



More International Students Coming to Russia: Pros and Cons

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Introduction. Despite numerous research works on international students' training at Russian universities, no analysis of efforts to increase student body has been made so far. In this paper, the authors analyze various aspects of policies aimed at increasing international students' body (economic advantages, sociocultural benefits, education system changes, international students' adaptation management). The goal of the paper is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the international students' rise in the total population of Russian universities.

Materials and Methods. The study comprised several stages, including statistical data screening, analysis of international students' adaptation measures efficiency, the education process participants' survey and observation of the activities of public agencies responsible for international students' stay and study in Russia. The survey involved about 100 university employees, an equal amount of small and medium business representatives and 500 international students from Russian universities. 500 international students participated in a questionnaire survey, and digital content of Russian universities' websites has been analyzed in order to obtain data necessary for the study.

Results. The study revealed a trend toward a rise in international student body at Russian universities, with advantages including higher universities' incomes, jobs preservation despite the demographic instability, and development of the region's small and medium business owing to an increased demand for goods and services. The trend also provided socio-cultural and educational benefits and revealed the need to manage students' adaptation, as well as to establish and develop interaction between universities and federal agencies.

Discussion and Conclusion. The research results provide a contribution to education and student body management and regional business strategy planning. The findings may be of assistance to heads of recruitment agencies and bodies responsible for accompanying international students at the place of stay, as well as to service industry managers.

Keywords: international student body, education process participants, pre-university training, international students' adaptation management, motivation, stay in the country, receiving university, education export

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Оригинальная статья

Плюсы и минусы увеличения численности иностранного контингента российских вузов

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Введение. Несмотря на многочисленные исследования, касающиеся обучения иностранных граждан в российских вузах, работы по анализу результатов увеличения студенческого контингента практически отсутствуют. Авторы статьи впервые изучили различные стороны политики наращивания иностранного контингента (экономическая привлекательность, социокультурные приобретения, изменения системы образования, развитие системы управления адаптацией иностранцев в вузах). Цель статьи – анализ плюсов и минусов процесса увеличения численности иностранных студентов в общем контингенте учебных заведений высшего образования России.

Материалы и методы. Исследование включало следующие этапы: анализ статистики, эффективности мероприятий по адаптации иностранных обучающихся; опрос и анкетирование участников образовательного процесса, наблюдение за работой структур, сопровождающих пребывание иностранных обучающихся в вузах. В опросе приняли участие около 100 сотрудников вузов, такое же количество представителей малого и среднего бизнеса, 500 иностранных обучающихся из разных вузов Российской Федерации. Для изучения проблемы было проведено анкетирование 500 иностранных обучающихся, проанализирован цифровой контент учебных заведений разных субъектов РФ.

Результаты исследования. В результате исследования была выявлена тенденция увеличения иностранного контингента российских вузов и связанные с ней преимущества: рост дохода вузов, сохранение научно-педагогического коллектива на фоне демографических качелей, развитие малого и среднего бизнеса региона за счет увеличения востребованности услуг и товаров, повышение уровня социокультурной компетенции, межкультурной коммуникации, уровня владения иностранными языками. Исследование показало необходимость организовывать и управлять процессом адаптации иностранных обучающихся, создавать и развивать каналы взаимодействия вуза и федеральных служб.

Обсуждение и заключение. Полученные результаты вносят вклад в развитие менеджмента образования и управления студенческим контингентом, планирование бизнес-стратегий региона. Материалы статьи будут полезны руководителям служб, занимающихся рекрутингом и сопровождением иностранных обучающихся к месту их пребывания, руководителям предприятий сферы услуг.

