

**FOREIGN STUDENTS' ADAPTATION CHALLENGES
IN THE US UNIVERSITIES**

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ПРОБЛЕМИ АДАПТАЦІЇ ІНОЗЕМНИХ СТУДЕНТІВ В УНІВЕРСИТЕТАХ США

Незважаючи велику кількість авторських досліджень проблем іноземних студентів, з якими вони стикаються під час навчання за кордоном, ми стверджуємо, що проблеми адаптації особливо важливі для сучасної педагогіки та психології з метою забезпечення фасилітації процесу адаптації іноземців. У статті пропонується аналіз організаційно-педагогічного забезпечення адаптації іноземних студентів до університетського середовища США. У роботі стверджується, що чинники прямої дії (зміст навчального матеріалу; форми, методи та засоби навчання) та чинники непрямой дії (просторово-предметна організація освітнього середовища, міжособистісна взаємодія та особистісно-психологічні особливості) впливають на адаптацію іноземних студентів до американського університетського середовища. Досліджено основні аспекти адаптації іноземних студентів до університетів США.

Стаття також окреслює низку компетентностей та здібностей студентів, необхідних для адаптації до освітнього середовища під час навчання за кордоном. Виокремлено основні компетентності викладачів, необхідних у роботі з іноземними студентами для їхньої успішної адаптації та навчальних досягнень. Завдяки результатам опитування ми визначили основні проблеми іноземних студентів у процесі адаптації до нового університетського середовища з різних аспектів, головним чином: психологічних, соціальних, культурних і академічних. Обґрунтовано організаційно-педагогічні основи роботи університетського персоналу з іноземними студентами щодо полегшення адаптації іноземців до нового академічного середовища та важливого значення університетського кампусу в цьому процесі. Окреслено також можливість впровадження прогресивних ідей та досвіду США щодо адаптації іноземних студентів до університетської освіти України.

Ключові слова: іноземний студент; проблеми адаптації; аспекти адаптації; сприяння; академічне середовище; штат університету; США.

FOREIGN STUDENTS' ADAPTATION CHALLENGES IN THE US UNIVERSITIES

In spite of the existence of a lot of authors' researches on the issues of international students' problems, while studying abroad, we state that the adaptation challenges they face are the issue of vital importance to solve for today's pedagogy and psychology in order to facilitate the foreigners' adaptation process. The article offers an analysis of the organizational and pedagogical support of foreign students' adaptation to the US university environment. The paper argues that direct-acting factors that are means of training and indirect factors, among which there are the spatial-objective organization of the environment and interpersonal interaction, influence foreign students' adaptation to the American university environment.

The main aspects that cover foreign students' adaptation at the US universities have been studied, namely: learning the language the host country, adopting its culture and social support. The article also outlines a number of competencies and abilities of students needed to be adapted to the educational environment while studying abroad, as: foreign-language communicative competence, sociocultural, intercultural, and strategic competences; ability to overcome cultural shock and stress associated with it, abilities to adapt to a new cultural environment. The major teachers' competences necessary in the work with foreign students for their successful adaptation and the study process have been singled out. The results of the survey defined the key foreign student's challenges of the adaptation process to a new university environment from different aspects, namely: the psychological, social, cultural, and academic ones. The organizational and pedagogical basics of the university staff's work with foreign students on ensuring the facilitation of their adaptation to a new academic environment and an important role of the campus in this process have been substantiated. The possibility of implementing the US progressive ideas and experience concerning foreign students' adaptation to university education of Ukraine has been also outlined.

Key words: *a foreign student; adaptation challenges; aspects of adaptation; facilitation; academic environment; university staff; USA.*

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Introduction

Nowadays globalization process covers all vital functions of the society and an individual (political, social, cultural, economic, informational, professional, educational, and other ones) leading to the need to develop interpersonal communication skills, which is impossible to gain without adjusting to a foreign-language cultural environment (Smolikevych, 2018, p. 1). In this paper we provide an overview of the foreign students' adaptation to the American university environment, as the US universities are the leaders among the world's providers of educational services. Evidence suggests that the the US higher education is of quality, which is confirmed by the ratings of international studies by reputable publications and organizations, such as Higher Education Top 200 World University Rankings "Times" and Quality Standard Top University Rankings, which evaluate the higher educational institutions by the studying results, of training effectiveness, research (citation), international educational activity, reputation, etc. According to these data, the US universities are in the top five and make up the largest share of the best universities in the world. Almost all states and 128 different US cities are presented in the rankings.

