

The Main Psycholinguistic Problems of International Students in the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

In the modern world, intercultural and international education is becoming more and more in demand. The number of exchange programs for students from different countries is growing every year; opportunities are opening up to receive education abroad and gain experience in intercultural communication. Like any changes, moving to a new language environment for a long time (from two to seven years, depending on the chosen degree of study) can cause several difficulties. The present work is devoted to a comparative analysis of students' main psycholinguistic problems in a new language environment.

The object of this study is the process of adaptation of international students abroad. The research subject is psycholinguistic difficulties; this work aims to compare the psycholinguistic challenges faced by international students in a new language environment.

Keywords: *Intercultural communication, Adaptation problems, Student depression, Intercultural adaptation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Upon arrival in a new language environment, every international student faces social, political, economic, linguistic, cultural, and academic problems. The prevalence of various issues among students in the new culture varies depending on age, psycho type, experience, life attitudes and academic goals. The adaptation process can be divided into several stages, sometimes quite long, [1, p. 251] however, theoretical and empirical studies on the phenomenon of adaptation primarily imply the interaction of man and the environment, the primary purpose of which is to maintain internal balance [2, p. 17].

As noted by Y. Kim, individual predispositions are of great importance in the process of intercultural adaptation. A person may develop various vulnerabilities and problems in a new language environment [3].

Cultural adaptation is associated with social barriers, and they, in turn, are a social and cultural process that shows how people react to changes and manage them. Adaptive barriers can be cognitive (beliefs about ambiguity, risk aversion), normative (unwillingness to change cultural norms, cultural memory) and institutional (discrimination against different groups, social/cultural cruelty) [4]. International students are under the pressure of a stressful situation, which only aggravates the process of overcoming adaptation barriers [5, p. 129].

Language, namely the national specifics of the semantics of any lexical units, is part of culture and group identity, which is why the question arises about forming a secondary linguistic personality of international students. In this process, it is important to fill each level with a "new" linguistic personality [6, p. 2429]. Adherence to the original culture affects a person's thinking and how he expresses his feelings when learning a second language. The perception and

use of speech expressions following his own culture hinder intercultural adaptation [7].

Changing the language environment for a student is almost always a difficult test, accompanied by stress. According to Robert Sapolsky's research, it turned out that chronic stress and constant exposure to glucocorticoids can kill brain cells. The first and foremost reason students suffer from (and not only) stress is sleep disturbance. Sleep is cyclical and consists of structured phases: slow, deep, fast. However, this sleep structure is severely disrupted in people who are under stress [8].

Prolonged chronic stress or a series of severe short-term stresses can lead to a more severe illness – depression. According to the report of the American College Health Association for 2020, the 4 main factors impeding the academic performance of students are stress (40.3% of respondents); anxiety (31.4%); depression (23.1%); sleep problems (22.6%) [9, p. 5].

Depression is a general emotional disorder that causes distress and is the cause of impaired functioning. Cognitive, physiological, behavioural and motivational symptoms are the main signs of this disorder. According to research, estimates of depression among university students range from 30% of students experiencing some level of depression to 15% of students who have experienced a clinical level of depression at least once [10].

2. RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in an anonymous online survey created on the Google Form platform in 2020.

In the survey, students were asked general questions:

1. Are you bilingual?
2. What country are you from?
3. How old are you?

questions related to the experience of adaptation:

1. Have you experienced a culture shock upon arrival in a new language environment?
2. How long did it take you to adapt fully?
3. Have you experienced a culture shock upon returning home for the holidays?
4. What helped you manage stress or culture shock?

and it was also suggested to choose from the list of problems that the students faced (several options could be selected):

1. Problems with the perception of teachers speaking a foreign language.
2. Difficulties in learning in groups.
3. Difficulties in studying and understanding a foreign language.
4. Problems of time management.
5. Difficulties in creating relationships with representatives of the culture in which you came to study.
6. Cultural characteristics (daily contact with a different mentality).
7. Depression: apathy, depression,
8. Complete absence of emotions or emotional lability,
9. Thoughts of suicide due to problems in school,
10. Thoughts of suicide due to problems in the family,
11. Doubts about the correctness of the choice of faculty or direction of study.

It was also suggested to indicate difficulties not mentioned in the survey, which the student may have faced.

In total, 2 surveys were created: one for international students studying in the Russian Federation, the other for international students studying in the United Kingdom.

All the questions were mandatory to pass, except for the request to indicate the difficulties faced by the students and which are not included in the list of problems, and the question "What helped you resolve stress?".

