Международное сотрудничество в сфере образования. Образование в странах мира International collaboration in education. Education around the world

Original article DOI: 10.14529/ped230306

SOCIOCULTURAL SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONL STUDENTS AS ADAPTATION TOOL IN INTERCULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY (SUSU CASE STUDY)

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Abstract. Russian universities strive to implement strategies to enter the global educational space and increase the number of international students, as this is the crucial indicator of a university's success. The implementation of these strategies involves not only the introduction of innovation in the educational process, but also the creation of favorable conditions for international students. However, academic migrants have to adapt to these new conditions, as they will differ from the conditions in the home country. Although many institutions put efforts to maximize students' adaptation and acculturation, the desired outcome is yet to come and the search for effective practices is still a pressing challenge. The organization of socio-cultural support as an adaptation tool in the intercultural environment is of great importance. The research aims to examine the current conceptions and best practices of sociocultural support in the academic environment, reveals the major challenges of the international students, identifies the international student' satisfaction rate and suggests the model of sociocultural support in SUSU. The authors employ qualitative research with the data obtained from the interviews, classroom observations, and satisfaction survey among 30 international students. Modern concepts and certain practices of sociocultural support for international students in the Russian academic environment are examined, their major challenges are revealed, the level of satisfaction of international students with the quality of sociocultural support at SUSU is determined, sociocultural pedagogical model for student support is elaborated. The implementation of the suggested model is supposed to contribute to more efficient adaptation of international students into Russian educational environment.

Keywords: higher education, international students, socio-cultural support, adaptation, sociocultural pedagogical model

For citation: Kolova S.M., Belkina O.V. Sociocultural support of internation students as adaptation tool in intercultural environment of russian university (SUSU case study). *Bulletin of the South Ural State University. Ser. Education. Educational Sciences.* 2023;15(3):67–83. DOI: 10.14529/ped230306

Научная статья УДК 378.016

DOI: 10.14529/ped230306

СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНОЕ СОПРОВОЖДЕНИЕ ИНОСТРАННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ КАК МЕХАНИЗМ АДАПТАЦИИ В ИНОКУЛЬТУРНОЙ СРЕДЕ РОССИЙСКОГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА (НА ПРИМЕРЕ ЮУрГУ)

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Аннотация. Российские университеты реализуют стратегии по вхождению в глобальное образовательное пространство и увеличению числа иностранных студентов, что является показателем успешности вуза. Создание благоприятных условий для иностранных студентов необходимо наряду с внедрением инноваций в образовательный процесс вследствие жесткой конкуренции в сфере образования. Тем не менее академический мигрант вынужден будет адаптироваться к новой обстановке, так как она будет в любом случае отличаться от условий в родной стране. Хотя многие образовательные организации прилагают все усилия для максимальной адаптации и аккультурации студентов, желаемый результат еще не достигнут и поиск эффективных практик остается актуальной задачей. Организация социокультурного сопровождения как инструмента адаптации в межкультурной среде имеет ключевое значение. Таким образом, цель исследования - создание модели социокультурного сопровождения иностранных студентов в Южно-Уральском государственном университете. Авторы провели качественное исследование состояния обозначенной проблемы с использованием данных, полученных в результате интервьюирования, наблюдения, опроса удовлетворенности 30 иностранных студентов. Изучены современные представления и ряд практик социокультурной поддержки иностранных студентов в академической среде, выявлены их основные проблемы, определен уровень удовлетворенности иностранных студентов качеством социокультурного сопровождения в ЮУрГУ, разработана социокультурная педагогическая модель поддержки иностранных студентов. Внедрение предложенной модели будет способствовать более успешной адаптации иностранных студентов в российское образовательное пространство.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, иностранные студенты, социокультурное сопровождение, адаптация, социокультурная педагогическая модель

Для цитирования: Kolova S.M., Belkina O.V. Sociocultural support of internation students as adaptation tool in intercultural environment of russian university (SUSU case study) // Вестник ЮУрГУ. Серия «Образование. Педагогические науки». 2023. Т. 15, № 3. С. 67–83. DOI: 10.14529/ped230306

