

# Adaptation of International Students: Challenges and Solutions

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**Abstract:** This study presents research on ways and means of adapting international students to higher education in a Russian university. These international students are mostly from CIS countries (former Soviet republics). As a background, the article outlines the role and place of the Russian language in these countries. It goes on to describe how Samara (a large industrial city with 1,200,000 population, formerly Kuibyshev, in the valley of the Volga river) and its environment are presented to newcomers from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kirgizstan and Armenia and analyzes the respondents' answers to the questions in an online anonymous questionnaire that shows the degree of adaptation of foreign students to education in the Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education (SSUSSE). The paper gives an overview of the activities held at SSUSSE aimed at international students' efficient integration into Russian everyday life and culture. The paper ends with some conclusions.

**Keywords:** Russian language, adaptation, foreign students, questionnaire, Kazakh students, Uzbek students, Tajik students, Turkmen students, Armenian students, Kirgiz students.

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## 1. Introduction

The integration of higher education in Russia into a worldwide educational space includes – among other features – admission of foreign students. Having foreign students in Russian higher education establishments is an important element of the country's higher-education development, as well as an indicator of the high-quality education and attractiveness of an educational institution. Foreign students are studying in Russian universities as part of different exchange programs. Most of the foreign students come from CIS countries (Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and others).

Our study is concerned with ways and means of adapting international students to higher education in a Russian university. One of several adjustment problems mentioned in previous research is that of the language of instruction (Kulinich, Makeeva & Savitskaya 2019). The better students' command of the language, the better are their chances to feel secure in the classroom and everyday life. That is why we felt it necessary to find out how foreign students in our university feel about the Russian language and in what ways their attitude is affected by the official status of Russian in their respective countries. These findings suggested starting a comprehensive program of purposeful activities: International Students Integration in Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education.

## 2. Literature review

Studying in a different country can be an exciting and challenging experience for international students who are forced to deal with many adjustment problems, particularly those relating to academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment (Ward & Kennedy 1993, 1999).

Foreign students usually deal with adjusting to the culture of the host country but may feel invisible during their classes (San Diego 2017: 50). To be successful, international

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students must adapt culturally to their host country and their new academic situations. The degree to which the international students adjust is key to minimizing their stress and helps them to more readily adapt (Misra & Castillo 2004). The foreign students' adaptation to the new environment is understood as acceptance of cultural differences, smoothing a psychological barrier between the culture of students and the culture of the recipient country (Vershina & Kocheva 2015: 124).

Students are also faced by the pressure of living independently, which makes them feel lonely, homesick and isolated from the domestic students. Foreign students face depression due to lack of concentration and low motivation with regards to their academics and social life (Lin & Yi 1997). Sociocultural adaptation appears to be vital in the overall academic achievement of foreign students. It is influenced by various factors that support "culture learning and social skills acquisition" (Ward & Kennedy 1999: 661). Letting the foreign students feel a sense of belongingness and acceptance from their peers and professors would positively affect their academic stay in the host university (Li & Campbell 2005). These and other problems that students face are described in numerous papers (e.g., Perrucci & Hu 1995; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld 2005; Li 2010; Wilson 2011.).

Studies suggest that problems can arise from differences in the language-determined discourse of intercultural and interpersonal communication and the cultural distance between the communication patterns of the participants (Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001). The closer the student culture is to that of the host community, the easier the interaction and adjustment will be (Mehdizadeh & Scott 2005). This influences our results, since many former Soviet Union citizens (in their late forties and older) speak Russian and even feel that they partly belong to the brotherhood of nations that once made up a whole (Fedotova & Miller 2018).

We should note that, in most countries of the former Soviet Union, the domains of use of the Russian language have severely narrowed since 1991. However, in contrast to such regions as the South Caucasus and the Baltic countries, in Central Asia Russian continues to be widely used in "prestige domains" (Fierman 2015: 56). We have focused our research on these countries.

### **3. The role of the Russian language in the post-Soviet era**

Instruction in Russian universities is in Russian. Thus, the first prerequisite of successful education for foreign students is a good command of Russian. We will therefore give a brief outline of how widespread Russian is in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and of how many people there speak it as a first or second language.