This paper states the development of the US higher education in the context of international education which is influenced by scientific and technological progress, global student mobility, the process of internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Besides, the characteristics of higher education are humanism, democratization, diversification, integration, and internationalization, developed on popular philosophies in the US, as postmodernism, constructivism, and positivism (Knight, 2012, pp. 23–24).

The analysis of recent research. A lot of investigations into some aspects of international education were carried out by P. Altbach and J. Knight (2007). Academic mobility was the subject of study by the scientist J. Knight (2012).

The researched features of the university environment functioning have been highlighted in the work by C. Grant and C. Sleeter (2006). The researcher R. Tafarodia and A. Smith (2001) studied the problem of multidimensional adaptation and interpersonal communication. The key features of developing communicative culture skills were considered by B. MacWhinney (2002). The process of forming foreign language communicative, sociocultural, intercultural and strategic competences was highlighted in Y. Lin's work (Lin et al., 2012). J. Bennett investigated the problem of acculturation of the individual as a progressive acceptance of the elements of another culture (ideas, concepts, values, norms, behaviour, institutions) by individuals, groups or classes of another culture (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). The intercultural adaptation process was examined by Y. Kim (2016). N. Smolikevych (2018) described theoretical and methodological basics of the foreign student adaptation process.

The teacher's intercultural competence in a multicultural environment was considered by A. Villegas and T. Lucas (2002). N. Mukan studied teachers' continuous professional development (Mukan et al., 2019). The problems of teaching diversity groups were the subject of the researcher N. Smolikevych (2019). There is a large volume of published studies on the researched problem, but there is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with analysis, generalization, and systematization of the data about the main foreign students' challenges they meet in their adaptation process to new educational environment. The academic literature on students' psychological, cultural, communication, social and educational adaptation barriers has revealed the emergence of the two contrasting themes: an insufficient representation of universities measures for students' overcoming them and the objective need for the improvement of organizing the foreign students' adaptation to university life and studies by implementing the best American practice in organizing the foreign students' adaptation to university studies and life.

The aim of the article is to give insight on the characteristics of foreign students' adaptation challenges and the US universities advanced practice in providing these students with a systemic organizational and pedagogical support on campuses in order to implement American progressive ideas and experience in this field by Ukrainian universities. The authors defined the following objectives: to highlight

the foreign students' adaptation problems in the US universities; to characterize the US university education in the context of the global education environment; to perform an analysis of organizational and pedagogical provision strategies for the foreign students' adaptation in the US universities; and to outline the possibilities of the American experience implementation in supporting of foreign students' adaptation to university practice in Ukraine.

According to the aim of our research, we opted for a set of theoretical methods, such as the comparative and historical ones, which allowed studying normative documents and laws on education and scientific literature; analysis and synthesis – to study pedagogical theories, concepts, and principles, induction and deduction methods were adopted for interpretation of the research material; analytical and logical methods were chosen to investigate the peculiarities and possibilities of improving the higher educational services; statistical methods, used for checking the obtained information by comparing data from scientific and other sources; empirical methods, among which we can mention questionnaires of foreign students of higher education institutions by using modern IT technologies to find out the most common challenges of international students in their new academic environment in the US universities and rate them.

Foreign students' adaptation to the US educational environment as a pedagogical problem

We have conducted an analysis of foreign students' adaptation difficulties in the US universities and organized this information into a logical sequence. Besides, we have outlined the major principles of the university staff's guidance for creating favorable conditions for their successful undergoing the process (Mukan et al., 2019; Smolikevych, 2019; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The current study found that foreign students' adaptation in a the US university environment was influenced by factors that contribute to its implementation, namely: direct factors – didactic (content of educational material, choice of appropriate forms, methods and means of training for the formation and development of sociocultural, intercultural, communicative competencies), and indirect factors – social and psychological (spatial-objective organization of the academic environment, the effectiveness of interpersonal interaction taking into account the individual and psychological characteristics of foreign students). We have identified linguistic, social, psychological, organizational, academic obstacles to the adaptation (Mukan et al., 2017; Smolikevych, 2018, p. 6).