Introduction

The internationalization of the tertiary education system seeks priorities for increasing the export of high-quality educational services, attracting more international students to Russian universities, creating appropriate conditions for shaping willingness of international students to obtain tertiary education in the Russian Federation. The mission statements of internationalization of universities' educational activities are listed in the National Project "Education" (2019–2024) [24] that has two ultimate priorities. The primary one is to ensure the global competitiveness of Russian tertiary education and secure Russia's accession to the top 10 countries with the highest quality of education. The second one is to pro-

vide conditions for developing a harmoniously advanced and socially responsible personality based on cultivating historical and nationalcultural traditions as well as cherishing spiritual and ethical values of the Russian Federation peoples. The Project involves the implementation of four main directions of the education system development: updating its content, creating the necessary modern infrastructure, training appropriate professional staff, providing their retraining and professional development, as well as creating the most effective management mechanisms in the area. The passport of the Project "Export of Education" has been developed within the framework of the National Project "Education" [24]. The Project was supposed to result in the continuing growth of full-time international students at Russian universities: from 220,000 in 2017 to 425,000 in 2025. It should be noted that the number of international students in Russia has been steadily growing in recent years. In the beginning of the academic year 2023, the total number of international students in Russian universities amounted to 10% of the total number of students in Russia [33]. Obviously, alongside a rise in the number of international students at Russian universities, there is also a rise in the scope of functionality of the university academic staff as well as the range of problems that need to be immediately solved. South Ural State University has attempted to create a model of integrated support to create the most comfortable conditions for academic activities, accommodation and communication of international students in the intercultural environment of the Russian university.

Sociocultural support is one of the most essential aspects of comprehensive support for international students, which also includes academic, informational, medical-psychological, and linguistic support. All of the above types of support are focused on the entire goal to attract more international students. The University divisions are to solve complex tasks of assisting international students. Administrative services ensure solution of legal, emigration and everyday issues. The academic staff of the University should provide quality education in a multicultural environment; the University PR services ensure comprehensive information support to international students and develop a multilingual university website. Thus, the tasks of adaptation of international students are multifaceted and diverse.

1. Goals and objectives of research

The overall goal of the research is the implementation of strategies to enter the global educational space and increase the number of international students, which is the crucial indicator of a university's success to organize and provide sociocultural support as one of the significant components of comprehensive assistance.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- to specify the notion of "sociocultural support" as a part of comprehensive assistance of international students for their further successful adaptation;
- to examine certain current practices of sociocultural support of international students' adaptation into the intercultural academic environment of the Russian university;

- to identify the international student' satisfaction rate and main sociocultural challenges;
- to develop the pedagogical model of sociocultural support as a part of comprehensive assistance of international students in SUSU.

The hypothesis of the research is that if the sociocultural support is organized properly with regard to needs analysis and satisfaction survey, consequently, the number of SUSU international students will be steadily increasing, the annoying factors will be eliminated at the prestage of education.

2. Literature review

2.1. Interdisciplinary approach as a part of sociocultural support framework

The analysis of scientific literature revealed that the most interesting and significant works centered on the international students; refer to different areas of scientific knowledge:

- instruction (formation of willingness to study in the university was investigated by V.V. Bondarenko, S.V. Polutin, V.A. Yudina, M.A. Tanina, O.N. Leskina, et al.) [8];
- sociology (sociocultural adaptation of international students was examined by N.Yu. Shcheka, Ya.V. Kalnitskaya, et al.) [33, 37];
- economics (export of educational services was considered by M.G. Balykhin, E.I. Kazakova, A.P. Tryapicyna, et al.) [6, 17];
- medicine (physiological and psychophysiological adaptation of foreigners were T.A. Milashechkina, I.N. Gernet., V.S. Milashechkin, et al.) [22];
- regional history (teaching international students in a particular Russian region was researched by V. Nomogoeva, A. Shoidonova, et al.) [25].

At the moment the issue of identifying trends within adaptation of international students does not appear to be an independent subject of research, though, the matters related to different aspects of instruction, philosophy, sociology, psychology, cultural studies and linguistics are fairly well developed in term of:

- socialization of personality (M.A. Swagler, M.V. Ellis, V.A. Slastenin, et al.) [34, 35];
- adaptation of personality (I.A. Vershinina, A.R. Kurbanov, N.A. Panich, et al.) [37];
- polycultural (multicultural) education and upbringing (J. Zhou, D. Cole, et al.) [41];
- dialogue of cultures (A. Bethel, C. Ward, V.H. Fetvadjiev, et al.) [7];
- theories of intercultural communication (G. Liu, W. Li, Y. Zhang, et al.) [20];

- and multicultural education and upbringing (C. Ward, W. Searle, et al.) [39].

