

Multi-Dimensional and Functional Approach to the Intercultural Adaptation Study

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Abstract

We believe it is important to do holistic, systematic study of intercultural adaptation. Our approach is based on the theoretical proposition of the multi-dimensional and functional organization of behavioral acts and human activities developed by A.I. Krupnov. It allows investigating not only separate aspects but the whole system, considering hierarchy and interaction of the components constituting the adaptation. According to this theoretical model six most important areas of psychological adaptation to a new culture were identified: operational and dynamic, motivational, cognitive, emotional, regulatory and productive aspects. In addition, since the intercultural adaptation is inextricably linked with the concept of ethnic tolerance, we investigated the relation of this personality trait with the selected aspects of intercultural adaptation. Our empirical research involved 351 first year students of Russian university arrived from different regions of the world (40 countries). According to our theoretical model, for each aspect of intercultural adaptation special psychodiagnostic techniques we picked up. In total 14 techniques were used. This research made it possible to reveal the ratio of the intercultural adaptation various aspects. Factorial analysis in general approved our theoretical model. It showed that in the intercultural adaptation general psychological structure all studied aspects of intercultural adaptation are relatively independent. Central place in this structure belongs to the emotional intelligence and communicative tolerance. The intercultural adaptation peculiarities of the students from different regions are determined not only by the level of the analyzed adaptation aspects development, but also by their specific correlations.

Keywords: intercultural adaptation, migrants, adaptation styles, social distance, stress coping strategies, life goals, social intelligence, emotional intelligence, self-regulation, ethnic tolerance.

1. Introduction

Active migration processes have become an integral part of the modern world. Psychology and allied sciences are actively exploring problems of intercultural adaptation. In this area has been accumulated a lot of knowledge, although often only certain aspects of this phenomenon studied.

We believe it is important to do holistic, systematic study of intercultural adaptation. Multi-dimensional and functional approach we propose to study the problem of cross-cultural adaptation was developed by the Russian psychologist Alexander Krupnov (2006, 2009) for the analysis of personality traits and activities. The approach has been actively tested and developed by Krupnov's Scientific School and proved its effectiveness in exploring not only separate aspects of the considered phenomenon but a holistic and an integral system considering its hierarchy and interaction of its component parts (Bojko, 2013; Volk & Akimova, 2010; Kudinov, S.I. & Chzhan Pan Hao, 2013; Lykova & Karaverdo Intriago, 2010; Maslova, 2011; Novikova & Ibadova, 2009; Novikova, 2010; Chebotareva, 2011, 2012, 2013).

According to this theoretical model six psychological areas responsible for adaptation process characteristics were distinguished. *The operational and dynamic* aspect includes stylistic characteristics of the adaptation process, in particular inter-ethnic cooperation and stress coping strategies. *The motivational* aspect of adaptation involves the adaptants' life goals, long-term plans, depending on which they choose adaptation styles. It is clear that, for example, that the adaptation styles and results of students studying abroad in order to become good specialists at home vary significantly from those who are considering studying abroad as a form of tourism or an opportunity to work abroad. Also, various adaptation characteristics vary depending on individual purposefulness, awareness of their goals in life, etc.

The cognitive aspect of adaptation also plays a significant role. It is important to consider a system of person's understanding of certain intercultural situation, his or her own ideas about their place and role in this situation, and their ability to analyze a variety of social situations.

The understanding of the situation is closely related to the attitude to it, i.e. the *emotional* aspect of adaptation. It

also takes into account the person's ability to understand and regulate his or her emotions and the others' emotions, to understand the specifics of emotional expression in other cultures.

Many researchers believe that the *regulatory* aspect is the key one in the social and psychological adaptation. Naturally, in intercultural adaptation it is important to consider the level of the person's main regulatory processes development. But it is important to consider them in relations to other aspects of adaptation.

The *productive* aspect includes the rates of adaptation successfulness, the degree of person's satisfaction with his or her adaptation, the presence or absence of maladjustment signs.

In addition, since the intercultural adaptation is inextricably linked with the concept of ethnic tolerance, we think it was important to investigate the relation of this personality trait with the selected aspects of intercultural adaptation.

