

About the Need in a Polycultural Dialogue

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The presented article deals with the issues of students' adaptation in a polycultural environment. It contains the data of the study of interpersonal interaction in a situation when students find themselves in a new socio-cultural environment on the example of young students from Armenia, Russia, and the United States. It discusses the symptoms, stages, and positive effects of a culture shock, substantiates the necessity of psychological efforts on adaptation of foreign students, describes the ways of such adaptation in a new cultural environment, factors influencing the expression of the culture shock and methods of its prevention, and substantiates the necessity of a polycultural dialog in solving the assigned tasks.

Key words: Polycultural interaction, Intrapersonal conflict, Culture shock, adaptation, polycultural dialog.

The urgency of the issue of forming a polycultural dialog in the context of the educational environment of Russia is determined by the progressive Russian ethnic intolerance among young people, which is manifested in individual behavior (ethnic prejudices, avoidance of inter-ethnic contacts, proneness to conflict), and in the group nationalist manifestations (ethnic

aggression, ethnic discrimination, ethnic conflicts, etc.). The study of tolerant consciousness in the educational environment has revealed that students (more than 54% of respondents) show clearly negative attitude towards other nationalities; more than 60% of them believe that Russia is only for ethnic Russians.

The study of the problem of inter-ethnic relations among young people and the features of adaptation of foreign students in the new cultural paradigm allowed unveiling a significant role of such state as *culture shock* in this process.

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Methodology

The term *culture shock* was for the first time used by an American anthropologist F.Boas. Further, it was developed within the framework of ethnolinguistics by K. Oberg (in the 1950s) and was used to describe the physical or emotional discomfort of a person who finds himself in a new cultural environment, which often leads to the need to understand and accept the new environment, and to adapt to an order, different from his former way and mode of life.

Currently, many scientific publications by psychologists, ethnic psychologists, sociologists, political scientists both abroad (Adrian Furnham, Stephen Bochner, Colleen A. Ward, Robert Menzies) [1, 2] and in Russia (A.G. Asmolov, S.N. Yenkolopov, E.P. Ilyin, V.G. Krysko, N.M. Lebedev, S.P. Myasoedov, G.U. Soldatova, T.G. Stefanenko, L.I. Fedorenko, E.I. Shlyagina *et al.*) are dedicated to studying this phenomenon³⁻¹². In these papers, a substantial characteristic of the phenomenon under consideration is provided, showing its risks and the necessity of finding ways to overcome it.

Considerable attention to the study of the problem was paid by the Austrian psychologist A. Adler¹³ who as far back as in the early 20th century proposed a model, which revealed the content of the culture shock state. This model is based on five stages: initial contact with the new environment (the state of euphoria, lack of perception of negative aspects of the new reality); disintegration – (the state of depression, perception of cultural differences and incompatibility with one's own culture; reintegration – (the state of non-acceptance, rejection of the other culture); autonomy – (the state of search for the ways to adapt to the new culture, study of the language and socio-cultural realities of the foreign country), and finally, independence – (the state of satisfaction, acceptance of the foreign culture, pleasure of interacting with it). So far, developments by A. Adler have been considered the most reputable in psychology.

Most often, a culture shock has negative consequences for an individual. However, let us pay attention to its positive aspects, as well, such as the need to mobilize and actively interact with the new environment, acquire new knowledge, etc., which leads to the acceptance of the new values

and patterns of behavior and, ultimately, is important for self-development and personal growth. Based on this, the Canadian psychologist J. Berry even offered to replace the term *culture shock* with the term *acculturation stress*: a stress, which eventually leads to positive adaptation to the new culture.

The culture shock phenomenon and its consequences were most fully described by S.P. Myasoedov⁷ who characterized it as a state of confusion and helplessness caused by the loss of normal value references and inability to answer the questions: where, when, and how to act properly in the situation of interaction with the new culture and its representatives. This concept describes the author's opinion, the conflict of old and new cultural norms and attitudes: the old ones, intrinsic to the individual as a representative of the society, which he has left, and the new ones, representing the society, in which he arrived. At the same time, the culture shock state is seen as a conflict between two cultures at a level of individual consciousness. The culture shock symptoms, according to S.P. Myasoedov, are general anxiety, irritability, fear of physical contact with other people, lack of confidence, insomnia, constant worries of different types, alcohol and drug abuse, psychosomatic disorders, depression, and suicide attempts. A feeling of loss of control over the situation, one's own incompetence, and failure to fulfill one's desires can be expressed in temper outbursts, aggression and hostility towards members of the host country.