The theoretical framework of the research encompasses scientific works studying adaptation in terms of:

- instruction (Yu.K. Babanskiy, et al.) [5];
- ontology (B.S. Gershunsky, et al.) [16];
- social interaction (H. Park, V.A. Slastenin, et al.) [26, 34];
- psychology (O.S. Popova, L. Schoofs, S. Hornung, J. Glase, et al.) [27, 30];
 - culture (F. Firdaus, A. Mariyat, et al.) [13];
- linguistics and cognition (Y.D. Apresyan, et al.) [3].

High-frequency keywords "intercultural transition", "acculturation", "adaptation" suggest that intercultural and sociocultural adaptation is a prevalent theme in global studies related to international students. Indeed, since the 1940s, when Loomis and Schuler [21] first investigated the acculturation of Hispanic students studying in the United States; researchers have addressed a number of fundamental adaptation-related issues, such as recognizing two different forms of adaptation: psychosocial and sociocultural ones [39]; identifying self-motivation, self-development goals, and self-efficiency as important predictors of adaptation [35]; and revealing the Buffer Effect of social support during cross-cultural transition [7].

However, in recent years, researchers have shifted to studying the actual difficulties in the process of international students' adaptation [20, 26]. For instance, based on semi-structured interviews with nine students from China, South Korea, and Taiwan [26]; summarized that language barriers, cultural differences, academic challenges, possible discrimination, and limited intercultural social interaction are the main problems East Asian graduate students face at U.S. universities. These authors also suggested problem-solving skills, strong mentoring relationships, religious beliefs, and the use of campus services as effective strategies for addressing these challenges [26].

Student satisfaction is a pivotal matter in the adaptation process. Host countries and institutions are increasingly concerned about the personal and social-university lives of international students. Numerous studies have been conducted to identify potential areas for improvement in order to facilitate the recruitment of future students. The obtained results indicate that international students are generally satisfied with their experiences abroad [2]. Facilitating factors include receiving sufficient information prior to arrival in the host country, high levels of host language proficiency, frequent social contacts with local friends, more interaction with the faculty, high quality teaching, and financial support [2, 4, 41].

However, this does not mean that host universities ensure the best, most appropriate conditions for international students [20]. On the contrary, international students strongly expect their institutions to provide more diverse services tailored to their needs, such as connecting international and local students as language partners, providing racial awareness workshops, and hosting lunch programs [41].

2.2. Historical periods of adaptation of international students' development in Russia

Higher education institutions of the Russian Federation have traditionally attracted international students. The brightest example is the Peoples' Friendship University named after Patrice Lumumba (or RUDN nowadays) that was established in the USSR in the early 1960s. A distinctive feature of this educational institution has always been its multinational character. Even in the early 1920s, residents of Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, and Mongolia studied in the RSFSR on a free basis. Educational institutions have acted as a tool of international policy [33].

As a matter of fact, international students in the USSR mostly did not face major problems as interethnic and international conflicts were strictly controlled and all governmental bodies tried to prevent or minimize any clashes of the type.

Soviet universities provided the most comfortable infrastructure and atmosphere for international students. They tended to master the Russian language quite fast, since they were accommodated in the dormitories separately from their compatriots. Thus, Russian was the main language of communication, which accelerated the adaptation of international students in the host society.

Regrettably, things are turn to be a bit different right now. Russian citizens' attitudes toward international students have significantly deteriorated in recent years. Aggression, violence, and xenophobic sentiment are on the rise in society. While potential conflict sources are tightly managed and avoided within the university, outside it, unfortunately, confrontations may happen quite frequently. International students

band together to create tiny ethnic groups due to a certain level of hostility from the local population. These groups communicate with one another in their native tongue, not in Russian. As a result, learning Russian, the language of instruction, takes longer, and communication in a different cultural setting is made more difficult. Due to their reluctance to cooperate, foreigners' education in Russia is of lower quality. Further, in the research, the lack of knowledge of the Russian language will be viewed as one of the main difficulties of adaptation and adaptation of international students in the intercultural environment of Russian universities [12].

Today, there are also new considerations for international students while choosing Russia as country for study. The most in-demand occupations in the Soviet Union were those in engineering and technology. Less people were interested in economics. Nowadays, we see the reverse effect. According to statistics, the majority of students choose economics and management (16,3%), humanities and law (13,4%) [24].

2.3. Approaches to the conception of international students' adaptation and sociocultural support

Despite the lack of theories providing systematic insight into the essence of international students' adaptation into educational environment as a socio-pedagogical phenomenon, the research may refer to more extensive investigation in terms of educational adaptation, namely:

- the Theory of Systems (D. Chen, W. Stroup, et al.) [9];
- the Theory of Personal-Activity Approach (M. Schmidt, A. Tawfik) [29];
- the Cultural Paradigm in Education (V. Trif, et al.) [36].