Ключевые слова: контингент иностранных граждан, участник образовательного процесса, довузовская подготовка, управление адаптацией иностранных обучающихся, мотивация, пребывание в стране, принимающий вуз, экспорт образовательных услуг

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Introduction

The 21st century is the age of globalization, mobility, transparency and accessibility of various countries for tourism, business, culture exchange and education. Potential employees have to meet the requirements of today, living at the time of fast speeds and infinite possibilities. The need to be highly

competitive in the labor market determines the demand for high quality education. It is not uncommon when an educational establishment which offers an attractive educational product is located abroad. The majority of nations offer academic programs for international students. Russia is not an exception. Our country is promoting educational



services in the global market. A focus on expanding foreign student population is a trend of contemporary education which depends on a number of factors.

In 2017, Russia's Government approved the "Developing Russian education system export potential" priority project. It contains an estimate of potential risks and opportunities, as well as results which the country may expect upon its implementation by 2025¹. However, having studied a number of academic papers, we can conclude that issues of forecasting the results of foreign student population expansion at Russian universities and international students' adaptation management are underexplored.

Russian universities have been popular among international students for many years. The history of training international students in Russia began as early as in 1870s, after the Russian Ministry of public education had taken a respective decision. It was designed as help to friendly nations which suffered from the Turkish rule².

In the Soviet education system, which dates back to 1920s–1930s, international students were attributed to the "national minorities" category, as well as all USSR citizens whose nationalities were other than Russian. International students' education in the USSR was focused on training specialists capable of performing immediate tasks in various ways, taking into consideration colonial and vassal states development specifics [1, p. 137].

Today Russia offers a wide range of educational services in the global market, with foreign student population expanding. Paragraph 5 (b) of Russian President's Decree No. 204 of 7 May, 2018, "On national goals and strategic objectives of Russian Federation development up to 2024", provides for at least two-fold increase in the number of international students at Russian establishments of higher education and research

organizations³. Such an expansion of foreign student population will enable the country to implement strategic development objectives. Without any doubt, it has a number of advantages. On the other hand, it will inevitably bring about some challenges.

The economic factor is the first one taken into consideration when the expansion of foreign student population at Russian universities is discussed. At the same time, other aspects and risks connected with foreigners' stay in Russia and their adaptation often remain issues of minor importance, which is not right. This paper is focused on analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of foreign student population expansion at Russian establishments of higher education and on studying the patterns of international students' adaptation management and control used at different universities in order to minimize risks and negative aspects of their stay in a specific educational establishment, city and country.

Literature Review

The trend toward increasing international students' population has been observed in various countries for a decade, as may be confirmed with sociological and statistical research done in the US [2], the UK [3], West Europe [4; 5], Russia [6; 7] and other states. The majority of statistical findings indicate a significant rise in the number of international students coming from China, Saudi Arabia and other Middle East states, as well as from India, Canada and Latin America. Data pertaining to the most numerous national groups may vary, depending on the country which offers education services. For instance, international students' population in the US as of 2019 was represented by 369; 548 students from China; 202,014 students from India; 52,250 students from South Korea; 37,080 students from Saudi Arabia and

¹ [Developing Russian Education System Export Potential: Priority Project Passport]: approved by the Government of the Russian Federation; 2017 [Electronic resource]. Available at: http://d-russia.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/education_export.pdf (accessed 11.01.2021). (In Russ.)

² [Informational Transparency of Universities: Challenges and Solutions]. *Akkreditatsiya v obrazovanii = Accreditation in Education*. 2019; (112). [Electronic resource]. Available at: https://akvobr.ru/informacionnaya_otkrytost_vuzov_problemy_i_resheniya.html (accessed 11.01.2021). (In Russ.)

³ [On National Goals and Strategic Objectives of Russian Federation Development up to 2024: Russian Federation President's Decree No. 204 of 7 May, 2018]. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/43027> (accessed 11.01.2021). (In Russ.)

26,122 students from Canada. At the same time, the majority of international students in Spain come from other European countries, as well as from China and Latin America. In Russia, international students come mainly from Kazakhstan, China and Turkmenistan⁴.