In the context of promoting everything ethnic and pre-Soviet, the generally accepted rule became that "proper" Kazakhs should speak Kazakh and "proper" Uzbeks should speak Uzbek (Letnyakov 2015). The policy of linguistic nationalism has been pushing Russian out of the public space, undermining its potential to be used by Russia to exert influence in the region. The growing negative perception of the Soviet past and colonial policies of the Russian Empire in Central Asia presents Russian as the language of the oppressors. This is not to say that the Central Asian states have totally banished the Russian language, but it does highlight how nation-building discourses have made it difficult to adopt policies in support of expanding education and entertainment using Russian (Bekmurzayev 2019).

Thus far it has been mostly people in the capitals and regions like the northern parts of Kazakhstan who have benefited from the educational opportunities provided by the Russian soft-power projects such as schools and universities offering education in Russian. There are educational institutions sponsored by Russia aimed at promoting the Russian language and culture in Kyrgyzstan, all located in the capital Bishkek. The same holds true for the Tajik-Russian Slavonic University, which is in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan.

The two spheres where Russian is still of high value in these countries are the educational and media spheres – especially with regards to technical, medical and military education. The lack of educational materials and the poor quality of education in local languages have resulted in a high demand for education in the Russian language.

On the other hand, there is growing competition from education possibilities in the English, Turkish and Chinese languages. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asia region became a subject of interest for the US, Turkey, China, Iran, Arabic and European states. All these states have sought to gain a foothold in the region, including working through soft-power projects. Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have adopted national programs introducing education in three languages, adding English. Turkey has built a network of elite schools and universities in the region through which it plans to raise a new generation of national elites with a friendly attitude towards Turkey; cultural and religious similarities provide Turkey with a competitive advantage.

Next, we will take a brief look at the homelands of the international students.

### 3.1. Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan stands out in terms of the Russian language being the most prevalent alternative to the Kazakh. In both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Russian has an official status mentioned in the constitution. It is widely used in paperwork, although the government has adopted a roadmap program according to which all paperwork will be done in Kazakh. The former President Nazarbayev issued a decree requiring all the discussions in the parliament and government to be in Kazakh, albeit providing translation. Although Kazakhstan has the largest number of students receiving education in Russian (800,000), this number has decreased by 1,4 million in the last 25 years, due to the closure of 5,861 Russian-language schools (Bekmurzayev 2019).

The government has adopted a program that promises to introduce high-school education in three languages: Kazakh, English and Russian. In February 2018, President Nazarbayev signed a decree on a shift to Latin script, with plans to complete by 2025. Although Russian is still widely used in political and social life, there are no doubts what language will be prioritized in future: the state language will be Kazakh and the trend for trilingualism in Kazakh, Russian and English is evident (Syzdykbayeva 2016).

Russians in Kazakhstan make up about 20% of the total population (other sources cite higher figures, like 23%), making Kazakhstan home to probably the largest ethnic Russian population outside Russia (United Nations 2020).

Russian is still co-official and widely spoken by many bilingual ethnic Kazakhs. In 3,819 schools, the language of instruction is Kazakh; 2,406 schools use Russian, while 2,138 schools are bilingual Russian and Kazakh (OECD Reviews 2015). Besides Kazakh, the country's media use Russian widely to cover international and domestic news, not only news of importance to the Russian community. Personal opinions of educated Kazakhs are that Russian is still considered as an elite class language, though no one goes public with this. Russian serves as a *lingua franca* throughout Central Asia. Since Kazakhstan is home to a very large number of ethnic groups, Russian serves as the primary language of inter-ethnic communication. Therefore, students from Kazakhstan feel at home at SSUSSE both from the point of view of studies and everyday communication.

### 3.2. Turkmenistan

The most extreme case of moving away from everything Russian, including the language, is Turkmenistan. The country has done everything to distance itself from Russia's linguistic soft power. The first step was the shift to the Latin alphabet in 1991. Around 82% of the population do not speak Russian. The remaining 18% are the older generation who grew up in

the Soviet Union. Education in Russian, either at the elementary or secondary levels, is almost non-existent.