Irrespective of the fact that the term "support" is deeply rooted in the communication theory, apparently, there is no its agreed international definition in modern instructional science. Researchers interpret support as an organized interaction (T.N. Korneeva, et al.) [18], a position of an attendant (T.I. Chirkova, et al.) [10], a method of creating conditions (V.V. Bondarenko, S.V. Polutin, V.A. Yudina, M.A. Tanina, O.N. Leskina, et al.) [8], a system of professional actions (B. Liebech-Lien, et al.) [19].

There can be distinguished diverse types of support:

- theoretical provisions of psychological support (E.I. Kazakova, A.P. Tryapitsyn, T.I. Chirkova, et al.) [10, 17];

- socialization support (M. Garibaldi, L. Josias, et al.) [15];
- relationship support (N.V. Ivanova, I.A. Kazakova, et al.)
- social and instructional support (E.S. Salahutdinova, et al.) [28];
- valeological support (A. Mueva, I. Kyun-krikova, V. Velegurin, et al.) [23].

However, the above-mentioned types of support are not sufficient enough to tackle the issues entirely at all stages, they fail to represent the coordinated interaction of departments, dealing with international students. Therefore, due to Yu.K. Babansky's approach [5], comprehensive integrity is asserted as the basic principle of support. The integrity allows providing:

- continuity of educational and instructional tasks;
- adaptation in all areas of development, education, training, and socialization;
- comprehensive support of professionals from diverse fields for international students at all stages;
- -consistence of techniques and forms of support.

Let us consider the most frequent approaches. *Psychological and instructional support*

- O.S. Gazman [14] first proposed the idea of psychological and educational assistance for individuals in order to address issues with physical and mental growth, which had a direct impact on the necessity of self-determination, interpersonal communication, and learning itself. B. Liebech-Lien [19] suggests thinking of assistance as a helpful activity in life choice situations, entrance into "the zone of proximal development".
- E.A. Salakhudinova [28] places emphasis on support as a psychological technology. In their opinion, psychological and instructional support of students' adaptation within the academic group is a purposeful activity of all participants of the educational and instructional process centered around maintaining healthy intergroup and social relationships; organization of interaction with fellow students and teachers in the educational process and extracurricular activity.

M.M. Semago [31] believes that "support" is the maintenance of functionality in the conditions of optimal amplification of educational influences and the unacceptability of its maladjustment.

K.P. Senatorova [32] emphasizes that support might be perceived as a holistic process including the operational field of personality deve-

lopment, its formation and correction. The scholar recognizes particular steps in this process: diagnosis, information gathering on techniques for tackling problems, advice at the decision-making stage, and help at the implementation stage.

V.A. Slastenin [34] interprets methods of relevant psychological and pedagogical activity in terms of psychological and instructional support. His perspective is that providing psychological and pedagogical support involves active observation, consultation, personal involvement, and encouraging the maximum amount of student autonomy in a challenging situation while requiring the least amount of a teacher involvement.

Support viewed as cooperation / interaction

B. Liebech-Lien [19] sees cooperation as support for problem-free interactions. Her theory takes into account a certain dependence in the student-teacher relationship, emphasizing that the student needs help and cannot solve the problem on his own; conversely, the teacher cannot solve the problem for the student because doing so could compromise his autonomy and, as a result, his need for development. V.A. Ayrapetova [1] regards support as a type of partner collaboration that occurs when the meanings of the activity are aligned and the circumstances are favorable for individual decision-making. The systematic interaction of participants in pedagogical activity is not properly revealed by this concept, though.

Support as creation of conditions

Support is viewed by some authors as being necessary for both good learning and psychological well-being. In the context of university engagement, Clark describes support as a system of professional activity of the teacher aiming at establishing the psychological and instructional circumstances for the student's successful training, education, professional and personal development [11]. Austrian academics L. Schoofs, S. Hornung, and J. Glase [30] claim that support is a type of professional action intended to foster personal growth and self-actualization as well as the growth of autonomy and self-assurance in a variety of decision-making scenarios. In this concept, the emphasis is placed on the objectives of support as specific results of personal development. Support, according to V.P. Zeleeva, S.S. Bykova, and S. Varbanova is an action that creates the right conditions for a person to successfully adapt [40].

According to F. Firdaus and A. Mariyat "support" is defined as establishing the conditions for the person to learn most successfully by basing the educational environment on a general

humanistic approach to maximize chances and personal potential [13]. This approach is focused on the age standards of development as criteria for the adequacy of educational influences, priority of needs, goals and values.