Globalization consequences, academic mobility and increase in international student body enable researchers to conclude that higher education quality and people's cultural level in receiving countries is improving [8]. Besides, it indicates the development of trade, service and entertainment industries in such states⁵. International students are usually well-educated and display good manners and motivation toward building solid skills and competencies. It cannot but influence their fellow-students who are natives in the country of stay. Besides, export of education services is a significant source of income for any university and any country, which is why the increase in international student body definitely has its economic advantages [9]. During the COVID pandemic accompanied with the economic crisis which affects many income-producing branches of economy, it is education that comes to rescue and mitigates the lack of funds usually received from foreign economic operations.

Despite the above positive aspects of academic mobility, scholars worldwide focus on adaptation challenges, especially during the first year in a foreign environment⁶, when international students learn to contact people whose behavioral standard and language is different from theirs. Specialists in pedagogy, psychology and sociology are concerned with adaptation management and improvement.

The fact that the academic community attaches priority to the problem is another evidence of its comprehensive character. Though some adaptation mechanisms may have much in common, they do vary depending on the receiving country, the educational establishment type, its location, as well as linguistic, religious or cultural differences or similarities. Each new research reveals new challenges, beginning with the definition and interpretation of adaptation and ending with assessing positive and negative results of international student body expansion in synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

Materials and Methods

A number of statutory documents recently issued by the Russian government display the country's motivation toward education export. Examples include the Russian Federation government program "Education Development" for 2013–2020," Russian government priority project "Export of education" and Russian President's Decree No. 204 of 7 May, 2018, "On national goals and strategic objectives of Russia's development till 2024". The proactive approach to attracting international students has yielded its first positive results. It has also entailed specific consequences and the need to amend the strategies of increasing international student body. Methods of working with large student groups differ from those used in individual work. A significant rise in international student body at universities is accompanied with legal issues, logistics, psychological and socio-cultural challenges, to name just a few. If unsolved, the problems

⁴ Arefiev A.L. [Training Foreign Citizens at Establishments of Higher Education in the Russian Federation]. *Statisticheskyy sbornik* = Statistical Bulletin. Moscow, Russia; 2018; (15):183. (In Russ.); Arefiev A.L., Sheregi F.E. Training Foreign Citizens at Establishments of Higher Education in the Russian Federation. *Statisticheskyy sbornik* = Statistical Bulletin. Moscow; 2015; (12):197. (In Russ.)

⁵ Sanmartin O.R. España, el país de la OCDE con mayor aumento de estudiantes internacionales al quitar la Selectividad a los extranjeros [Electronic resource]. *El Mundo*; Madrid, España; 2018. Available at: <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2018/06/20/5b294869468aeb0b588b45fd.html> (accessed 11.01.2021). (In Spa.); West J. Growth of International Student Numbers in Higher Education [Electronic resource]. *QS*; 2018. Available at: <https://www.qs.com/growth-international-students-higher-education> (accessed 20.11.2020). (In Eng.)

⁶ Bastrikin A. International Student Enrollment Statistics. *Educationdata.org*. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://educationdata.org/international-student-enrollment-statistics> (accessed 30.12.2020); Dorset J. Exploring International Student Adaptation through a First-Year Experience Course at Iowa State University. Graduate Theses and Dissertations. Ames, Iowa; 2017. Available at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6303&context=etd> (accessed 20.11.2020). (In Eng.); [Export of Russian Educational services]. *Statistical Collection*. Issue 9. Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation. Moscow: Center for Sociological Research; 2019. 536 p. Available at: <https://www.5top100.ru/documents/library/113494> (accessed 30.12.2020) (In Russ.)

keep accumulating, bringing about frustration and lost hopes for all participants of the education process. It is likely to affect Russia's education export, decline trust in it and reduce the international student body in the future. The need to solve such issues and prevent any negative scenario has motivated us to do this research.

The study includes the following stages:

1) Analysis of statistical data, including works by a team of scholars headed by A.L. Arefiev and dealing with statistical data collection, analysis and integration (since 2013).

2) Student adaptation measures efficiency assessment, as well as assessment of measures aimed at minimizing negative consequences for the visiting and the receiving parties, based on the example of universities in Central Russia.

