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SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF FOREIGN STUDENTS ADAPTATION IN A HIGHER SCHOOL

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Abstract. *The issues related to socio-cultural and cross-cultural adaptation of foreign students have been analysed, the indicators of psychological adaptation have been identified, some aspects of their psychological adjustment have been studied, the concept of «culture shock» in the process of psychological adaptation to the cultural differences between countries has been analysed.*

Key words: *higher education, international students, culture shock, socio-cultural adaptation, psychological adaptation.*

СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ И ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ АДАПТАЦИИ ИНОСТРАННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ В УСЛОВИЯХ ВУЗА

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Аннотация. *Проанализированы проблемы, связанные с социокультурной и кросс-культурной адаптацией иностранных студентов; определены показатели психологической адаптации; рассмотрены некоторые аспекты их психологической адаптации; анализируется понятие «культурный шок» в процессе психологической адаптации к культурным различиям между странами.*

Ключевые слова: *высшее образование, иностранные студенты, культурный шок, социокультурная адаптация, психологическая адаптация.*

СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНІ ТА ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ АДАПТАЦІЇ ІНОЗЕМНИХ СТУДЕНТІВ В УМОВАХ ВНЗ

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Анотація. *Проаналізовано проблеми, пов'язані із соціокультурною і крос-культурною адаптацією іноземних студентів; визначено показники психологічної адаптації; розглянуто деякі аспекти їх психологічної адаптації; аналізується поняття «культурний шок» у процесі психологічної адаптації до культурних відмінностей між країнами.*

Ключові слова: *вища освіта, іноземні студенти, культурний шок, соціокультурна адаптація, психологічна адаптація.*

Introduction

New international students tend to encounter challenges due to cultural differences in how tasks are carried out in different societies, ranging from buying food to getting a vehicle.

Upon arrival in a new country, most international students go through an adjustment process that is usually referred to as culture shock. Being faced with multiple new tasks and roles in an unfamiliar culture and being far away from family and friends can induce feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and frustration. Compared to domes-

tic students, international students possibly encounter more specific challenges, such as language barriers, acculturative stress, separation from loved ones, homesickness, and discrimination. However, current literature has very limited recommendations for international students to overcome their adversity.

Recent Papers Review

One of the most popular and well-known stage theory of cross-cultural adaptation, the U-curve theory, was originally advanced by Lysgaard in his study of Norwegian Fulbright scholars in the United States. The validity of the theory is criticized mainly because the theory neither provides much information on the mechanisms of adjustment nor explains why each of the different stages of adaptation starts and ends and that the theory is overgeneralized to explain diverse experiences among sojourners regarding how they adjust to the host country [4].

A similar account of cross-cultural adaptation was provided by Oberg in his anthropological description and elaboration of «culture shock». Culture shock has three basic causal explanations: 1) the loss of familiar cues, 2) the breakdown of interpersonal communications, and 3) an identity crisis. Although culture shock is commonly associated with negative psychological symptoms such as fear, anxiety, anger and feelings of helplessness.

However, there is not enough research yet to explain for whom the shock will be more or less intense; what determines which reaction a person is likely to experience; how long will they remain in a period of studying and so forth.

Problem Setting

The aim of the article is to study features of sociocultural and psychological adaptation among foreign students in order to improve psychological health of students and decrease problems related to adaptation.

Socio-cultural and psychological problems of foreign students adaptation in a higher school

The latest statistical data prove that half of all foreign students study in Europe and almost one-third in the United States and out of every ten tertiary students studying abroad, four are Asians, three are Europeans and one is African. Women form 46% of all foreign students and only eight countries host more foreign female students than male. In spite of the fact that three countries host half of the world's foreign students (United States, United Kingdom, and Germany) 110 countries are involved in this process.

Representing over 180 countries and many more cultural groups, foreign or international students encounter many challenges in the process of their adaptation to their host country [3]. During their school years, college students deal with stress from academic life and issues stemming from normal development, such as psychological autonomy, economic independence, and identity formation. Compared to host national counterparts, however, international students experience added difficulty in that they must handle with other forms of stress. This difficulty includes culture shock, language difficulties, adaptation to unfamiliar social norms, eating habits, customs and values, differences in education systems, isolation and loneliness, homesickness, and a loss of established social networks [2]. On the other hand, willingness to learn about another culture, establishing relationships, opportunities to learn foreign language, and sharing common interests are viewed as stimulators.

Bochner, McLeod, and Lin studied the friendship patterns of foreign students and found that foreign students belong to three social networks: 1) a co-national network, 2) a network with host nationals and 3) a multinational network. The data from friendship choice confirmed a strong preference not only for co-nationals but for those coming from similar or neighbouring countries which share similar religion, language and climate etc. [1].

Host country proficiency has also been found to be an important factor in social interaction and adjustment. Research has shown that language restrictions and other affective and situational factors are detrimental to academic performance and to the overall educational experience. Many studies support the finding that the inability to speak the host language fluently is a primary inhibitor to becoming socially involved in the host society.

Furnham A. studied strategies related to dealing with culture shock with 2,536 international students from 139 nations; they found that the two most important factors in the coping process were social contacts with local people and prior

foreign experience. The findings of Bochner S. research suggested that:

a) culture is important in defining role conflict and identifying elements of stress, but adaptive coping responses are similar across cultures;

b) environmental factors are more powerful than personality in determining adaptation;

c) self-confidence with positive reinforcement of social skills and the learning of new skills, can facilitate a successful adaptation [1].

Ward C. and colleagues have proposed that cross-cultural adaptation may be meaningfully divided into two domains: psychological (emotional/affective) and sociocultural (behavioral) [4]. Psychological adaptation refers to psychological well-being or satisfaction in new cultural environments, while sociocultural adjustment refers to sojourners' abilities to «fit in» or effectively interact with members of host cultures. Lack of mood disturbances or depression has been used as indicators of psychological adaptation. Psychological adaptation has been associated with personal flexibility, internal locus of control, relationship satisfaction, approach-oriented coping styles, and use of humor, while psychological difficulties in sojourners have been linked to a higher incidence of life changes, loneliness, stress, and avoidant coping styles.

Ward C. and Searle W. argue that socioculturally adjusted sojourners are able to meet social demands in their host cultures. Sojourners' perceptions of their behavioral competence and acquisition of social skills that are effective and appropriate in host cultures have been used as indices of sociocultural adaptation.

Ward C. and Searle W. make three points about the relationships between psychological and sociocultural adaptation: 1) psychological and sociocultural adaptation are interrelated, but are predicted by distinctive sets of variables; 2) the two domains of adaptation develop in different patterns over time and the magnitude of the relationship between psychological and sociocultural adaptation differs depending on specific groups and contexts; 3) some variables are significant predictors of adaptation regardless of motivation for the move, origin of the sojourners, and destinations, but some predictors are situation and culture specific [2].

Psychological adaptation is more variable over time although studies have confirmed that the greatest difficulties are experienced at the earliest stages of cross-cultural transition.

Conclusion

So, the purpose of the article was to examine sociocultural and psychological features of adaptation among international students and explore factors contributing to their effective adaptation in the countries. Undoubtedly, all factors can not be found out because of the complicated nature of adaptation but the main psychological, social, cultural and economical ones have been revealed.

By analyzing differences and similarities the results may give suggestions to propose special programmes to decrease problems related to adaptation among this group of students by using the most adaptive foreign experiences of these students. The fact that different regions of the countries might have different culture, social, climate characteristics etc., could limit the generalizability of the results to other regions of the countries.

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