From the standpoint of O.S. Popova, "the essence of support in professional education is to minimize the impact of negative factors on students, consciously creating a system of humanistic beliefs about the world and one's own place through the inclusion of students in an independent, multi-channel search for answers to questions about the meaning and purpose of human life" [27]. The growth of personal accomplishments and the construction of competencies are the emphasis of co-learning and assistance, according to A.V. Vorontsova, A.G. Samokhvalova [38]. Summarizing the above-mentioned definitions, support is to be viewed as a process of interaction aimed at creating conditions for personal development, the formation of necessary competences and support in difficult life situations.

The present paper considers the sociocultural support in detail as a vital part within the comprehensive support system, which purpose is to make stay in an intercultural environment as comfortable as possible, and maximize adaptation of students in the educational entity of Russian university.

The novelty of the present research is the proposition of the conception of sociocultural support as a distinct type of comprehensive assistance.

3. Methodology

The analysis of the historical growth of educational institutions related to the education of international students and primarily, the support framework is the focus of theoretical part of the research. The authors used the method of historical comparison to study the best practices of existing supports of international students in Russian universities, conducted literature analysis of sociocultural support of international students as a part of comprehensive assistance, and analyzed basic notions of research such as sociocultural support of international students.

The empirical research was also performed by the authors, which includes expert interviews with university representatives (including members of the academic staff and administrative employees involved in international cooperation) and a number of interviews with the university's international students. The data for the research were mainly obtained from the entire cohort of international students who entered the bachelor's and master programs in the years 2021, 2022, 2023. The survey embraced not only the homogeneous groups of international students that were relatively small, but also the mixed groups with Russian students.

In this study, the authors resorted to both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The qualitative methods included participant observation and informal interviews. There are two reasons for applying such methods. First, the authors believe that the research questions might be better understood, answered and explained through interpreting and describing rather than measuring. Second, survey research questions were general, broad and rather flexible.

Since the groups were relatively small, individual interviews and classroom observations seemed to be the most convenient tool for investigation. Students were also interviewed on-line.

The interview questions were carefully constructed and reviewed based on research objectives. The students were interviewed in English and the interviews did not cause any inconvenience or discomfort, as they took place in their habitual environment: regular classrooms. The analyses of the interviews revealed students' willingness to answer the questions, share their opinions and their alacrity to social and cultural communication. The interview are sure to be the source of acquiring reliable extensive data.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Concept clarification of sociocultural support

Primarily the study attempted to define the term of sociocultural support of international students in Russian universities, particularly in the South Ural State University. The authors analyzed different definitions of this notion and regarded this type of support as a system of interaction between the subjects of the educational process aimed at optimizing the process of socialization and adaptation. The authors view support as a necessary constituent for both good learning and psychological well-being. In the research, support is viewed as cooperation and interaction.

4.2. Current practices of sociocultural support

As it was mentioned earlier, the task of this research is to organize and provide sociocultural support for international students with the purpose of their adaptation in Russian universities

to satisfy their needs and demands. The current practices of sociocultural support in Russian universities of Moscow, Kazan, Tomsk etc. were examined (as it was the second objective of the research). The collected data – regular online sociocultural support for international students in Tomsk State University; organization of multicultural academic communities in Moscow RUDN University, educational program "Summer Camp" with lectures, tutorials, workshops, excursions, and cultural entertainment activities, intended for fast and better adaptation of international students – proved that more efforts should be implemented to make the sociocultural support in SUSU sustainable.

Our university faces a challenging task to improve conditions for international students during their period of study in Russia as well as to increase recognition and brand status of Russian education in the international educational market. A huge number of international students at the university faces a number of problems of cultural, social, value-and-semantic and communicative nature. Peaceful coexistence of Russian and international students is quite problematic without establishing a unified system of values, which would act as universal meanings and help to develop academic communicative culture in the multicultural university space.

The success of international students' education and the level of their professional training largely depend on the degree of their adaptation into the socio-cultural life of the host University.

4.3. Dealing with sociocultural challenges of international students in the Russian educational environment as a tool to increase their satisfaction

The following principal sociocultural challenges that international students may encounter at Russian universities have been singled out. The most critical problem is the low level of proficiency in the Russian language (RL). The survey conducted showed the lack of sufficiently strong motivation to learn the RL.

As a solution to this problem, the following options are suggested:

- pre-university training of international students for communication with native speakers of the RL;
- increasing the period of pre-university training aimed at RL learning;
- introducing extra classes of Russian language and special disciplines during language training at university.