3) The empirical stage: questionnaire surveys involving the education process participants (staff of various university departments and offices, international students, their parents and/or authorized representatives), the analysis of Russian universities' website contents as they are perceived by students, their parents and/or authorized representatives, as well as observation of the activities undertaken by various agencies responsible for international students' stay and study in Russia.

4) Summarizing the data obtained for the purpose of this paper.

A theoretical and methodological approach was used. The research methods included document screening and document analysis, as well as statistical data analysis. Relevant statutory documents and digital content of higher education institutions were considered. Among the empirical methods employed in the research were adaptation process observation, international students' survey and interview, contrasting and comparing the data obtained and systematization of the findings.

Results

A study of the student population at Russian establishments of higher education for 6 years has revealed almost a 1.5-time rise in the number of international students (from 255 students in 2012–2013 academic year to 334,5 students in 2017–2018 academic year). There was a downward trend in the percentage of international students studying at different education levels on a fee-paying basis: while in 2012–2013 academic year this number was 65.7%, in 2017–2018 academic year it dropped to 63.3%⁷. Still, over half of international students study on a fee-paying basis, that is, provide income into universities' budgets (Fig. 1).

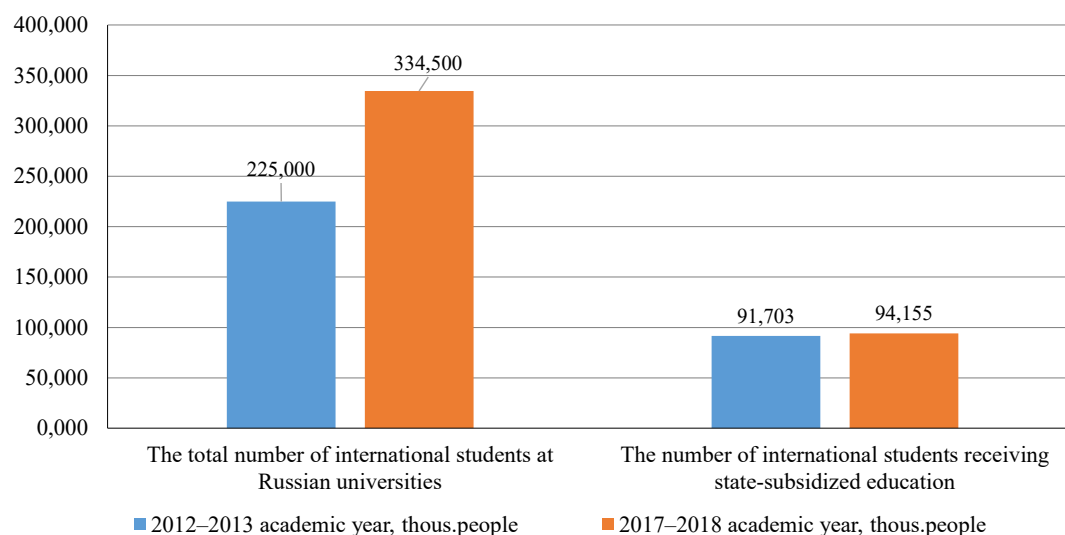


Fig. 1. International student body at Russian universities

⁷Arefiev A.L. [Training Foreign Citizens at Establishments of Higher Education in the Russian Federation].



It should be stressed that income from for-profit education might be higher if the price-forming policy for major academic programs in most popular fields of training were different. For instance, in 1990s, Russia's Health Ministry recommended that the tuition fee for "General Medicine" program, which was most popular among international students, should be at least 2,000 USD. Today no recommendations of this kind are issued. At the same time, tuition fees for various training programs in medicine is dozens of times lower in Russia than in third-world countries, to say nothing about economically developed ones.