All researchers of the problem notice that the degree and the states, in which culture shock manifests itself, depend on the individual features of a person who finds himself in a different culture¹⁴. Several types of reactions to another culture and its representatives have been identified: denial of cultural differences; protection of one's own cultural superiority; minimization of differences; acceptance of the possibility of existence of other cultural worlds, and their right for it; adaptation to a new culture and integration into it.

Thus, entering into a new environment usually results in an intrapersonal conflict, as experience of interaction with the new culture is often frightening and uncomfortable.

The summarized results of a study conducted in 2014 in the USA (Seattle, Bogacheva,

T.Y.)¹⁵, Russia (Moscow, Sinyagina, N.Y., E.G. Artamonova, T.N. Bانشchikova, N.A. Konovalova), and Armenia (Yerevan, Gevorgyan, M.M., Gevorgyan, A.M.) provided below, also confirm the above-said: during the period of adaptation, students of different nationalities differently experience the situation of meeting a new culture (culture shock) and behave differently with regard to other people. This depends on both the similarity of the encountered cultures and their peculiarities¹⁶. Young people are afraid of not only new living conditions, new relationships, but also new forms of behavior, responses to different situations. The shocking factors can include new clothes, food, the need to speak a foreign language, religion, customs, and sometimes even climate.

The mentioned research was aimed at studying adaptation of foreign students in a new polycultural environment, identification of factors influencing the expression of the polycultural shock, and identifying ways to prevent it. We used the L.G. Pochebut's technique of estimating ethnocentrism, the M.M. Gevorgyan's technique of estimating the level of readiness for inter-ethnic polycultural dialog of students, the questionnaire determining the level of ethnic tolerance of the modern student environment with account of the regional singularities, the V.V. Boyko's technique of diagnosing common communicative tolerance, and interviewing. The study was organized in the form of a hand-out questionnaire and a subsequent interview; it was attended by 60 foreign students enrolled in US colleges, 204 – in Russia, and 129 – in Armenia. Researchers were interested in the age, ethnicity, period of staying in the new cultural environment, issues related to the feelings of the students, ways to respond to different situations, experience of the culture shock, and ways to overcome it, and so on. Most of the surveyed students were between 17 and 25 years of age.

RESULTS

As demonstrated by the study conducted in the USA, almost 70% of the surveyed students had been staying there for one to five months. 53% of these students said that they knew what a culture shock was, and 47% of the them were not able to define it, though they cited examples directly pointing to the fact that they had clearly

experienced it (Fig. 1).

The results of the study conducted in the US showed that 76% of students indicated that they had experienced culture shock, and 24% said they had never experienced it. The interrogated students were planning to obtain education and return home (almost 84%), seeking to get as much knowledge as possible about the United States (72.4%), did not object intermarriage (about 56%), and all 100% of the respondents wanted to establish a relationship of trust regardless of nationality.

In Russia, the study involved 204 students of 12 different nationalities (Russians, Kumyks, Avars, Dargins, Kabardinians, Lezghins, Ingushes, Nogais, Armenians, Chechens, Uzbeks, Tatars) aged 17 to 25 years in six higher educational institutions.

It turned out that more than 92.3% of the respondents were proud to belong to their ethnic group. We failed to find those who would feel a

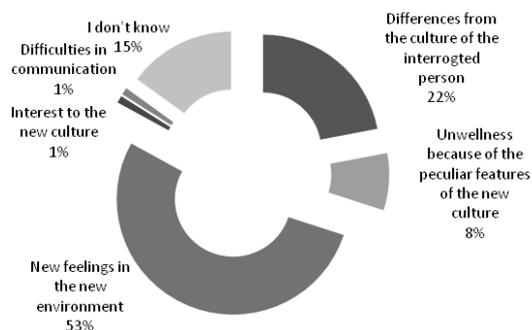


Fig. 1. Factors indicating the culture shock manifestations in foreign students studying in the United States (N=60)