The next identified difficulty is the so-called "communicative failure" when teachers do not take into account communicative peculiarities of international students having bad command of the Russian language. One of the ways to tackle the problem is to create the "home" atmosphere where every international student would feel comfortable.

The following socio-cultural difficulties have also been highlighted. Stress of "culture shock" or "acculturation stress" is rated as the most significant problem. Possible effective remedies are the introduction of adaptation measures, intercultural trainings and cultural assimilators, the organization of diverse range excursions and activities.

The analysis of recent problems of international students in 2022–2023 has revealed a new, sociocultural challenge, which was not identified before. Students who have successfully adapted to a foreign, intercultural, foreign-language environment and have a different mentality are very trusting, which makes them vulnerable to new kinds of fraud, cyberdeception, etc. For this purpose, in our opinion, it is necessary to develop various recommendations how not to be cheated and how to get an immediate assistance in case of emergency. In this respect, Tomsk State University came up with an interesting initiative the International Department of TSU organized on-line consulting support service, a kind of "first aid". Every student can get instant advice when he/she finds himself/herself in an ambiguous socio-cultural situation.

Adaptation of international students to the educational environment of Russian universities is a phenomenon, which includes adaptation of a representative of native linguoculture, of a socialized personality, of a participant of pedagogical environment, and of an object of this environment influence. The success of adaptation ensures proper interaction of international students with social-cultural and intellectual environment of the university, psycho-emotional stability, formation of new personal qualities, acquisition of new social status and new values. mastering of new social roles, understanding and comprehension of future profession significance. Without proper adaptation, international students will get no satisfaction with their study in Russia and their well-being will not be provided, thus the university will not be able to acquire high rating brand and good reputation

SUSU has been successfully operating SUSU Center of Sociocultural Adaptation for interna-

tional students for several years that seeks to provide:

- intercultural trainings;
- training for international students' supervisors and tutors;
- extracurricular activities involving international students;
- free access to current methodological materials;
- strengthening of positive and elimination of negative factors affecting the adaptation of international students into SUSU educational process.

4.4. Satisfaction survey as a prerequisite for efficient adaptation

Customer satisfaction index research has been conducted for many years in numerous countries. The initial index was released in Sweden in 1989, followed by publications in Germany in 1992, America in 1994, Israel and Taiwan in 1995, and New Zealand in 1996. By request of the European Organization for Quality, the European Commission launched a study in 1996 with the goal of creating a national index and the European Customer Satisfaction Index based on the knowledge of other nations. Since that time, satisfaction surveys of various stakeholders have started to be held everywhere to provide the necessary feedback for improving the industries.

Almost all Russian top-rated universities conduct special surveys aimed at identifying the level of student satisfaction with the quality of education and conditions of study. The content of the survey is based on the student satisfaction criterion recommended by Federal Education and Science Supervision Agency (so-called Rosobrnadzor) guidelines "Quality systems of training graduates of education institutions". The analysis of satisfaction with the quality of education is an important tool for assessing the educational process, as well as for effective management of educational activities. Thus, regular monitoring studies act as powerful feedback, thereby helping to improve the system of education in the institution.

Special courses as "Intercultural Communication" and "Conflict Resolution" were elaborated to ensure deep insight and thorough understanding of key notions and conceptions necessary for efficient social communication in the university environment. The content of the courses is selected according to the learners' needs, their preferences what points are to be studied and what aspects to be discussed.

4.5. Sociocultural pedagogical model of international students' adaptation into Russian academic environment

The following methodology approaches for the model of international students' adaptation are selected:

- the systematic approach aimed at descrybing the support of international students' adaptation as a system embracing a set of elements that form integrity, unity, that is achieved via certain interconnections and interactions of the system elements;
- the activity approach aimed at describing the support for the adaptation of international students as their parity interaction with representatives of university departments, divisions, institutes and higher schools.

The social needs of society are as follows: to increase the number of international students in the universities of the Russian Federation and increase their degree of satisfaction with tertiary education. There is the Federal Project "Export of education", which aims at attracting international students, meeting their needs become fundamental goals in the strategic plans of educational institutions.

Today student satisfaction is one of the main goals of university development. A satisfied student is a source of competitive advantage in a highly competitive international education market [40].

The authors identified the target component of the model, which is to optimize support for the adaptation of international students into the educational environment of a Russian university.

