and regulation of his motivational sphere. Modern studies of the development of motivation of future teachers (Maksimova, 2016; Karpov & Karpova, 2018), speak about the possibility of forming the skills of regulation of the motivational components of the personality (beliefs, meanings).

In regulatory activity, like other types of activity, the orientating, executive and control parts can be identified.

The orientating actions may include: self-observation; reflection of motives, emotional experiences; conception and selection of objects to meet needs; separation of emotional anticipation of the possible result from a specific image of the situation and the object, reproduction of past experience and previously set goals of activity, collecting information about the situation, objects, methods of achieving the desired, the formation of standards of goals and algorithms of action. Performing skills can be referred to skills of intellectual analysis of a state (correlation of motives of different levels, identification of intrapersonal conflicts, assessment of personal resources, level of ambitions, complexity of a situation, probability of success, obstacles), mental transformation of situations, possession of ways to reduce and strengthen motivation, the importance of objects and situations correction of emotional states, the ability to develop and evaluate plans; speech-cognitive skills (formulation of goals, plans, the most essential qualities of objects); fixing intentions, organizational and volitional skills. In the list of control skills, the following are essential: obtaining external information support and criticism, assessing the personal and social significance of goals and results of activity, assessing and remembering the dynamics of motives and emotional experiences; skills of correction of ideas, goals, plans, self-attitude.

The ultimate goal of the development of self-regulation skills is "a meeting of affect and intellect" - the formation of a conscious "self-movement" of motivation (Bozhovich, 1968), ideally associated with the assimilation of moral values and resolute behavior, which themselves become the motivators of activity and personal development.

Activities for the development of self-regulation skills can be represented as the achievement of auto-psychological adaptation.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

We have carried out diagnostic tests of the level of socio-psychological adaptation among international students of

RUDN University, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics,

The Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation using the following methods: the multi-level personality questionnaire "Adaptability" designed by A. G. Maklakova and S. V. Chernyanin (2001) and the technique for the diagnosis of socio-psychological adaptation developed by C.R. Rogers and R.F. Diamond (1954). The study involved students from neighboring countries: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan. Of them, 150 girls and 150 boys. From foreign countries - African countries: Ghana, Zambia, Guinea - Bissau. Of them, 100 girls, 100 boys. All the subjects are students of RUDN University, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, The Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation at the age of 18-22.

The multi-level personality questionnaire (MPQ) "Adaptability" is aimed at studying the adaptive capabilities of an individual based on an assessment of some psychophysiological and socio-psychological characteristics that reflect the integral characteristics of mental and social development (Volynskaya, 2018). The questionnaire was adopted as a standardized technique and is recommended for use for solving problems of professional psychological selection, psychological support of educational and professional activities. The multi-level personality questionnaire (MPQ) "Adaptability" consists of 165 questions and has 4 structural levels, which allows one to get information of various sizes and nature. In the framework of our study, to solve the tasks we set, we will consider scales of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> level, which make up the personal and adaptation potential: scales of the 3<sup>rd</sup> level: behavioral regulation (BR); 4<sup>th</sup> level scale - personal adaptive potential (PAP).

The technique for the diagnosis of socio-psychological adaptation designed by C.R. Rogers and R.F. Diamond (1954) is intended to study the characteristics of socio-psychological adaptation and the associated personality traits. The stimulus material is represented by 101 statements, which are formulated in the third person singular, without the use of any pronouns (Volynskaya, 2018). The technique provides for a rather differentiated, 7-point scale of answers. The authors distinguish the following integral indicators:

1. "Adaptation";
2. "Acceptance of others";
3. "Internality";
4. "Self-perception";
5. "Emotional comfort";
6. "Striving for dominance".

Each of them is calculated according to an individual formula, found, in all probability, empirically. Interpretation is carried out in accordance with the normative data (Volynskaya, 2018).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the course of the study, it was found that such parameters as adaptation, self-acceptance, emotional comfort are higher among representatives of neighboring countries than among representatives of foreign countries. And on the indicator "Escapism" the opposite is obtained. Such differences can be explained by the fact that for students from neighboring countries, Russian social reality is not completely new and unstudied: most of them speak Russian at an acceptable level, they know Russian culture and traditions. This may be due to the fact that mainly neighboring countries are the former republics of the USSR. Therefore, students from these countries do not experience difficulties associated with lack

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of knowledge of the language, with the inability to express their thoughts. All these factors reduce the level of anxiety from changes in the social environment, which leads to a higher level of emotional comfort in this group of subjects. Not experiencing strong pressure from Russian students, students from neighboring countries feel more protected, and, accordingly, their level of self-esteem and self-acceptance is higher. These subjects, unlike African students, do not feel a strong difference in culture, life, and treat themselves as individuals worthy of respect, capable of independent choice, believe in themselves and their capabilities, trust their own nature. The risk of psychosomatic reactions, the painful course of adaptation for students from neighboring countries

is much lower than for students from foreign countries.