Even those international students, who study on a budgetary basis under a quota established by Russia's government, do secure profit for the respective city, region and the country, as they buy equipment, kitchenware, clothes, excursions et cetera. In 2018–2019 academic year, eighty students of the Pre-University department at Belgorod State University took part in a sociological poll which revealed that the average budget of one foreign student per month equaled to about 650–680 USD, exclusive of tuition fees and accommodation. Part of the cash received by shops, stores, entertainment and catering establishments, health services and

so on, is channeled into municipal, regional or federal budget in the form of taxes.

Besides, having a sufficient number of international students means that there are jobs for the academic staff and maintenance personnel at universities and campuses. It is a good trend, taking into consideration poor demographic situation that Russia has been facing for two decades already [10; 11]. The demographic decline and government's documents standardizing the correlation between the number of students and lecturers may result in staff redundancy. As early as in 2012, the government set the goal of transferring higher education to per capita financing⁸. Russia's government resolution No. 722-p of 30 April, 2014, "On approving the roadmap "Changes in the social sphere aimed at enhancing the efficiency of education and science", provides for an upward trend in the correlation between the number of students and lecturers. For instance, in 2018 the recommended correlation was 12 students per lecturer, while in 2013 this number equaled to 10.2 students (Fig. 2). This will result in academic staff redundancy unless total student population is increased⁹. Thus, expansion of international student body is an opportunity to preserve high-skilled academic personnel [12; 13].

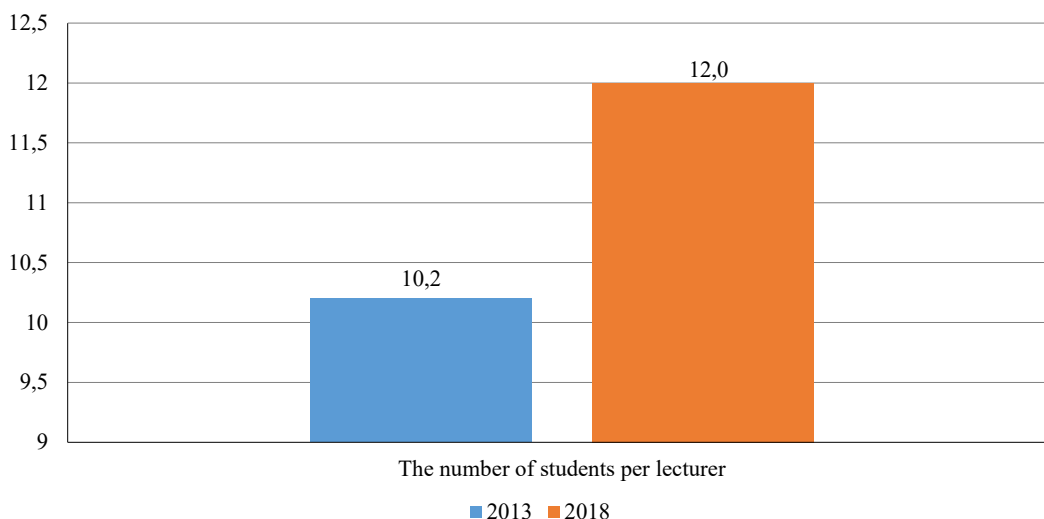


Fig. 2. Changes in the correlation between the number of students and lecturers

⁸ [Developing Russian Education System Export Potential"]. Available at: http://d-russia.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/education_export.pdf.

⁹ Vadimova I.V. Transfer to the New Correlation between the Teacher and Student Number. *Sovetnik bukhgaltera* = An Accountant's Counsel. 2015; (6):14-18. Available at: <https://www.elibrary.ru/contents.asp?id=34117073&selid=24393050> (accessed 20.12.2020). (In Russ.)



Apart from the economic advantages of training international students, other positive aspects of their stay in Russia should be mentioned.