The content component of the model was revealed – sociocultural support for the adaptation of international students into the educational environment of a Russian university that is characterized by the following hurdles:

- language barrier (problems with the Russian language);
 - culture shock;
- lack of background sociocultural know-ledge.

Our suggestions are as follows:

- organization of Russian language courses with elements of traditions and customs of the country of study;
 - tutoring, consultations, national holidays;
- interaction with the department of international cooperation.

The subjective component are the international students themselves. They should contact

and interact with the departments of SUSU international cooperation; Department of international students; Center for Social and Cultural Adaptation of SUSU.

The model also embraces the organizational component that has its own methods and forms. The main methods comprise organization and self-organization, as well as, role-plays and projects. This component could be implemented via:

- activities of cultural and leisure center;
- courses of lectures on intercultural communication;
- courses on conflict resolution in intercultural communication.

The procedure component of our model has 3 stages:

- preparatory stage (learning the Russian language and getting to know Russian culture, measures to be undertaken for the adaptation of foreign students);
- adaptation stage (involvement of students in the study of courses, discussions, case methods);
- reflexive stage (survey questioning, analysis of the results of the degree of satisfaction with sociocultural type of support).

Based on these components, the following criteria of students' satisfaction with sociocultural support have been worked out:

- the relevance of the courses:
- sociocultural communication between teachers and students:
- question list and survey to check the formation of socio-cultural knowledge.

While elaborating the pedagogical model, the authors identified the conditions under which the model might be efficiently implemented:

- constant feedback with international students and joint activities to recognize problems and eliminate shortcomings in support;
- high level of foreign language communicative competence of international students (the Russian language);
- high level of foreign language communicative competence of international students and faculty (the English language);
- acquiring competence in sociocultural communication.

4.6. Survey outputs

The first question of the survey dealt with satisfaction of the students with extra-curricular activities in SUSU. The response choices were completely satisfied, partially satisfied and not satisfied at all. It was a real pleasure to know that

there were no answers demonstrating dissatisfaction. 66,7% were completely satisfied and only 33,3% were among partially satisfied. It means that all activities organized by SUSU were quite interesting for the students and helped them to adapt in a foreign country. But still some options and solutions should be found to ensure students' comfort and to make their life more stimulating and actions-packed (Fig. 1).

The second question was about satisfaction with the social and psychological climate in SUSU, vertical relationships of university: student – SUSU administration, faculty, department and horizontal ones: Student – Teacher. Less than 3% of the students were dissatisfied with the psychological climate of university environment. Overall, the climate is rather comfortable, but the students pointed out in the previous answers that some of them were dissatisfied with attitude of administration services and disliked the way they were treated. There are many things to be improved in sociocultural communication, taking

into consideration different mentalities and attitudes (Fig. 2).

The third one was dedicated to university support – whether it was sufficient enough in terms of challenges and problems international students faced during their studies. Less than 7% did not get any support when they desperately needed assistance. While 40% were partially satisfied and 53,3% got the support when they were in need. Figures show that some special types of support activities do satisfy students' needs. Thus, much attention should be paid to the options related to students' immediate support: online, through some special telephone line connection etc. (Fig. 3).

The fourth question dealt with the point whether the students could overcome challenges and problems (language, social, cultural) in new socio-cultural environment. Less than 4 % (3,3) could not manage their problems and challenges, while 43,3% managed partially and for 53,3% the process of studies and live-being was not

1. Were you satisfied with extra-curricula activities in SUSU?

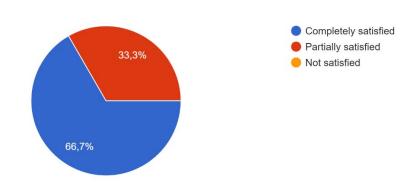


Fig. 1. The level of satisfaction with extra-curricular activities

2. Were you satisfied with the social and psychological climate in SUSU (student - teacher; student - administration, faculty, department)?

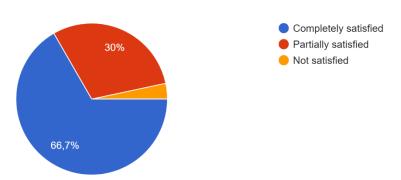


Fig. 2. The level of satisfaction with social and psychological climate in SUSU

problematic at all. Still the number of students who did not manage or manage partially is rather high. In our future research, we plan to differentiate those problems and discover what is really of concern for them (Fig. 4).

The fifth one was about students' satisfaction with cultural and social activities organized for

them by the university. Completely satisfied were 53,3 %, partially satisfied 20%. One person was not satisfied at all. In future, we plan to work closer with Adaptation center and other organizations, which specialize in providing activities for international students and work out some ideas and solutions (Fig. 5).