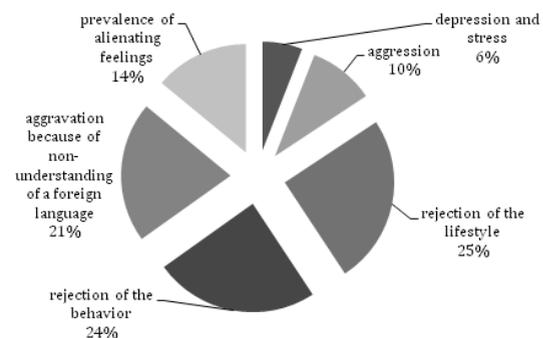


Fig. 2. Manifestations of a culture shock when interacting with people of other nationalities according to the survey of Russian students (N=204)

sense of shame for belonging to their national group in the study. However, it turned out that every fourth student determined his attitude to the person depending on his nationality, and one in six took part in inter-ethnic conflicts. Nevertheless, 70% expressed their willingness for inter-ethnic dialog.

The responses of students indicate the existing negative attitudes, biases, and prejudices. A significant proportion of respondents (about 86%) considered the culture, values, and behavior of other nationalities through the prism of their own ethnicity. A little more than 63% responded positively to the question "Is there a nationality that you dislike?" This figure remained unchanged compared to the same study conducted in 2009¹⁷.

We revealed that representatives of national minorities living in the territory of Russia are less ready to learn its history and adopt its traditions. Also, about 50% of the respondents categorically rejected any probability of intermarriage. At the same time, 90.7% of the students recognized the importance of addressing issues related to ethnic conflicts.

Among the surveyed young people, 20% avoid any kind of inter-ethnic interaction; 32% neither avoid it, nor seek to establish a relationship of trust with the representatives of other nationalities; only 48% (less than half) of students seek to establish a relationship of trust, regardless of nationality.

About 64% of the respondents felt a cultural shock when interacting with people of other nationalities. They named the following manifestations of such a shock: depression and stress (8.4%), aggression (14%), rejection of the lifestyle of people of another nationality (about 36%), or behavior in public places (34.8%); aggravation because of non-understanding of a foreign language (30%), prevalence of alienating feelings, hostility, anger, envy (20%), and others. (Figure 2).

The study has shown that a polycultural society feels the need for a new vision targeting integration of cultures. The basis for strengthening this process can become education aimed at formation of readiness for inter-ethnic dialog, which is planned to be reflected in the developing model of inter-ethnic polycultural dialog.

The study of the views of students of

Armenian higher educational institutions also showed their readiness for dialog of cultures (more than 65% of respondents voted "for" the dialog). However, there were responses that expressed concern that the ethnic polycultural dialog will lead to the unification of cultures, erasing the national identity of small nations and cultures, and, as a consequence, destruction of the nation, including the Armenians. 26% of respondents had not thought about it and did not consider it relevant or important for the Armenian youth.

In general, students highly appreciate the positive impact of international polycultural dialog on development of a person, expansion of his worldview (37% – very high, 24% – higher than the average, 24% – at the average level, 10% – below the average; the low level was not registered, but 5% could not determine their opinion).

Only 24% of respondents fully agreed with the statement that the Armenian society is not ready for constructive inter-ethnic communication, and the majority (47%) agreed to some extent.

A comparative analysis of these studies in Russia and Armenia allowed to register a number of differences in the understanding of the problem (the Russians put in the first place the emotional aspect, the Armenians – the historical aspect (about 68% noted a deep trauma from denial of the genocide), in personal manifestations (significant aggressiveness in inter-ethnic relations was revealed in students of Russia), in the migration intentions (significantly represented in students of Armenia).

In general, the study allowed to identify the main "symptoms" of the culture shock: a sense of longing for the native country; sadness and lack of desire to do anything; insomnia or, conversely, increased sleepiness; overeating: a person begins to eat and drink more than usual; a sense of dissatisfaction with the reality: a person does not like everything he does and everything that is happening around, and so on.

DISCUSSION

An analysis of the results of the study confirmed the presence of several *stages that characterize a culture shock*:

a) Euphoria of the new environment and new

- relationships;
- b) Excitement and feelings about the new culture, new lifestyle, and new people;
 - c) Stress and depression – it is difficult to adapt (homesickness, when confronted with problems);
 - d) Attempts to face the problem – a person begins to think positively and adapt his behavior to the new culture;
 - e) Adoption of the culture – a person begins to feel better (assimilating traditions, participating in local activities);
 - f) A secondary culture shock – when returning home, a person often re-experiences the same shock, but of his own country.