The only media outlet available in Russian is the official newspaper *Neutral Turkmenistan*. There are no radio or TV shows in Russian; the same applies to all other print materials. Turkmenistan now has a new generation of citizens who do not have any knowledge of Russian.

The Turkmen language is the only state language in the country, as stated in the constitution. Russian is the language of inter-ethnic communication. Russian is not considered a foreign language in Turkmenistan. There are many people that feel comfortable communicating in Russian rather than in Turkmen, but these again are mostly middle-aged people.

Since 2001 the language of instruction in all higher-education institutions is Turkmen. Departments of Russian and Russian literature were dissolved. Russian-speaking people who fail a Turkmen language test cannot be civil servants. Among more than 1,900 secondary schools, only 49 have Russian as the main language of instruction (with about 130,000 students). However, in many Turkmen schools there may be a class with Russian instruction, and parents try to get their children enrolled in this. It is commonly believed that a command of Russian (together with English or Turkish) will be an advantage when looking for employment. Russian classes in Turkmen schools are given once a week, which is not enough to master the language. There are no Russian kindergartens in the country.

During the presidency of the first president, S. Niyazov, all the schools using languages of national minorities as the language of instruction were closed. Former Russian, Uzbek and Kazakh schools were converted into Turkmen schools. Only in major cities are there several schools with one to two classes continuing to be offered Russian as the main language of instruction. Originally, only children of parents holding Russian citizenship or migrant status in Russian were entitled to study there. An official from a provincial board of education justified this decision on the grounds of a reduction in the number of children from families with Russian citizenship or migrant status, which led to numerous cases of bribery to enable children to attend classes with Russian as the language of instruction without having legitimate grounds.

Therefore, students from Turkmenistan coming to study in Russia are in a less advantageous position than students from Kazakhstan and need more time and effort to adapt both to the academic milieu and to everyday life in Samara.

### **3.3. Tajikistan**

Tajik-Russian bilingualism, which has existed from when the Tajiks became part of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, has been undergoing significant changes recently. The current generation of young people speaks worse Russian than the older generation. The constitution of Tajikistan does not mention Russian as an official language but says that it can be used for communication between people belonging to different ethnic communities as a *lingua franca*. In 2009, an amendment was made to the constitution removing any mention of Russian. The language was later returned to its original status. The number of speakers who speak Russian as their first language has decreased in the past few decades due to the large-scale emigration of ethnic Russians from Tajikistan to their homeland in Russia. However, demand for Russian-language tuition is growing in the country, since more than a million nationals leave each year to work as labor migrants in Russia or Kazakhstan. Instruction in Russian in secondary education is limited to 1% of the population. In higher education, the situation is better: there are many groups in medical, technical and other universities with instruction in Russian. There are weekly newspapers in Russian, and some TV news is accessible in Russian.

### 3.4 Uzbekistan

The Russian language remains essential for interethnic communication in the country and more so in the cities, where it finds a lot of day-to-day governmental, technical, business, and scientific use. Over 14% of the population use Russian as their primary language, while many others use it as a second language. At present, a large percentage of schoolchildren have zero proficiency in Russian. According to a 2003 report (Khalikov 2003), more than half of the country's population could not only understand but also speak the language. Newly established, close political ties between Uzbekistan and Russia mean that the official deterrents to Russian language use have been dropped.

It is noted in mass media that, despite a relatively small Russian-speaking population in Uzbekistan, the popularity of the language is growing. Often, in secondary schools and classes with tuition in Russian, many children are from Uzbek families. Parents are anticipating the future: they think that education in these classes is much better and paves the way for entry into Russian higher-education institutions and later employment in Russia.

### 4. Education reforms in Russian universities

Since the beginning of the 2000s, higher education in Russia has been reshaped. Formerly, higher education institutions received funds from the government for wages and stipends; construction and maintenance of faculty and staff housing, academic buildings and dormitories; and development of well-equipped laboratories. In 1996, after reforms had started, higher education received less than 2% of the annual government budget, almost all of which went toward wages and students' stipends (Kodin 1996). There were no funds for maintaining buildings; buying books for libraries; replacing scientific or other equipment; or paying for electricity, water, central heating, and other utilities. Institutions received less than 14% of the capital investment funding they required, and the purchase of equipment for educational needs came to a complete stop (Kodin 1996).