2. The Research Methods

According to our theoretical model, for each aspect of intercultural adaptation special psychodiagnostic techniques were picked up. In total we used 14 techniques.

The *operational and dynamic* aspect was assessed by the techniques: "Types of Ethnic Identity" (G.U.Soldatova, S.V.Ryzhova), "The Indicator of Stress Overcoming" (D. Amir Khan, translated and adapted on Russian N.A. Sirota and V. M Jaltonsky). The *motivational aspect* was regarded with "The Test of the Life Meanings Orientations (D.A.Leontev). The *cognitive aspect* was investigated with "The Scale of Base Convictions" (R. Janov-Bulman), "The Scale of Social Distance (E.Bogardus in T.G. Stefanenko modification), "Who am I ?" – Technique of 20 questions (M. Kun, T. Mc-Partland), "The Social Intelligence Measurement" (J. Guilford). The *emotional aspect* was measured with "The Questionnaire of Emotional Intelligence" (D.V. Lusin) and the techniques "Gnosis Facialis Foto" (J. Merten, J. Spang). For investigating of the *regulatory aspect* the questionnaire "Style of Self-control" (V.I. Morosanova) was used. The *productive aspect* was assessed with the techniques "Adaptation" (A.I. Krupnov) and "The Person's Adaptation to New Social and Cultural Environment (APSCE) (L.V. Yankovsky in modified version of T.G.Stefanenko, M.S.Panova). The level of students' tolerance was measured with "Tolerance Index" (G.U. Soldatova, O.A. Kravtsova, O.E. Khukhlaev and I.A. Shaigerova) and "Diagnostics of the General Communicative Tolerance" (V.V. Bojko).

The statistical significance of the differences between studied groups of the students was estimated by means of nonparametric *Kruskall Wallis test*. Also we used *Multiple Range Tests*, with which the variables received for students from different regions were compared by pairs. For revealing the gender specifics of adaptation of students from different regions we investigated joint influence on indicators of adaptation of factors of region and gender by means of the *multifactorial dispersive analysis (MANOVA)*. For revealing the correlations of various aspects of intercultural adaptation with its productivity we used *Spearman's rank correlation coefficient*. For research of the structure of adaptive characteristics of foreign students and specifics of such structures at students from different regions we used *factorial analysis*. This article summarizes the results of these statistical studies.

3. Sample

351 foreign students studying in Peoples' friendship university of Russia were included into the empirical research sample. Among them there were students from 5 regions of the world: Asia (80 persons), Africa (61), South America (69), Middle East (81) and the Central Asia (60), from 49 countries. All examinees were students of the first years of 9 different faculties. Among examinees there were 189 men and 162 women. Ages of examinees were from 17 to 25 years old, the average age - 21.3 years old.

4. Results and Discussion

The aim of this stage of the study was to identify the nature and the psychological mechanisms of foreign students' intercultural adaptation through the assessment of its different aspects intensity and interaction.

At first the general characteristics of the foreign students' intercultural adaptation should be considered. In operational and dynamic aspect of adaptation can be seen a wide scatter in the data on all tests' scales, what is the evidence of variety of ethnic identity forms at foreign students. Leading ethnic identity type for most foreign students is a positive ethnic identity, that is, on average, foreign students accept their own ethnicity and have positive attitudes towards other ethnic groups. However, next in intensity goes an ethnic indifference, and then – an ethnic bigotry. Accordingly, in the sample, there are many students with blurred ethnic identity, for whom ethnicity is irrelevant (perhaps

indirectly it also demonstrates the favorable level of adaptation). And there are a certain number of students who worry about their ethnicity and ready for extreme measures for its protection.

In stressful situations, mostly foreign students take an active and constructive position, they tend to analyze situations and discuss them with different people to choose the best solutions, to act purposefully and persistently for achieving their goals, they may, if necessary, seek the help from others, though often they may "get away from problems" as well.