We have done the analysis of the key aspects of foreign students' adaptation process in the US universities, namely: learning the host language (English), adoption of the host country culture, and social support. Therefore, adaptation for the purpose of studying according to a foreign syllabus implies formation of several student competences such as foreign language communication, sociocultural, intercultural, and strategic competences, ability to overcome the cultural shock and the stress related to it, the ability to adjust to a new sociocultural environment. The teacher's main competences have been also determined, which include: educational and methodical,

scientific and research, sociocultural, multicultural, emotional, communicative, managerial, environmental, and IT ones, the competence in drawing up and implementing culturally appropriate curricula, the competence in lifelong learning, that are necessary for supporting an effective and rapid foreign students' adaptation to the study in the new academic environment of a US university and ensuring their successful learning process (MacWhinney, 2002; Tafarodia & Smith, 2001).

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the pedagogical support for foreign students' adaptation to the American university environment are: conformity of the process of adaptation to its theoretical and methodological fundamentals; students' awareness and perception of cultural models; knowledge and correct usage of effective models of communication, following the norms of verbal and non-verbal behavior; sufficient level of student' communication culture and such relevant competences, as foreign language communication skills, socio-cultural, intercultural and strategic competences; an effective spatial and substantive organization of structural units of the university (offices of "orientation programs", language institutes, centers), which provide a justified usage of appropriate forms, methods, and teaching aids (Smolikevych, 2018, p. 7).

The present study has determined that international students' socio-psychological adaptation to the the US university environment involves academic and social student activity. Furthermore, it is regarded as a unity of accommodation and assimilation. The socio-psychological aspect of adaptation is characterized by such stages of adaptation, as "honeymoon", "culture shock", "recovery", "adaptation" and "reverse culture shock". Adaptation rates are a lack or low level of anxiety and a high level of self-esteem (Kim, 2016). The investigation of the subject matter has shown that there are psychological and sociocultural varieties of socio-psychological adaptation that depend on many factors. Firstly, personal traits, strategies for overcoming stress, social support impact on psychological adaptation. Secondly, the duration of living in a new culture, cultural knowledge, language skills, and four different strategies of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization influence sociocultural adaptation (Yu & Wright, 2016).

We have performed an analysis of the use of outsourcing and insourcing capabilities of the US universities due to the organizational context. It shows that establishing cooperation between the US universities and the US recruitment companies has some advantages as the latter provide orientation programs of two types. These include programs that are implemented prior to arrival in the United States (the English language, pre-university course, academic, and financial consulting programs) and upon arrival in the United States (cultural orientation programs, academic programs, consulting programs on visa status, financial status, housing, employment opportunities, health status, etc.) (Smolikevych, 2018, pp. 13–14).

Overall, this study strengthens the idea that offices of foreign students, international programs, academic support; language, cultural and religious centers / schools, counseling services, leisure centers, student university organizations, hostel

association, and advisors / mentors that are present at the US university campuses provide foreign students with academic, financial, domestic, legislative counseling in the forms of seminars, individual assistance or group work. They organize social, cultural, sporting events, group work, student self-government activity, volunteering for the purpose of their socialization as well as help in studying process, job search, and solving of household problems. So, the organizational and pedagogical support for the adaptation of foreign students in the US universities includes such kinds of activity as organization of a system of recruiting foreign students; offering a wide range of counseling services oriented into psychological, sociocultural and pedagogical support before and after arrival in the the US; providing opportunities to master academic English at the required level together with the improvement of communication skills; teachers' training to work in a multicultural environment; the improvement of educational programs adding multicultural content, etc. (Yu & Wright, 2016).

We have proved that it is of vital importance for universities to offer not only up-to-date high-quality educational services and use high-tech resources but also to provide favorable conditions for student learning and support (academic and social adaptation, acculturation in a divertive environment, linguistic, and financial support). Besides, the prestige of universities is influenced not only by the enrollment rate of foreign students but also by the number of foreign students who have gained a certificate or a diploma. Accordingly, this indicator provides a certain reputation of the institution, its financial position or budget allocations, which are essential factors for further development. It has been found out that the tasks of multicultural education include the development of an appropriate educational policy, a multicultural content of educational programs, inclusion of the international component in the curricula, preparation of the teachers for work with diversity groups, offering qualitative educational and consulting services on adjusting to a new environment and providing opportunities for improving the language and communication skills, gaining the intercultural competence, a support for ethnic, social, racial and linguistic differences, etc. (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Grant & Sleeter, 2006).