New laws that came into force in 2021 allowed universities to find or earn extra money through commercial activities including private investments, production and sale of goods, and provision of revenue-generating continuing-education programs (Federal Law on Education 2012). The most common – and now obligatory – form of generating extra revenue is through recruitment of foreign students. Recruitment of foreign students has become a significant factor for institutional income and a matter of national economic interest.

Foreign student quotas were seen as a measure of the effectiveness of higher-education institutions. The Russian government had, as part of its effort to boost the rankings of its universities, made it a priority to boost international enrollments. In 2015, Russia raised the international student quota at Russian universities by 33%. It also significantly increased the scholarship funds available to foreign students. The number of international students in Russian universities has increased greatly over the past five years as has the need for new methods to work with this them (Anufrieva 2014; Latipov, *et al.* 2017; Latipova, *et al.* 2017; Litvina, Ivanova & Vladimirova 2018).

The integration of Russian higher education into a worldwide educational space presupposes admission of foreign students. Having foreign students in universities is a key element of internationalized development of the country's higher education as well as a guarantee of high-quality education and institutional attractiveness for a global market of educational services (Lopukhova & Makeeva 2018). Hundreds of foreign students, mostly from former Soviet Asian republics, have entered Russian universities. Though most of these students speak Russian, which helps them study and communicate in a new country, they nevertheless need assistance with integration in Russian everyday life and culture.

## 5. Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education

For many years, Samara was a closed city, with no opportunities for collaboration or communication with most organizations and peoples from other countries. After the end of the Cold War, the Samara region gradually started becoming part of the global European community, finding partner cities and business associates in industrial, cultural and educational spheres. There are new opportunities in the region for cross-border interactions, and they are increasing at an incredible rate due to media exposure, international travel, virtual interaction, and chance encounters. The growth in cross-cultural encounters increases both the opportunities for intercultural understanding and the possibilities for miscommunication. Raised in a closed community, most citizens of Samara never knew how to understand other cultures or communicate without an imperialistic bias. They did not understand how living in a foreign country and being open to another way of life is liable to affect one's personality and career in the direction of growth, sensitivity, holism and awareness. The question is, how can we comprehend and prepare graduates and young specialists for the increasingly complicated and challenging situations that they might face?

Founded in 1911, Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education recently celebrated its centenary. The oldest institution of higher education in Samara, today it is a unique integrated institution and one of the largest R&D centers and teacher-training universities in the Volga region (and the only one in Samara). Its mission is to train teachers and other specialists to assume positions as educators, school administrators, researchers, and policy makers at the regional, state and federal levels. The next generation of teachers is committed to sharing global values and priorities with their students and colleagues and to promoting these values in the organizations where they work as well as in the Volga region as a whole and throughout the country (Makeeva & Lopukhova 2018).

Despite Samara – formerly Kuibyshev – having been a closed city, SSUSSE could boast of fruitful experience concerning the linguistic adaptation of students belonging to a different culture. For about two decades (1975-1993) up to the USSR's disintegration, the faculty of Russian language and literature at SSUSSE had an agreement with the Tajik republic regarding training teachers of Russian for schools and higher-education institutions in Tajikistan. Each year, about thirty students from all regions of Tajikistan came to study at SSUSSE for a full five academic years. To teach this cohort of students, the department of teaching Russian in national schools was established. A special methodology for teaching Russian as a foreign language was developed, with a view to typological differences between Slavic (Russian) and Iranian (Farsi) languages. Efforts were made to adapt Tajik students to everyday life, Russian culture and traditions: sightseeing tours, theatre trips, thematic events, sporting events, etc. Unfortunately, this was lost after the USSR's disintegration.

By the end of 2017, the university employed 700 people, with 51% members of the academic staff. The proportion of full-time teachers holding a PhD was approximately 79%.