First of all, Russian citizens receive an opportunity to learn about the culture, history and traditions of other countries firsthand [14; 15]. There is a Cross-Cultural Communication Centre at Belgorod State University where various international events are organized. For instance, in 2017–2018 academic year over a thousand of events took place involving international students, including 200 ones aimed at the presentation of national cultures and history, building cross-cultural communication competencies, or just providing an opportunity to get acquainted with each other. Among such events were Benin Independence Day, Martisor – Moldova's Spring holiday, Son Day, a traditional holiday of Latin America countries, Native Language Day et cetera. It enables Russian people to broaden their horizons and to hear opinions of certain traditions, facts, events and persons which may be different from the official stance. By comparing subjective views about some state, culture or nation with the opinion of its natives, Russian citizens make their world views more objective and true-to-life.

Second, Russians receive an opportunity to take a detached view of their own country, as they can hear foreigners' opinions about historical and contemporary events, people and cultural values. Apart from a better understanding of specific international problems, it enables them to adjust Russia's image in the minds of international students, which cannot but have a positive effect on building a positive perception of our country on a global scale¹⁰ [16]. It is a known fact that the perception of World War II real events, victims and our country's role in the struggle with fascism may differ in various nations. The personnel of Belgorod State University Pre-University department have designed and organized a series of events dedicated to the history of Great Patriotic War of

1941–1945, Nazi occupation and siege victims, concentration camp prisoners, the role of Soviet soldiers in liberation of Europe et cetera. These included presentation lectures, excursions, demonstrating thematic movies and so on. The events received an emotional response of the participants and visitors, and the overwhelming majority of international students changed their opinion of respective historical facts. Building in international students a system of values typical of Russia's space makes them more tolerant towards Russia, which, in its turn, indirectly changes the attitude of their fellow-citizens to our country¹¹ [17].

Third, training international students is a stimulus for the academic staff, making lecturers polish their teaching methods, develop and implement new pedagogic technologies enabling the education process to become more intensive, improve time management and spend in-class and self-study time more reasonably and minimize risks of poor information digestion [18].

A new challenge that the academic community has faced is a global switch to distance learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Universities now cannot afford to lose the international student body. At the same time, they must be able to attract new ones, despite the unfavourable conditions they are facing. A fundamental change in the approach to teaching international students is necessary. There is abundant evidence of the lecturers' increased interest in training international students, including numerous discussions in social networks devoted to teaching various subjects in groups of international students (especially to teaching Russian as a foreign language), the emergence and renovation of Internet-resources for studying Russian as a foreign language, preparation and presentation of PhD theses in theory and methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language, and so on.

Training international students and international student body expansion poses

¹⁰ Sánchez C.H. Dificultades "invisibles" de los estudiantes extranjeros para promocionar en el sistema educativo. In: F. J. García Castaño y N. Kressova (Coords.). Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre Migraciones en Andalucía. Granada: Instituto de Migraciones; 2011. p. 485-489. (In Spa.)

¹¹ Ramírez M.P. El proceso de adaptación sociocultural: un modelo sociocognitivo de aculturación (Tesis de Doctorado). Universidad Pontificia Comillas ICAI-ICADE, Madrid, España; 2017. Available at: <https://repositorio.comillas.edu/rest/bitstreams/93778/retrieve> (accessed 11.01.2021). (In Spa.)

a number of challenges as well. Among them is adaptation management and control. A lot of academic papers have been published which focus on foreigners' adaptation to new cultural environment, climate, social conditions, new educational environment, as well as on the experience gained by specific universities in solving the above issues [19]. We will therefore attempt to reveal and analyze international students' adaptation management and control patterns applied by several universities, including St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, Tomsk Polytechnic University, Belgorod State University and Voronezh State University. All of the above universities have many years of experience in admission, enrollment and training international students, and there is a significant number of international students there. These universities demonstrate specific foreign student population dynamic patterns: upward trends, as is the case with St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, Tomsk Polytechnic University and Belgorod State University) and downward ones, as in the case of Voronezh State University.

Each university has a respective service (office, institute, sector or department) responsible for reaching prospective international students and admission issues. In some cases, several infrastructural units share this function. For instance, The Department for Foreign Affairs at Belgorod State University is responsible for contacting prospective students, while the Enrolment Board deals with the admission and enrolment of Russian and international students.