3. Was the university support sufficient enough in terms of challenges and problems students faced?

30 ответов

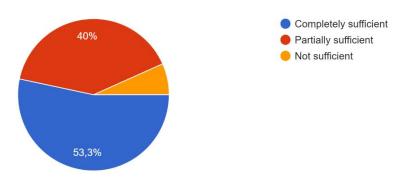


Fig. 3. The level of satisfaction with the sociocultural SUSU support

4. Did you manage to overcome challenges and problems (language, social, cultural)?

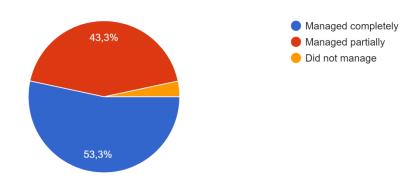


Fig. 4. The level of satisfaction with challenges and problems' management in SUSU

5. Were you satisfied with cultural and social activities organized for you by SUSU?

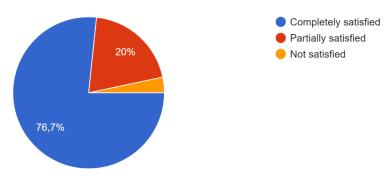


Fig. 5. The level of satisfaction with cultural and social activities organized in SUSU

The sixth question was about safety and protection in the university environment. Only 2 students (6,7%) felt fully unprotected, whereas 26,7% felt partially protected and 66,7% felt absolutely safe. According to statistics, there were some conflicts in the dormitories between different ethnic groups; the level of dissatisfaction of Russian students who lived together with the international students was rather high. A special psychological and even sociocultural analysis must be done to improve the situation and to make it better both for local and international students (Fig. 6).

The last question of the survey was whether they would recommend the study at SUSU to others. The answers demonstrated rather positive attitude of international students towards their study and life in Russian academic environment.76 % are likely to recommend, 23,3 – partially likely. To attract international students to SUSU, to raise the reputation of the university brand, to ensure the comfort a lot of efforts must be undertaken by the administration of the uni-

versity, by university divisions, international centers and certainly, by the teaches themselves (Fig. 7).

Conclusion

This research presents a new approach to the attempt to the international students' adaptation. The authors have tried to assess the status of the research problem and described the ways of organizing sociocultural support in the field of international students' adaptation into the academic environment of the Russian university (SUSU). The goal of the research was acquiring high ranking in global educational environment. There were also different objectives to organize and provide sociocultural support as one of the significant components of comprehensive assistance. The authors specified and clarified the notion of "sociocultural support" as a part of comprehensive assistance of international students, "adaptation of international students"; examined the current practices of sociocultural support of international students' adaptation into the intercultural Russian academic environment; revealed

6. Did you feel protected in the university environment? 30 ответов

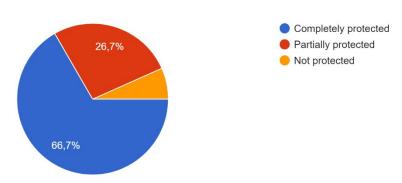


Fig. 6. The level of feeling of protection in SUSU

7. How likely were you to recommend study at SUSU to others?

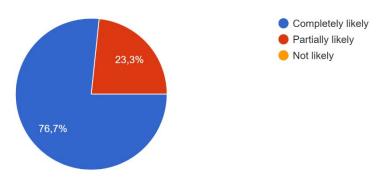


Fig. 7. The level of positive feedback of current international students about SUSU

the major challenges the international students might encounter; identified the international student' satisfaction rate; elaborated the sociocultural pedagogical model of sustainable international students' support. Research was aimed at ascertaining the levels of management of international students' support, the functional characteristics of the sociocultural level. The experiment showed the necessity to organize and provide sociocultural support via implementation of the suggested pedagogical model. Nevertheless, there is the necessity to conduct further studies in this field.

The hypothesis of the research was proved that if the sociocultural support was organized properly with regard to needs analysis and satisfaction survey, the number of SUSU international students would be steadily increasing, the annoying factors should be eliminated at the pre-stage of education.

We express our sincere gratitude to the Head of Foreign Language Department of The Institute of Linguistics and Intercultural Communication of SUSU K.N. Volchenkova for the idea, inspiration and motivation.

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The authors contributed equally to this article.

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

Вклад авторов

Авторы сделали эквивалентный вклад в подготовку публикации.

Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

The article was submitted 14.08.2023

Статья поступила в редакцию 14.08.2023