With about 7,000 students (including about 300 foreign students), SSUSSE offers 85 degree programs at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels as well as special training courses for professional development and pre-university training. We have developed a complex approach to training specialists, which gives an applicant a multiple-disciplinary choice of interests to specialize in. Breadth of knowledge, quality, competence, and flexibility are the hallmarks of learning and teaching at SSUSSE. Our programs provide graduates with the skills necessary to meet the challenges of a changing global environment and help them meet the challenges of tomorrow.

## 6. The questionnaire and its analysis

To analyze the degree of adaptation of students from the former CIS countries, the researchers offered an online anonymous questionnaire in Russian; English translation was added later. The original Russian text and analysis are presented here in English.

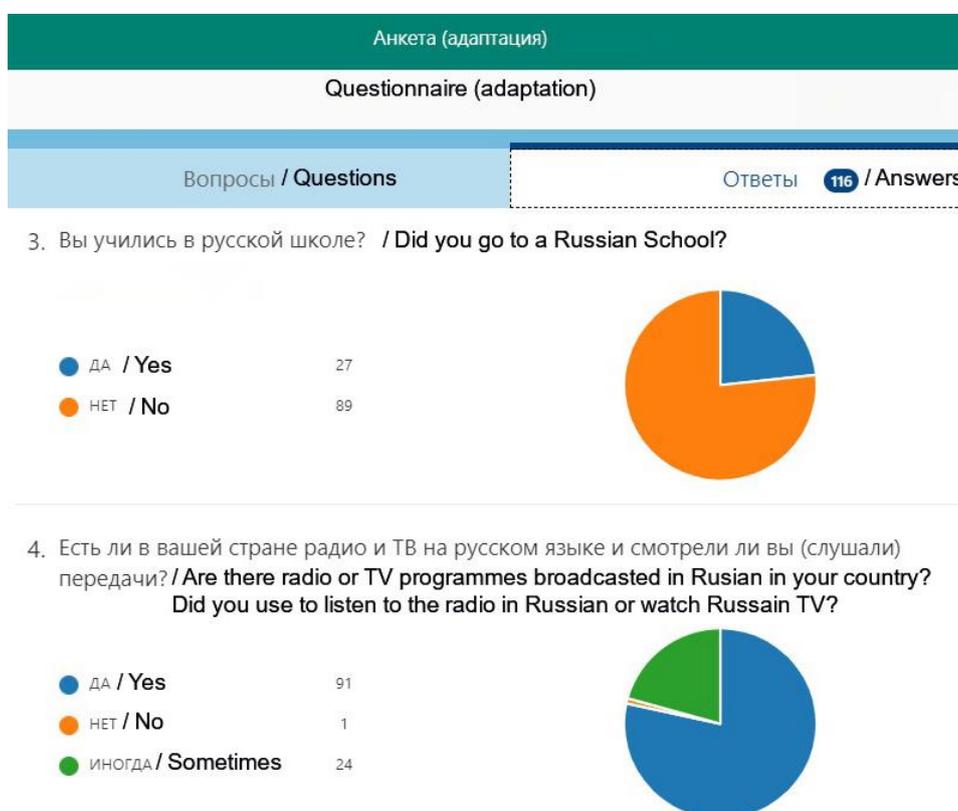
According to official data provided by the SSUSSE international office, 162 international students were studying at the university in the autumn of 2018. The international office sent a link to the questionnaire to all international students asking them to complete it; 116 students responded (see Figure 1).

The first question was about the language the students speak in their family. The vast majority (94%) responded that they speak their national language only. Two respondents stated that Russian was occasionally spoken. The second question was whether they had studied the Russian language at school; all respondents stated that they had. When, in the third question, they were asked if they had studied at a Russian-speaking school, three-fourths (77%) stated that they had not.

Question 4 was about the availability of radio and TV programs in Russian in their country. The greater portion of the respondents said that they watched Russian TV on almost a daily basis (91 of 116 used to do so regularly; 24 watched Russian TV from time to time).

Question 5 asked whether Russian is used in public transport, at the doctor's, or on the street. The results confirmed the assumptions made in the previous paragraphs: most of the Turkmen students (61%) reported that they do not use the Russian language in public places. Respondents from the other post-Soviet countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) said that Russian is widely spoken. Almost all the students from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan named Turkish as one of the languages that they speak, in addition to Russian and English. This may be unsurprising given the common roots of all Turkic languages.