Respondents also noted the positive aspects of a culture shock: an opportunity to learn a new language; an opportunity to get acquainted with the culture of a new country, to learn new skills, an opportunity to make many new friends from all over the world, etc.

In determining ways to prevent culture shock, we focused on the results of the conducted study.

To the question: “How do you overcome a culture shock?” students gave the following answers: 60% responded that they had tried to communicate and understand the new culture; 10% responded that there was no need to overcome a culture shock, it needed only the time to go by, one just had to wait out; 5% said that they would never overcome it; and 5% said they would ask other people for advice and assistance.

In response to the question: “How can we prevent a culture shock?” 45% said that we should just try to understand the situation, evaluate it, and accept it. 15% said that they would study the culture before arriving in a new country. 30% responded that they simply would not think about it and this issue did not bother them at all. 5% said that they would participate in activities associated with this culture to learn more about the culture of the country. The remaining 5% said they would return to their countries as soon as possible if they suddenly face the problem of a culture shock.

The research allowed to identify that in the American system of education of foreign students considerable attention is paid to the prevention of a culture shock. Students are given

the goal not only to learn new subjects and acquire new knowledge, but also to assimilate the new culture – the culture of polycultural interaction, respect for traditions and peculiar features of people of other nationalities and ethnicities. In the US educational institutions, special classes aimed at familiarizing students with the peculiarities of life in a new environment are mandatory; students also introduce to their fellow students the culture and customs of their native country. This occurs both at the interaction in study groups and at various events, special group discussions aimed at understanding the cultures and traditions of different countries.

In Russia and Armenia, no special systematic work in this direction at the educational institutions participating in the study was revealed.

Let us try to systematize ways to overcome a culture shock. The researchers Lebedeva N.M., Stefanenko T.G., Shlyagina E.I., Yenikolopov S.N. [4, 18, 19 11] as far back as in the last century identified four basic ways to overcome a culture shock: ghettoization: avoidance of any contact with foreign culture and focus on cooperation with the representatives of their own culture; assimilation: the attempt to adapt as soon as possible to the new culture, learn its norms, values, behavior models, abandoning one’s own culture; interaction: an attempt to combine elements of the cultures that are old and new for the individual; colonization: an attempt to impose one’s own values, norms, and behavior models in the new culture, by contrasting them to those traditional for the culture, in which one finds himself²⁰.

The described study registered a manifestation of all the four of the above-mentioned methods. 83.6% of students studying in the USA named assimilation as the main way to overcome a culture shock. In Russia, about 32% named assimilation and 34.2% – interaction. In Armenia, almost 36% named ghettoization and 19.6% of the interrogated students named interaction.

An analysis of statements of the surveyed students in the three countries allowed for naming the most popular ways to prevent and overcome a culture shock, which are listed in order of priority: *usual affairs* (during the period of adaptation in another country, students try to cook

more familiar, traditional food, meet friends from their country, watch their favorite movies in their native language, etc.); *increased physical activity* (sports, excursions, meeting new friends can help overcome psychological stress, distract and remove unnecessary strain), *estimate of pluses* (discussion with the family and introspection of the positive sides (pluses) of living in another country and finding the ways to achieve them smooth the process of adaptation of students to the conditions of the new country), *new communications* (making new friends (a new friend) living in the new country, helps adapt to the new culture, especially when the new friend is familiarized with his culture).

One of the effective ways of adaptation of students in the new polycultural environment is a polycultural dialog, which will enable them to obtain special social knowledge (about the social norms, structure of the society, socially approved and disapproved behaviors in the society, etc.) to form primary understanding of the social reality and the everyday life, to gain the experience and positive attitude to the basic values of the society, the valuable relation to the social reality in general, and experience of independent social action. An important result of polycultural dialog is the formation of *polycultural thinking*, which ultimately contributes to conflict-free civic identification of a personality in a polycultural society and his integration in the polycultural world space.

CONCLUSION

For fast and efficient adaptation, students need to get acquainted with the culture of the country even before entering into it, try to understand its culture and peculiar features (rules) of life, learn how to ask people (in both their native country and the new one) for advice and help, set oneself up to assimilating the new culture. The technology of a polycultural dialog can largely contribute to it.

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