

Social Adaptation of Foreign Students in Higher Educational Institutions (Case of Samara University)

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Abstract—Research interest of the authors of this article was inspired by the objective of the Education National Project: to increase the number of foreign citizens studying in Russian universities. The aim of this study is theoretical and practical understanding of the social adaptation of the foreign students of Korolyov Samara National Research University (Samara University). Research methods: questionnaire and expert survey. Based on the results of this study, an assessment was made of the situation with the export of educational services; problems and special aspects of the social adaptation of foreign students were defined, as well as possibilities for increasing the number of foreign students at Samara University. The most important barriers to social adaptation of foreign students at Samara University were the following: language barrier that causes the problems of understanding educational content and passing examinations by foreign students; psychological barrier leading to the problems of interpersonal communication, self-realization and self-empowerment in new environment; household barrier which results, in particular, in problems of adaptation to living conditions, and also administrative barrier. Based on the research data, practical recommendations were defined. Favorable image of Samara University should be created in the global educational space what can be achieved by overcoming the administrative barrier between subjects involved in the social adaptation of foreign students. It is recommended to support student communities (interest groups, sports classes) and supervision and mentor system at the university; to create the information environment of the university; to involve foreign students in extracurricular activities; to organize specialized (additional) advanced training courses in Russian for foreign students and in foreign language for staff and professors; to improve the living conditions of foreign students.

Keywords—social adaptation, barriers to successful adaptation, ways of social adaptation, foreign students, increasing competitiveness, case of Samara University.

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to globalization processes, the role of any kinds of movements is growing in modern society: people, capitals, money, information, etc. cross the borders. Changing society ceases to be a closed and limited system of national states. All kinds of mobility cover all spheres of life, including education. On the one hand, education as a fairly stable system is a direct reflection of the processes taking place in a particular society and around the world, on the other hand, education, especially

in its mobile form, has an impact on the development opportunities of countries and their global competitiveness. In this regard, there is a desire for international cooperation in the field of education in the modern world – and Russia is no exception. Different forms of cooperation are particularly important in the field of higher education where new inventions are developed and accumulated in laboratories and university centers around the world, and the innovative capital of the participants of educational process is growing. These forms of cooperation establish the growth vector and establish the basis for a potential breakthrough in modern society. Mobility in the field of higher education has an influence not only on the processes of cooperation between countries at the level of the largest universities in the world; they also occur at the regional level: the export of educational services among regional universities is developing, their material and technical base is increasing, and the academic staff of these universities is growing. Regional universities with their own specific character and self-identification, having their own “brand”, their own stock-in-trade – as, for example, Samara University in the field of space – are actively cooperating with universities of other countries, are attracting students from abroad to study, and start to exist and to declare themselves as independent “players” and entities on a global scale.

Today, global education market is one of the fastest growing export items. According to UNESCO forecasts, by the beginning of 2025, the number of people studying abroad can reach 7 million [1].

Russian universities are certainly also interested in internationalization and in increasing the number of foreign students; their number is an indicator of the success of a higher educational institution and allows it to be recognized at the international level. However, the export of Russian educational services does not yet generate significant revenues. Having high resource potential and low cost of education compared to Europe, Russia receives income from studying of foreign students which is equal to 1% of educational export in the world, and is in 9th place in the total number of foreign students [2].

At the same time, Education National Project poses serious challenges for Russian universities, specifies parameters that they should aim for: by the end of 2024, 60 universities should implement at least 5 educational programs

that pass international accreditation, and should double the number of foreign students in Russian universities [3].

Samara region is one of those regions that are known in the country and abroad for its high-quality education. The main university in the Samara region is Korolyov Samara National Research University. Students from different countries come here every year, especially these from the former Soviet republics. Currently, the number of foreign students is approximately 800 people who came from 72 countries. It is worth noting that their number is increasing every year: 345 in 2015, 545 in 2016, 643 in 2017, and 814 in 2018. To attract foreign students, Samara University uses different ways including the help of recruiting agencies, the implementation of different educational programs for bachelor and master programs in English, and also summer schools and academic competitions for foreign citizens.

At the same time, many unresolved issues remain in this field, in particular, problems associated with the adaptation of foreign students at Samara University. Leaders at different levels take part in solving these problems.