**Figure 1:** Online questionnaire and its results automatically graphed in Microsoft Forms (translation added later).



**Figure 2:** Question 12 (multiple responses possible).

12. What makes Russian difficult to learn and use for you?

● writing and spelling	25
● pronunciation	19
● grammar: case, gender, person, etc	58
● choosing a correct word	24
● smth else	10



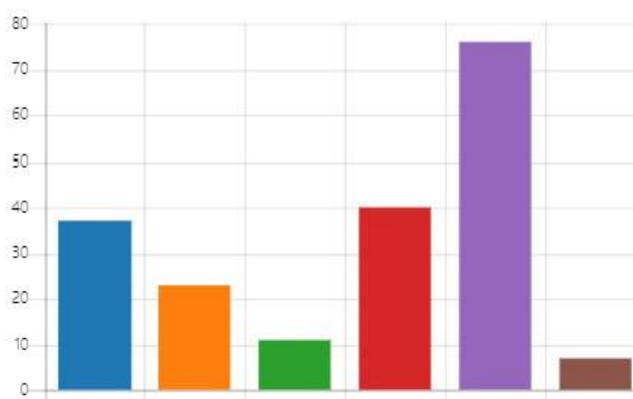
The next set of questions dealt with the difficulty of learning the Russian language. Most respondents irrespective of nationality noted the difficulty of Russian grammar: namely, case, gender, and person – rather than vocabulary (see Figure 2).

As for seeking language help (Question 13, Figure 3), 76% of respondents preferred using the Internet; 40% (surprisingly many) referred to a dictionary, 37% named their teacher, and only 23% stated that they normally ask their classmates.

**Figure 3:** Question 13 (multiple responses possible).

13. In case you do not understand a Russian word or a sentence you ask ...

● your teacher	37
● your groupmates	23
● your countrymen	11
● seek a word in the dictionary	40
● browse the Internet	76
● other	7



Question 14 asked respondents to tick the most difficult thing about studying at the university. The overwhelming majority (90%) said taking notes during lectures. Many Russian students have the same problem, which can, in some cases, be attributed to the lecturer's manner of speaking.

Question 15 outlined the importance of Russian for the respondents. All of them stated that they had learned it to be able to study in a Russian university, while 21% said that Russian can act as a means of intercultural communication.

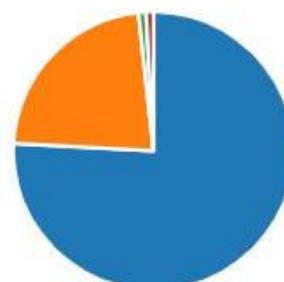
For Question 16 ("who/what helped you to study Russian?"), most (95%) replied that it was the school and their parents who helped them; 42% listed TV and cinema. Question 17 dealt with the university library; all respondents regularly borrowed books from it. Question 18 asked students if they could easily navigate the city and if they ever go sightseeing; 99% of respondents stated that they had no trouble moving around and had visited many city sites.

The last two questions (19 & 20) showed that most of the students (88%) live in the university hostel, sharing a room with their fellow countrymen (84% share, out of the 88% living in the University hostel); 26% rent a flat, also with people from their own country. This might be preventing students from communicating in Russian, thus slowing their adaptation.

**Figure 4:** The final two questions.

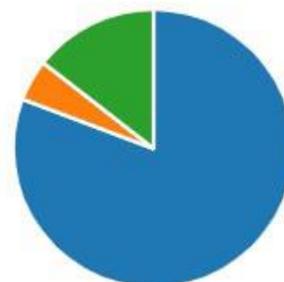
19. While studying you temporarily live ...

● in a university hostel	88
● in a rented apartment	26
● with relatives	1
● other	1



20. If you live in a university hostel you share your room with ...

● your fellow countrymen	84
● Russian students	5
● other	15



## 7. Activities to help students adapt to studies in Russia

The results of the survey show that all students believe in the importance of higher education in Russia for their future careers, including personal and professional development. Ironically, Turkmen students – who make up the largest number of international students at the university – are less fluent in Russian than students from other countries due to reasons mentioned earlier.