Motivational aspect of foreign students' adaptation is characterized by equilibrium of focuses on achieving their life goals and on enjoying the process of life. Not all foreign students are convinced that it is possible for humans to control their lives, to decide freely and to implement the decisions. Although mainly these students consider themselves strong personalities with freedom of choice enough to build their lives in accordance with their objectives and representations about life meaning. Apparently, such characteristics are due, firstly, to the fact that students who have chosen study abroad, really, basically are more strong personalities, more conscious of their goals in life. And secondly, the uncertainty in the life controllability may be associated with some problems in cross-cultural adaptation.

In the cognitive aspect, we also may see the data that are consistent with the motivational aspect characteristics. The highest rate among the scales obtained by methods of "Scale of Base Convictions" has a scale of "I value". However, many international students have no illusions about the global justice of world order, do not believe that success comes only to the deserving people.

Qualitative analysis of the method "Who am I?" results showed that in general, foreign students indicated a positive image of themselves. Ethnic identity in the majority of them is not actualized. Students from all the regions, except Central Asia, rarely mentioned any social roles that may indicate an identity crisis associated with uncompleted process of social adaptation in the new environment. The most frequently mentioned roles were "student", "human", "family member", "man / woman". In the foreign students' responses almost never we could meet characteristics describing their attitude toward Russia, the process of adaptation, except for a few references to the non-acceptance of the Russian weather or about acquaintance with the Russian language and culture.

The foreign students' social intelligence evaluation showed the indicators below the average. That is, foreign students often have difficulty with perception of nuances (the meanings) of verbal signs and with interpretation of nonverbal cues, at least, accepted in European and Northern American culture. They find it difficult to assess accurately the holistic situations of interaction, so they can behave inappropriately in such situations. At the same time the foreign students' ability to anticipate future actions of people based on the analysis of real situations of communication in general is well developed. They are well able to build a strategy of their own behavior in order to achieve their goal, know the models and the rules of behavior in certain social groups.

The emotional aspect of intercultural adaptation study showed that on average, foreign students emotional intelligence is at the average level, although a wide scatter in the data were noted, i.e. in the sample there were people with a very low general level of emotional intelligence, as well as with very high level. It is interesting that among the test subscales average maximum score was obtained on a scale of "other people's emotions managing". That is, the majority of foreign students believe that they have a highly developed ability to influence other people's emotions. However, the other abilities that make up emotional intelligence are much less developed. In general, foreign students' interpersonal intelligence is higher than intrapersonal, and emotions managing is higher than emotions understanding. Perhaps this ratio suggests that in a situation of intercultural interaction foreign students show the tendency to manipulate other people instead of conducting real open interpersonal interaction.

Analysis of the foreign students' facial gnosis ability showed that foreign students better recognize the joy, which was the most positive emotion in the entire list of emotions in the test. Recognition of the astonishment was on the second place. Perhaps this is one of the most important emotion for the intercultural communication that helps to assess, whether your interlocutor understands you. Maybe that's why students from different cultures are well aware of this emotion. Following is sadness / grief. Perhaps, good recognition of this emotion due to the fact that it is usually quite strong in manifestation. Although while one of the interlocutors experiences this emotion some tension in dialogue arises, perhaps that's the reason why the emotion is recognized worse than joy. The foreign students recognize disgust, fear, anger and contempt worse (on average less than a half of the correct answers). Perhaps this is due to the fact that different cultures have different attitudes with regard to manifestations of these emotions, and apparently different ways of their manifestations.

Regulatory aspect of the foreign students' intercultural adaptation is characterized by the average intensity of the main regulatory personal properties and processes. Among separate regulatory processes flexibility, the abilities for planning and changing the activity are expressed stronger, abilities for modeling and evaluating the activity are less

developed.

In the *productive aspect* of the foreign students' intercultural adaptation to Russia the average general level of intercultural adaptation is noted. Generally the students are satisfied with their stay in Russia, have a positive attitude towards others, have a sense of social security and belonging to a new society. They are determined to expand their social ties and they are confident in their abilities, focused on respecting the current environment social norms. Perhaps this accepting of the new environment is determined not by internal changes, but by external adjustment. But maybe, for students who after some time will return to their homeland, such strategy is optimal.