Upon arrival, international students can be accompanied (if necessary), accommodated and offered assistance in migration registration [20; 21]. It may be done by employees of the above services (as at Voronezh State University) or of other offices (for instance, the Adaptation Office at Tomsk Polytechnic University or the Department for Foreign Affairs and Pre-University Department at Belgorod State University), as well as by other persons, for instance, the so-called adapters – members of student association (as at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University).

Respective offices at universities are responsible for international students'

registration with migration authorities, visa extension and other issues (for example, the for coordination between the university and the region). These offices closely cooperate with regional departments of Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry. Most typically, somebody must accompany international students in their interaction with university offices responsible for migration issues. Students may be accompanied by volunteers, the university employees (tutors of academic groups, cohorts, associations of fellow-countrymen or education support staff).

Should any issues arise during the academic year (which is most significant for the Pre-University training), they may be solved by the structural unit staff (such as tutors) from among the academic staff (including the teachers of Russian as a foreign language at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University; the teachers of Russian as a foreign language, of general theoretical subjects, and education support staff at Belgorod State University); respective institute, sector or office personnel competent in particular issues, as at Voronezh State University; special adaptation office and academic staff at Tomsk Polytechnic University; the so-called adapters, who are not employees, at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University; national community heads and members at Voronezh State University and Belgorod State University.

As there are many aspects in the interaction between international students and the University structural units, the coordination between them must be good enough in order to ensure a timely and successful solution to any problem [22; 23]. The university personnel may be responsible for such coordination, including a group tutor at Belgorod State University, an adaptation office specialist at Voronezh State University or a student association member at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University.

Let us summarize our findings and answer the following questions: 1) if there is a special service responsible for working with international students; 2) if there is a service responsible for migration issues, that is, migration registration, visa extension, invitation visas et cetera; 3) if there is a service responsible for international students' adaptation.



First, each of the Universities mentioned above has a respective office responsible for reaching and admission of international students. They correspond with prospective applicants, companies and partner universities, they organize and participate in the events to promote the educational projects of their universities abroad and focus on expanding the foreign student population at their universities. These offices may have various names, though they all share a distinctive feature – at each university, it is a separate structural unit which is included neither in the Pre-University department nor in any other institute of department.

Second, there is a migration office at each of the above universities. It is responsible for document processing, contacting the migration department of the regional interior ministry directorate, migration registration and de-registration, visa extension and so on. As well as the above service, this one is independent on academic units, but it works in close contact with them in terms of monitoring the international student population and meeting document submission terms in compliance with Russian Federation migration law.

Third, two of the above universities have special units responsible for adaptation issues. At Voronezh State University, it is the adaptation office, while at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University it is the “Adapters” public institute project. At two of the universities there are tutors appointed from among the academic staff, which is especially important at the pre-university stage. At Belgorod State University there are several student associations, including “The Russian

club”, “International Students Office” and “Welcome to Russia”. They organize various events aimed at socio-cultural adaptation of international students. Thus, there are four ways to solve international students’ adaptation problems: 1) establishment of a respective structural unit; 2) assigning adaptation management duties to the academic staff (a system of tutors and instructors); 3) entrusting student associations with foreign citizens’ adaptation management duties; 4) allocation of adaptation management responsibilities among the academic staff, student association members and various university services.

Discussion and Conclusion

The above findings enable us to conclude that apart from having some advantages, the significant increase in international student body at Russia’s universities poses a number of challenges connected with adaptation management. Establishments of higher education are in a continuous search for the best solution. New concepts of interaction with international students’ population are developed, tested and implemented. Universities set up and develop offices to attract international students, control their compliance with migration law and so on. There are various ways to assist international students in primary and socio-cultural adaptation. However, the role of student associations in it keeps increasing. A specific category of volunteers is now emerging. They display a high level of internal motivation and cross-cultural competence, which is sufficient for a positive cooperation with international students.

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