The next point deserving consideration is that students prefer either to share a hostel room or a rented apartment with their fellow countrymen. They feel more comfortable pursuing their everyday habits and ways of life; but constantly speaking their native language does not improve their Russian. In some European countries where international students come for an English (or French or German) course of study, they stay with host families. It is common to host students from different countries in the same family, to prevent the temptation to switch into their native language.

To help in adaptation, throughout the course *Theory and Practice of Intercultural Communication*, which is given for every bachelor program at the department of foreign languages, special tasks are offered. Until recently, tutors discussed mainly the similarities and differences between Russian culture and those of the countries of the main European languages. Now the attempt is made to adjust classwork and homework to the group, giving tasks comparing Russian/European/American cultural habits with those of the native cultures

of our students. Typical tasks are to introduce proper names relevant to one's native culture (public figures, historical figures, writers, etc.) and say what they are famous for; compare native non-verbal communication with Russian; or say what are the most important concepts for your culture compared to British, German or Russian culture.

SSUSSE is implementing a comprehensive program *Integration of International Students at SSUSSE*. The collaboration of different SSUSSE subdivisions – the Department of International Affairs, Department of Educational and Social Affairs, Department of Domestic Affairs, Department of Russian as a Foreign Language, Foundation Programs Centre (the so-called Pre-University Training Centre), deans' offices, and sports club – involves international students in educational, academic, sporting and other recreational activities. Since 2017, the vice rector on student affairs has administered foreign students' extracurricular activities along with their academic and social adaptation and integration. The program provides informational and psychological support to international students along with facilitating their accommodation in the university hostels. The goal is to interest in cultural events, scientific projects, concerts, festivals, conferences, round tables, forums, seminars, healthcare activities, etc. There are special sessions on crime prevention and on social, psychological and legal support.

Every department has a group of advisors – both professors and student volunteers (including senior international students of SSUSSE) – engaged in helping students from abroad adapt as well as in supporting them in managing problems. The Department of International Affairs offers counseling and advises on migrants' registration and monitoring.

The program outlines events for every department to support planning their activities. It provides guidelines to student volunteers.

To make adaptation easier and overcome the language barrier, a two-stage foundation course is offered by the Department of Russian as a Foreign Language and the Centre of Pre-university Training. Starter, basic and elementary levels of Russian can be achieved with the help of certified tutors. Students with an elementary-level certificate may enter a higher-education institution. If would-be students are not good enough in some core subjects in the bachelor's or master's curriculum, the centre provides extra training for them, too.

To contribute to student adaptation, integration and intercultural communication and to instill international tolerance and prevent acts of terrorism and extremism, SSUSSE collaborates with the Centre of International Friendship in Samara and with members of ethnic communities, inviting them as experts to educational, academic and cultural activities.

SSUSSE holds an annual orientation week for international students to experience the sights of Samara, see the landmarks and get exposed to the university's history, structure and infrastructure.

Students take an active part in the celebration of Knowledge Day (September 1<sup>st</sup>), Student Day (January 25<sup>th</sup>), and Victory Day (May 9<sup>th</sup>). Together with Russian students, they participate in a student festival *Studvesna* (short for *Studencheskaya Vesna*: literally, Student Spring), of amateur performances, sports tournaments and competitions.

To get to know Russian customs and traditions, international students are involved annually in the Day of the Russian Language and Russian Culture, festivals like Christmas meetings and Farewell to Shrovetide, and the Russian Language Olympiads. Such occasions are an opportunity to enjoy Russian cuisine, sing and dance in a ring and join Russian folk contests.

By way of reciprocation, the students from abroad treat their Russian peers to national dishes at the festival of world cuisines arranged by the Education and Social Work Office, Student Hostels Committee and foreign-student tutors. This popular event includes contests for the best-decorated dish, most interesting dish, best dish presentation, and best dessert,

along with an audience award. It is accompanied by ethnic song and dance performed by international student bands and dance groups.