The aim of this study is theoretical and practical understanding of the social adaptation of the foreign students using the case of Samara University. Setting this goal involves defining barriers (obstacles) to the successful adaptation of foreign students, finding ways to solve the existing problems of their adaptation and conditions for increasing competitiveness and increasing the number of foreign students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social adaptation of foreign students at a university is represented in its most general form by the process of their mastering the educational space of a university including physiological, social, psychological and pedagogical levels. B.B. Stepanova defines academic, cultural and psychological components in the process of social adaptation of foreign students [4]. V.A. Beyzerov specified the main trends in the studying of foreign students analyzing world experience in solving this problem [5]. Adaptation of foreign students in Russian universities is evaluated in the results of a forecast study by F.A. Vadutova, L.I. Kabanova, G.I. Shkatova [6]. D.G. Arsenyev, A.V. Zinkovsky, M.A. Ivanova put their attention on socio-psychological and physiological problems of adaptation of foreign students [7]. L.N. Vaulina and N.A. Konoshenko define cultural shock as the main problem that foreign students face. In this regard, one of the factors of social adaptation, according to scientists, is intercultural communication between foreign and Russian students [8]. A.A. Kazantseva analyzes the mechanism of tutoring in the pedagogical support of foreign students [9]. The influence of educational environment on the effectiveness of social adaptation of foreign students is shown in the study by Yu.L. Kravets [10]. Both foreign (Schmitt M. T., Spears R., Branscombe N. R. [11]) and domestic scientists (I. A. Pozdnyakov) emphasize the role of extracurricular work with foreign students which has an impact on their adaptation and academic performance. According to I.A. Pozdnyakov, social adaptation being a type of interaction of the individual with social environment suggests the importance of organizing pedagogical support for the studying of foreign students in Russian universities [12]. E. Nabivacheva analyzed the participation of foreign students in contests, academic competitions, festivals and characterized these forms of

extracurricular work at the university as being public, consolidating, creative, cooperating [13]. Stages and results of the adaptation of foreign students, their educational, sociocultural, financial, household problems, as well as the factors that determine their motivation to obtain higher professional education in Tatarstan, are presented in the study by G.F. Gabdrakhmanova, N.I. Korableva, E.A. Sagdieva [14].

Adaptation of foreign students has been studied at the Faculty of Sociology of Samara University for several years. This issue attracts special attention of students in the framework of the master program "Interethnic Relations in Modern Russia", program 39.04.01 Sociology. Students of the master program "Social Work with Different Populations", program 39.04.02 Social Work, are interested in communicative practices of intercultural interaction. The results of scientific research on this issue are reflected in the sociological studies of professors and masters of the Faculty of Sociology [15].

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In March-April 2019, 102 first-year and second-year students from 29 countries participated in the questionnaire on the issues of adaptation of foreign students, since the adaptation process touches, first of all, those who recently arrived in Russia and entered a higher educational institution: students from Asia and Africa, Arab countries, Latin America and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The sample is multi-stage. At the first stage, we used stratified selection for students belonging to different cultural groups: European, African, Asian. At the second stage, the selection was made according to the students' affiliation with the countries of the corresponding culture. The third stage included mechanical selection where the sample step was calculated for the selection of students from each country.

We also conducted expert interviews that allowed assessing the situation with the export of educational services in the university as a whole, finding the most serious problems faced by foreign students studying in different faculties of our university, and, most importantly, outlining the main directions for solving the following problems: increasing the level of adaptation of foreign students, as well as possibilities for increasing the number of foreign students in general.

There were two groups of experts in this study: internal and external; they were selected on the basis of documentary method. Expert selection criteria included:

- 1) position;
- 2) practical experience in management the problem of adaptation of foreign students (at least 5 years);
- 3) theoretical understanding of this problem (at least 3 publications and/or speeches at conferences on this topic over the past 5 years).

Experts in our study were the specialists from Samara University whose activity was related to the studying of foreign students, as well as experts in higher education in the Samara region as a whole, i.e. specialists from Samara University International Department; employees of the Social and Psychological Center for Extracurricular Activities and the Health Promotion Center for the Students of Samara University; academic staff of the different faculties of Samara University; members of the Council of Rectors of Universities

in the Samara region; deputies of Samara Provincial Duma. A total of 15 people were interviewed.