Among the negative trends the nostalgia are most pronounced, although its intensity is below average. But it should be mentioned that a number of the students intercultural adaptation studies conducted in People's Friendship University (Maslova, 2011; Novikova, 2010; Chebotareva, 2011, 2012, 2013) showed that a high level of nostalgia (as homesickness), cannot be considered a sign of maladjustment, on the contrary, it usually directly related to the successfulness of intercultural adaptation, at least for short-term migrants. Maybe reducing the overall level of mental tension due to a stay in a new culture takes off some psychological barriers, and increases the level of reflexivity, allows students understand better their internal condition.

The study of tolerance draws us to the conclusion that the foreign students usually show an average level of tolerance in various fields. They are more tolerant to different unconventional social groups and less tolerant to other ethnic groups. The foreign students' intolerance may be manifested primarily in categorical or conservative assessment of others, in inability to hide their negative feelings.

Factorial analysis of the structure of the foreign students' cross-cultural adaptation in general confirms the correctness of the theoretical model proposed. The factors were grouped mainly on the previously identified aspects.

The first factor includes all the components of emotional intelligence. The second included with a negative sign all indicators of intolerance in interpersonal communication. The third factor is the ability to facial gnosis. The fourth factor is the life meaningfulness and the fifth - the basic beliefs in benevolence and meaningfulness of the world and the value of their own "I". The sixth factor all the difficulties in adaption (negative scales of adaptation techniques) formed. The seventh factor combined positive scales of adaptation techniques, i.e. adaptability and tolerance. And the eighth factor included the overall level of social intelligence and the indicator of the situation dynamics understanding together with the proximity of social distance with the majority of the studied regions.

Thus, in the general psychological structure most studied aspects of intercultural adaptation are relatively independent. The emotional intelligence and communicative tolerance have the central place in this structure. To a large extent the success of adaptation is associated with tolerance, and the closeness of the social distance from the other cultures correlates with the social intelligence. Cultural, gender and individual differences in intercultural adaptation manifested not only in its various aspects intensity, but also in the specific relationships between the components and in specific in the overall structure of adaptation.

5. Conclusion

Thus, a holistic multidimensional analysis of the foreign students' intercultural adaptation in Russia shows that the overall picture is quite prosperous, but large scatter in the data of the general adaptation successfulness and almost all aspects of adaptation must be taken into consideration. It means that besides successfully adapting students there are also those who are experiencing serious difficulties.

The different adaptation aspects comparison revealed that some students show ethnic identity style transformation toward either the ethnicity blurring or extreme ways of its protecting. Although most students use rather constructive coping strategies, they as well often avoid problems, "close eye on them."

The regulatory aspect of adaptation as maybe the most obvious, on average, at foreign students is represented quite well. In other aspects some contradictions was highlighted that can cause difficulties in adaptation. In particular, the inconsistencies are observed in the motivational and cognitive aspects. The foreign students are well aware of their goals in life and consider themselves quite able to fulfill them, but they are not quite sure in the life controllability in general. They have a generally positive image of "I", although the decrease in the number of social roles in their self-images presupposes an identity crisis. Foreign students also have difficulties in interpreting social situations on the basis of verbal and nonverbal signals accepted in European culture. The foreign students often have difficulties in understanding emotions not only of others but also their own, but they are confident in their ability to influence the emotions: their own and the other's as well. That may create the situation of misunderstanding in their relationship.

There are also some personal factors that complicate adaptation. In particular, the foreign students have relatively

low level of tolerance, they show greater tolerance towards representatives of various social groups than of other cultures; in intercultural interaction they may exhibit categorical assessments of others and they hardly restrain their negative emotions.

In the general psychological structure most studied aspects of intercultural adaptation are relatively independent. The emotional intelligence and communicative tolerance have the central place in this structure.

The analysis using the multi-dimensional and functional approach showed that such holistic analysis helps to understand better the process of cross-cultural adaptation and the degree of its successfulness. This research made it possible to create a holistic picture of the intercultural adaptation, to reveal the ratio, interaction and hierarchy of its various aspects.

In the programs of psychological and pedagogical support for the foreign students and other migrants this approach allows the use of an impact not only on the regulatory aspects of adaptation, but also on its other components, such as motivation, emotion, cognition, including self- consciousness.

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