For sake of adaptation, social and psychological training sessions, quests, questionnaires, counseling, and sessions with members of ethnic communities are arranged. Students from abroad are encouraged to join self-government bodies, hostel student committees, and student volunteer divisions of almost all the faculties to maintain close contacts with Russian students. The annual friendship event arranged by the Education and Social Work Office and the student union focuses on students' tolerance development, overcoming of egocentric feelings, accepting of others' opinions, and taking of others' values into consideration.

Foreign students are engaged in student research groups. They present their papers at various annual student-oriented scientific and practical conferences. One of the most exciting is the conference *Food Traditions in Various Countries* where participants present traditional dishes of their home countries. Their task is to make a dish, explain how to cook it, and present its role in their culture. Students wear national clothes, sing folk songs, perform traditional dances and act out episodes from rituals and folk games. The program usually consists of several parts: e.g., Peoples of the Urals and Volga Region, Cuisine of European Countries, Mysterious Africa, and Enigmatic Asia. Each ends in a tasting session. Participants have a chance to observe wedding ceremonies from other countries, New Year traditions, and the spring holiday *Nowruz*; they celebrate Orthodox and Catholic Easter and Jewish Passover.

National student art groups are often invited to participate in the concerts around Samara and the Samara region. Students from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan took an active part in the fourth regional international holiday *Nowruz* ("beginning of spring") supported by the Samara Regional Administration, Administration Office of Samara and Centre of International Friendship. They performed scenes from the holiday's history and traditions. They exhibited arts and crafts and national cuisine.

Students of the Faculty of Culture and Arts organized the national Armenian holiday *Terendez* as the "Symbol of Everlasting Love". They were supported by the regional, national and cultural autonomous *Nairi*; Armenian Society of Mutual Assistance; Union of Armenian Youth; departments of philosophy, history and theory of world culture; and head office of the ethnic and cultural Park of International Friendship; along with representatives of the Ossetian non-governmental organization *Alania* and the Center for International Friendship. Visitors could try Armenian dishes, watch folk songs and dance, and witness an Armenian wedding acted out by students. They could then join the actors to learn the ethnic dance *Kochari*.

All these activities contribute to creating favorable conditions for the adaptation of foreign students while they study at SSUSSE, making their university years more attractive. The program has proved to be efficient according to the efficiency report produced annually by the SSUSSE International Office and approved by the rector. The number of students from abroad has approximately tripled within the last five years, from 72 students in September 2014 to 225 in December 2019.

That said, private interviews with students revealed that some are reluctant to participate in these events. The reasons are mostly lack of fluency in Russian, informality in the behavior of Russian students compared to those of their native cultures, self-containment within their own ethnic groups, fear of losing face, and fear of publicity. These are trouble spots to be overcome gradually, diagnosing them by means of an anonymous questionnaire based on national psychology research and then by adjusting the program of adaptation.

## 8. Further steps

SSUSSE is not the only university in Samara that admits foreign students. There are many foreign students at the Samara State National Research University – not only from former

Soviet republics but also from Asian, African and Latin America countries. They are mostly attracted by the bachelor's and master's programs in aerospace studies and aircraft and engine manufacturing. Other international students come to programs in the Samara Medical University and Technical University. Every university has its own adaptation program, but at present there is no cooperation between them in this area. A good step forward would be an inter-university conference of those responsible for adaptation – university authorities, tutors, heads of international departments, etc. – to share know how and discuss problems. The next step could be joint thematic activities of two or more universities with active participation of foreign students. A further step might be extension of the research reported here using a more elaborate anonymous questionnaire sent to all higher-education institutions in the Samara region with the aim of revealing hidden trouble spots.

## 9. Conclusions

As more students from former Soviet republics come to Russian universities for their education, more attention to their cultural adaptation is needed. Cultural differences present critical challenges to these students. Universities should be aware of the problems, helping international students enjoy their educational programs and their sojourn in Russia. A thorough analysis of their needs, monitoring their social life on a regular basis, taking into account attitudes toward the Russian language in CIS countries that may have influenced the students' expectations, and arranging activities and events at SSUSSE like the ones mentioned in this article will be beneficial for all the involved in the intercultural communication taking place in Samara.

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