It also highlights the priority tasks of the US higher education institutions which are: 1) to create the favorable conditions for effective adjustment to the academic and cultural environment of foreign students who have not been fully prepared for successful educational and cultural interaction and have not achieved a proper level of foreign language communication skills yet and 2) to help them overcome psychological, communicative and academic barriers in their adaptation process, which is a necessary prerequisite for the implementation of not only academic and educational tasks but also interpersonal and intercultural interactions in modern educational environment. The role of university campuses as an academic and educational environment in promoting the psychological, sociocultural and academic adaptation of higher education applicants from abroad, the activities of student offices, and other resources providing this process have also been investigated.

Foreign students' experience in adaptation to studying in the US universities

We have justified important prerequisites for successful overcoming the adaptation challenges, namely: a sufficient level of the English language and communication skills, the development of intercultural competence and education of a multicultural personality capable of cooperating in a global environment (Kim, 2016). In order to support our theoretical findings concerning foreign students' adaptation challenges in the US universities we conducted a survey to determine what best describes foreign students and their adaptation to academic and social life in the US universities. The findings helped better understand complex interaction on campuses, enable teachers to better motivate foreign students, and facilitate their learning. A total of 50 foreign students of the US universities took part in the survey using modern technologies (for instance, e-mail, social networks). The results of the study are presented in Table 1. The data were collected from respondents, the information was summarized and organized into a logical sequence, and conclusions have been drawn.

The major findings of the survey helped deeper understand foreign students' problems and enable teachers to better motivate international students and facilitate their learning. The most of their challenges are: passive behavior (48%), high level of anxiety (38%), removal from the university community (34%), difficulty in making friends (32%), a huge difference between cultural values at home and in the USA (48%), "cultural shock", (38%), inadequate level of foreign language command and communication skills (42%), difficulty in speaking in public (36%), problems with food (38%), and homeland nostalgia (44%).

Table 1. Foreign students' adaptation challenges in the US universities

№	Adaptation problems	50 interviewees (%)	the US teachers' comments
1	What problems of the psychological aspect of adaptation were the most difficult for you?		Psychological adaptation depends largely on the psychotype of the individual.
	- passive behavior	48	
	- high level of anxiety	38	
	- low self-esteem	14	
2	What problems of the social aspect of adaptation were the most difficult for you?		Social adaptation is determined by such main criteria, as acceptance of the person by society, well-being and sense of spiritual comfort.
	- removal from the university community	34	Passive adaptation
	- difficulty in making friends	32	Passive adaptation
	- non-acceptance of community rules and regulations	16	Disadaptation
	- no problem	18	Active adaptation

3	What problems of cultural adaptation were the most difficult for you?		Two factors, such as the level of English proficiency (in intercultural communication and knowledge) and the similarity of cultures (own and host), also have a significant impact on the perception of American culture and the unfamiliar environment by foreign students.
	- a huge difference between cultural values at home and in the USA	48	
	- “cultural shock”	38	
	- ignorance of the host country culture	14	
4	What problems of academic adaptation were the most difficult for you?		Academic adaptation is determined by the main criteria, such as to the requirements of the course, successful study, orientation to the future profession, the ability to work independently and in a group, establishing and developing formal (business) relationships with teachers and students, especially from their group, etc.
	- inadequate level of foreign language command and communication skills	42	
	- inadequacy of training in high school to the content of training programs at university	30	
	- mismatch between teaching and learning styles	28	
	- low level of professional orientation, motivation	18	
	- difficulty in speaking in public	36	
5	Other problems of the adaptation process:		Students’ motivation, mental and physical health is very important.
	- food	38	
	- financial problems	26	
	- longing for family and homeland	44	
	- weather conditions	28	

* Compiled by the authors

The survey has shown that adaptation for each of these areas can be progressive or regressive. A regressive adaptation manifests itself when a person formally keeps to the ideals of society and is also formally involved in the educational process, which creates new problematic situations for which it is extremely difficult to find adaptive mechanisms. A progressive adaptation is characterized by a meaningful acceptance of a person’s socially recognized values, which creates favorable con-

ditions for personal growth and creativity. So, orientation programs are very important for international students at the beginning of the studying process to facilitate their adaptation to the new American sociocultural and academic environment.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study that foreign students meet a lot of different adaptation challenges in the US universities. The research on social and psychological, cultural features of foreign students' adaptation to university studies and its theoretical and methodological fundamentals has been carried out. Some invariant components of foreign students' adaptation to a new university environment have been determined from the point of view of pedagogical science. The main student competences necessary for a successful adaptation process can be the subject of the following researches.

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