The survey was conducted by students (80 people in total: 40 in Russia; 40 in England) studying at the BA/BS (4 years), MA/MS (2 years) or PhD (5-7 years) programs in England; bachelor's degree (4 years), master's degree (2 years) or two-year programs for studying Russian as a foreign language in Russia.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Results of a study with international students studying in the Russian Federation

Processing of the survey showed the following results:

1. To the question "Are you bilingual?" 32 respondents (80%) answered "yes"; 8 respondents (20%) answered "no".
2. The answers to the question "Where are you from?" showed the following results:

3. 9 students from Nigeria (22.5%); 11 from China (27.5%); 8 from France (20%); 6 from Spain (15%); 3 from Iran (7.5%); 2 from Transnistria (5%); 1 from Ghana (2.5%).

4. The answers to the question "How old are you?" gave the following results:

5. The 3rd students answered that they were 20 years old (7.5%); 15 - 21 years old (37.5%); 3 - 22 years old (7.5%); 3 - 23 years old (7.5%); 5 - 24 years old (12.5%); 2 - 25 years old (5%); 1 - 26 years old (2.5%); 1 - 27 years old (2.5%); 2 - 28 years old (5%); 2 - 29 years old (5%); 1 - 32 years old (2.5%); 1 - 33 years old (2.5%); 1 - 36 years old (2.5%).

To the question "Did you experience a culture shock upon arrival in Russia?" 29 respondents (73.3%) answered "yes"; 11 (26.7%) answered "no".

The question "How long did it take you to adapt to the new cultural environment?" showed the following results:

10 students answered - 1 year (25%); 2 - 1 week (5%); 11 - 2 months (27.5%); 5 - 3 months (12.5%); 5 - 6 months (12.5%); 6 - "not for long" (15%); 1 - "several months" (2.5%).

1. To the question "Did you experience a culture shock when you arrived home for the holidays?" 24 students (60%) answered "no"; 16 students (40%) answered "yes".

2. The surveyed students chose the following problems they faced: 16 students indicated that they encountered difficulties in the perception of a teacher who speaks another language (40%); 13 - experienced difficulties in learning in groups (32.5%); 23 - faced difficulties in studying and understanding a foreign (Russian) language (57.5%); 13 - time management problems (32.5%); 18 - indicated that they encountered difficulties in creating relationships with representatives of the culture they came to study in (45%); 10 - noted cultural peculiarities (daily contact with a different mentality) (25%); 10 experienced depression: apathy and depression (25%); 8 - faced a complete lack of emotions or emotional lability (20%); 5 - experienced thoughts of suicide due to learning difficulties (12.5%); 3 - experienced thoughts of suicide due to family problems (7.5%); 8 - experienced or are experiencing doubts about the correctness of the choice of faculty or direction of study (20%); 3 - chose the column "other" (7.5%).

3. Optional question-please indicate the difficulties faced by students and which are not included in the list of problems, reflected the following results: 1 student answered - "problems with currency"; 1 - "In Russia, I can't eat traditional Chinese food".

4. The optional question "What helped you to resolve stress or culture shock?" yielded the following results:

"I have not encountered a culture shock or, if I have experienced it, I have not even noticed it. I need to try to adapt as much as possible to a new situation or a new country to reduce stress"; "Time"; "Long walks alone and calls to parents and friends"; "Returning home"; "I'm already used to it, there are no problems"; "Self-regulation"; "Just tried to adapt"; "Singing in Russian"; "Sports"; "Open mind"; "Friends who participate in social events and are in cultural clubs. These events allow me to communicate with the locals and be part of the country and culture, and now I'm starting to feel that way"; "Conversations with my parents and friends"; "Good friends"; "Understanding the country, culture and traditions".

3.2. Results of a study with international students studying in the United Kingdom

Processing of the survey showed the following results:

1. To the question "Are you bilingual?" 34 respondents (85%) answered "yes"; 6 respondents (15%) answered "no".

2. The answers to the question "Where are you from?" showed the following results:

2nd students from Cyprus (5%); 2 - from Fiji Islands (5%); 2 - from Hong Kong (5%); 2 - from India (5%); 2 - from Jordan (5%); 4 - from Malaysia (10%); 8 - from Northern Macedonia (20%); 2 - from Pakistan (5%); 2 - from Poland (5%); 2 - from Romania (5%); 4 - from Russia (10%); 2 - from Scotland (5%); 4 - from Ukraine (10%); 2 - from Indonesia (5%).

3. The answers to the question "How old are you?" gave the following results:

8 students answered that they were 19 years old (20%); 4 - 20 years old (10%); 12 - 21 years old (30%); 2 - 22 years old (5%); 2 - 23 years old (5%); 2 - 24 years old (5%); 2 - 25 years old (5%); 2 - 26 years old (5%); 4 - 27 years old (10%); 2 - 28 years old (5%).

4. To the question "Did you experience a culture shock upon arrival in the United Kingdom?" 26 respondents (65%) answered "yes"; 14 (35%) answered "no".