Escapism, as an indicator of avoiding problems, indicates that it is students from African countries who, faced with new conditions for carrying out activities, with a new interaction environment, experience the greatest stress, the frustration of the need for safety. This explains the significant difference in favor of the high values of escapism among students from foreign countries - avoiding problems for them is a kind of mental defense, a defense mechanism. Using this mechanism, they thereby protect their psyche from the invasion of a foreign culture, traditions, principles, while maintaining their identity within the national community.

**Table 1.** Differences of social and psychological adaptation in the questionnaire MPQ "Adaptation" by A.G. Maklakova and S.V. Chermnyanin (2001) in students of neighboring countries and beyond

Parameters /countries	Behavioral regulation				PAP			
	Mean rank	U <sub>emp</sub>	U <sub>crit</sub>	Level of significance	Mean rank	U <sub>emp</sub>	U <sub>crit</sub>	Level of significance
Neighboring countries	28,91	336,50	394	0,016	29,06	342,50	394	0,020
Countries of far abroad	40,56				40,33			

Representatives of non-CIS countries showed significantly more pronounced indicators of behavioral regulation and adaptive personality potential (see table 1).

A higher level of personal potential among representatives of African countries, compared with neighboring countries, indicates a potentially greater openness to interaction with the new sociocultural environment, more variability in behavior patterns. Consequently, the most intensive work is needed with representatives of non-CIS countries to realize and discover the possibilities of this potential, which will reduce the number of adaptation disorders by the type of psychosomatic reactions and preserve the health of these students.

It should be noted that, probably, due to a greater degree of emotional discomfort, and possibly ignorance of the rules of behavior, social norms, African students demonstrate a higher level of behavioral regulation than students from neighboring countries. Students from the countries of the former Soviet republics, knowing the legislation of the Russian Federation, allow themselves some actions that definitely will not entail responsibility in any form other than administrative. But students from non-CIS countries, not knowing such "loopholes", behave more quietly.

Higher values of personal adaptive potential among African students may also depend on the fact that in developing countries people, with the appropriate ambitions and desires, try to realize themselves as fully as possible and occupy the most comfortable social niche. Residents of foreign countries, as a rule, come to Russia to get a good education and receive highly paid promising work in the future. Therefore, potentially, they can adapt to this sociocultural environment more effectively than students from neighboring countries. At the same time, the purpose of adaptation, the realization of adaptive potential will be a perspective projection of their future opportunities from their education.

### CONCLUSION

Thus, one can draw the conclusion that with respect to students from neighboring countries and beyond, the differences in the level of behavioral regulation and personal adaptive potential are determined by both the commonality of cultures and different levels of expectations in relation to the prospects for future life. The data obtained in the study laid the foundation for the development of a program of psychological and pedagogical support for socio-psychological adaptation of international students at a university. The program is aimed not only at helping students

to adapt to the new sociocultural environment, but also at developing their social competency as an important factor in their readiness for professional activity. The work on the psychological support for social and psychological adaptation of international students is organized in the following areas:

- 1) the activity of the psychological service: providing assistance in resolving conflict situations, adopting one's new position, in studying strategies and coping mechanisms with stress and techniques for reducing anxiety;
  - 2) the activity of Russian students - native speakers: to give a better insight into the culture of Russia, traditions, customs, to provide assistance in homework, supervision;
  - 3) the activity of the international student himself: constant involvement in self-development, the formation of skills and abilities to overcome stressful situations, reduce anxiety.
- Doing work on this program involves the active participation and interaction of all its participants with each other: the psychological service can advise not only international students themselves, but also supervisors of students on the organization of the most productive interaction between "student and mentor"; international students should be able to consult with the university administration on various issues.

### LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

We have carried out diagnostic tests of the level of socio-psychological adaptation among international students of RUDN University, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, The Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation using the following methods: the multi-level personality questionnaire "Adaptability" designed by A. G. Maklakova and S. V. Chermnyanin (2001) and the technique for the diagnosis of socio-psychological adaptation developed by C.R. Rogers and R.F. Diamond (1954). However, we did not study the dynamics of the level of socio-psychological adaptation among international students.

### AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Theoretical provisions and conceptual proposals of the authors of the article do not conflict with the existing theoretical studies of foreign and domestic authors. On the contrary, the research results complement the existing theoretical provisions in the field of psychological support for adaptation of international students as a factor of raising their social competency. A.V. Litvinov and B.S. Vasyakin

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developed a program of psychological and pedagogical support for socio-psychological adaptation of international students at the university. M.V. Polevaya and E.V. Shamalova analyzed the data obtained in the study. I.S. Zhuravkina carried out a theoretical and methodological analysis of both domestic and foreign studies on the problem.

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