IV. RESULTS

Analyzing the answers of respondents resulted in the following conclusions. The vast majority of respondents speak Russian (96%) because at the time of the survey they had already graduated from the faculty of pre-university training, and some of them had taken Russian courses in other cities of Russia. But only 34% of students are fluent in Russian, mostly these are students from the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. One of the main problems arising in the process of adaptation of foreign students is “language barrier”; about 58% of the respondents mentioned it.

The second problem for foreign students is living conditions. Since the place of residence of the respondents is mainly a student dormitory, 95% answered so; only 19.4% of all students living in dormitories are satisfied with their living conditions, therefore, it is indeed a serious problem that needs to be resolved at the level of our university and of the region as a whole.

Respondents mentioned the relationship with neighbors as the most positive moment in the life in dormitory (58.3%), and sanitary conditions in the bathroom (62.2%) and in the kitchen (37.8%) as the most negative ones. These answers show that administrative measures are required aimed at improving living conditions in dormitories.

Most of the students (77%) like to study, they study with interest – the results of our survey give evidence of this. But they face a number of difficulties during educational process. The most difficult part in this process for foreign students is attending and understanding lectures (43%), and preparing for exams or tests (21%).

There are also problems in relationships with professors and “local” students; 58% of respondents experience them. These problems are not occasional; they arise most likely due to the specifics of student age which is “borderline” state between childhood and adulthood.

Answering the questionnaire, foreign students outlined their vision of adaptation problems; those who specified that they were constantly or sometimes experiencing difficulties mentioned “language barrier” (71.6%), psychological barrier (23.9%), and cultural barrier (22.4%) as the most important ones.

The views and assessments of students are one aspect of the subject being studied, and the opinion of experts is another one. Therefore, we conducted an expert survey that allowed us to detail existing problems and propose solutions to them not only at the level of a particular university, but also at the level of the region as a whole.

In the course of expert interviews, the respondents expressed the opinion that in order to increase the attractiveness of Samara University for foreign students it is necessary to solve problems at different levels: *“some issues should be resolved directly in student groups and within the educational process, and some – at the regional and even country level as a whole”* (E1).

Key issues in this area today are the following: *“low recognition of the Samara region and Samara University among foreign applicants”* (E9), *“administrative barriers (for*

example, when interacting with the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia in the Samara Region)” (E3), *“obsolescence of the university housing stock, lack of places in dormitories”* (E11), *“language barrier”* (E14).

Successful social adaptation of foreign students depends on various factors: *“the level of communication skills of a foreign student; motivation to overcome the communication barrier; knowledge of the information of new sociocultural environment; psychological features; satisfaction with interpersonal relationships in the group; need for self-realization and self-empowerment in a new cultural society”* (E6).

A lot depends on the university, on its work with this contingent of students: *“the university should actively attract foreign students to participate in various events”* (E7), so, for example, in 2018 foreign students took part in training volunteers for the World Cup-2018 English and Spanish, took part in inter-university concerts, events, festivals, competitions, seminars, meetings, etc.

V. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis of expert interviews, several ways can be proposed to solve the existing problems of adaptation of foreign students at Samara University and in the Samara region:

- to support student communities (interest groups, sport classes), so that foreign students have the opportunity to interact with each other, discuss arising issues, find support, learn Russian, maintain a high level of motivation to study, and also receive various information about life and studying at the university and the city of Samara as a whole;
- to develop supervision and mentoring system at the university;
- to implement a general navigation system at the university (duplicate important information in dormitories and academic buildings in foreign languages) and create a more detailed information environment of the university on the official website of the university;
- to conduct specialized (additional) continuing education courses in Russian for foreign students and in foreign languages for staff and professors;
- to support interethnic holidays, events, projects at Samara University that promote intercultural and interethnic dialogue;
- to carry out activities to promote the Samara region abroad; promotional events at Samara University and academic competitions for foreign participants will be a part of it;
- to improve living conditions of foreign students (for example, through the construction of an inter-university campus);
- to improve working of state bodies with foreign citizens, for example, the work the Multidisciplinary Functional Center.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In general, summing up the results of empirical research, the following conclusions can be made. Overcoming difficulties arising in the process of adaptation of foreign students at Samara University, the competent policy of university for promotion of educational services and overcoming administrative and housing barriers at the regional level will create conditions for a comfortable and safe learning environment for foreign students and will contribute to the realization of the effectiveness factors of international educational activities of the university.

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