5. The question "How long did it take you to adapt to the new cultural environment?" showed the following results:

8 students answered - 1 month (20%); 1 - 1 week (2.5%); 8 - 2 months (20%); 5 - 3 months (12.5%); 1 students answered - 3 weeks, as they already had experience of independent living (2.5%); 3 - 6 months

(7.5%); 2 - 6-8 months (5%); 1 - 877 years (2.5%); 4 - not much (10%); 5 - several months (12.5%); 2 - adaptation lasts more than 8 years (5%).

6. To the question "Did you experience a culture shock when you arrived home for the holidays?" 18 students (45%) answered "no"; while 22 students (55%) answered "yes".

7. The surveyed students chose the following problems they faced:

6 students indicated that they encountered difficulties in the perception of a teacher who speaks another language, which was (15%), 10 - experienced difficulties in learning in groups (25%); none of the students encountered difficulties in studying and understanding a foreign language (0%); 16 - time management problems (40%); 24 - indicated that they encountered difficulties in creating relationships with representatives of English culture (60%); 18 - noted cultural peculiarities (daily contact with a different mentality) (45%); 16 - faced depression: apathy and depression (40%); 12 - with a complete lack of emotions or emotional lability (30%); 2 - experienced thoughts of suicide due to learning difficulties (5%); 6 - experienced thoughts of suicide due to family problems (15%); 8 - experienced or are experiencing doubts about the correctness of the choice of faculty or direction of study (20%); 2 - chose the column "other" (5%).

1. Optional question-please indicate the difficulties faced by students and which are not included in the list of problems, reflected the following results: 1 student answered – "nostalgia"; 1 - "My experience was boring. Quarantine has made it even worse."

2. The optional question "What helped you to resolve stress or culture shock?" yielded the following results:

"Time"; "My dreams"; "Time and attempts to adapt"; "My friends"; "Communication with people with similar interests outside the university helped a lot to cope with stress, and the culture shock eventually passed by itself"; "A positive point of view"; "I still face it. I didn't find a solution and just dropped my hands"; "Friends"; "To be a real optimist, I see big goals in front of me and go to them"; "Interaction/conversations with my foreign colleagues from the same country"; "Sports"; "Time and active interaction with locals"; "Understanding that all people are the same and walk with new friends"; "Time and good friends"; "Time helped"; "You need to learn to live with it. My experience has shown that adopting a mentality is the key to understanding it and then implementing it into your lifestyle"; "Friends, but sometimes they couldn't help"; "Netflix"; "Local and non-local friends and family".

4. RESULTS DISCUSSION

When comparing the results of the surveys, the following common points were noticed:

1. Basically, all students coming to study abroad are bilinguals.

2. The average age of all students varies from 19 to 24 years.

3. Both international students studying in Russia and those studying in England have problems with the duration of adaptation. So, in Russia, students' adaptation lasts mainly from two months to a year, which is much longer (2 times) than in England – from 1 to 6 months.

4. Most students studying in Russia do not experience culture shock upon arrival home for the holidays, which is very different from the answers of students from England – most of them experience culture shock at home on vacation.

5. Problems:

- The perception of teachers in Russia (Russian) is much harder for international students than in England (English), about 2.5 times.

- Students experience difficulties in studying in groups both in England and Russia, and they make up approximately 1/4-1/3 of the total number of students.

- While in England, none of the surveyed students faced difficulties in learning and understanding a foreign language, in Russia, this figure was more than half of the surveyed students - 57.5%. The Russian language is given to international students very hard.

- With the problem of time management in Russia and England, about 1/3 of the surveyed students faced.

- About half of the respondents from both countries found it difficult to build relationships with native speakers.

- It is more difficult for foreigners to adapt to the Russian mentality than to the English one about 2 times.

- Depression and all its symptoms were affected by approximately 1/5 of students from both countries.

6. The most frequently mentioned factors that helped students adapt to the new language environment:

- Chat with friends and family - 11 mentions;

- Attempts to adapt, to understand the culture through communication with local residents - 11;

- Time – 6;

- A positive view of the world - 3;

- Dreams - 2;
- Sport - 2.

5. CONCLUSION

The results obtained in the study allow us to better understand the adaptation process of international students in a new country through the perception and acceptance of a new culture. Psycholinguistic problems arise due to cultural and linguistic differences; the inextricable connection of language and thinking determines the need to build a new linguistic personality by the student himself on the one hand and the need for international students for university assistance on the other. As we know, the consequence of unresolved psycholinguistic problems can be prolonged depression and stress, which adversely affects students' psycho-emotional and physical condition. The adaptation process can be delayed for an extended period, so the university services should organise their activities so that the educational process is supported by the process of linguistic and cultural adaptation.

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