

# LANGUAGE CLASSES AS A MEANS OF ADAPTATION OF FOREIGN STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Purpose of the research is the analysis of the problems of adaptation of foreign students to life and realities of a host country and presentation of our experience how English classes can be used for this goal. It is possible to reveal essential problems, which foreign students face with coming to a host country (language barrier, problems of self realization, problems of safety, homesickness). English classes are an effective means of their adaptation to living in a host country, as it allows implementing activities that simplify the process of adaptation (reading and discussing texts on Ukrainian culture and traditions, roleplaying situations that can happen in real life, discussing problems, which students face with). Findings can be used by teachers when helping students to adapt to new realities.

**Keywords:** adaptation; problems of adaptation; foreign students; English classes.

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays, the process of integration is actively going on in the field of education in many countries. The practice of international cooperation, the increase in demand for internship and student exchange programs reflect the popularity and mass nature of the processes associated with the social mobility of students. Globalization brings changes not only in the economic and political spheres, but also in the education system. Influencing the international educational market, globalization triggers the emergence of innovations in the internal structure of the university and the educational process, contributes to the emergence of new educational areas and teaching methods.

The internationalization of education in the modern world can pursue various goals: expanding the number of educational programs, including those ones which offer education entirely in English; the students' opportunity to study in foreign universities; expansion of the university' international network of contacts; improving the quality of education and research through the participation of students, teachers, and staff in international exchange programs. The development of international cooperation with other universities around the world allows organizing joint research projects, conferences, exhibitions, and special educational programs for foreign students.

The integration of higher education of Ukraine into the educational space of other countries also involves the intensification of foreign students' training and their adaptation to the conditions of the country in which they will study. It should be noted that Ukraine has recently developed active relations with many countries, including Poland, Lithuania, Great Britain, China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and others. According to the statistical data of the Ukrainian Center of International Education of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, at the beginning of 2020, 76,548 foreign citizens from 155 countries studied in Ukraine.

It should be noted that before the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, the Kharkiv region uncounted 20,196 foreign students, which is significantly more than the number of foreigners studying in the Kyiv region (17,634 foreign citizens) [18]. Taking into consideration the large number of foreign citizens, the organization of the student adaptation process is a necessary element of higher education for students from other countries.

## 2 Literature Review

Based on the analysis of scientific literature, it can be stated that the issue of adaptation of foreign students to life and study in another country has repeatedly attracted the attention of scientists. In particular, D. Dauber, H. Spencer-Oatey researched the issues of internationalization and student diversity, T. Dovgodko concentrated on peculiarities of propaedeutic training of foreign students and their psychological and pedagogical

adaptation, T. D. Dubovitskaya, A. Ya. Krylova looked into methods of studying the adaptability of students at the university, J. Hotta and S. Ting-Toomey researched intercultural adjustment and friendship dialectics in international students, M. Jackson, S. Ray, and D. Bybell elucidated the issues of international students' challenges and adaptation in the U.S. R., Jones and Y.S. Kim studied communication experiences of international students in the U.S., T. V. Kiyashchuk, A. A. Kiyashchuk, A. R. Sardarian, and M. N. Komarova highlighted socio-psychological and cultural adaptation of foreign students at modern universities as a whole, C.M. Westmont and C.R. Glass researched comparative effects of belongingness on the academic success and cross-cultural interactions of domestic and international students.

However, in our opinion, the role of foreign language classes in the process of adaptation of foreign students is not sufficiently covered in the scientific literature, that is why the purpose of our publication is to reveal how English classes can help foreign students with the process of adaptation.

To solve the purpose, we consider it necessary to address the following tasks:

- Generalize the essence of the concept of "adaptation" in scientific literature;
- Identify the main problems which foreign students face with during their studying in another country;
- Outline ways how to solve these problems during foreign language classes.

## 3 Method

Methodology implies content analysis of works of scientists in the area of adaptation of students-foreigners to life and realities of a host country. The general scientific methods of critical analysis, systematization and generalization of the approaches to the considered problem were used.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### *Notion of Adaptation*

The term "adaptation" is used in many fields - Biology, Pedagogy, Philosophy, Sociology, Ecology, Cybernetics, etc. The study of problems related to the adaptation process is also at the intersection of various sciences and is the most important approach in the comprehensive study of a human. However, the concept of adaptation still does not have a generally accepted definition. Originating within the framework of Biology, this concept soon ceased to be a term of only biological research: "Attributing the phenomenon of adaptation to biological phenomena artificially narrows it: a person is a carrier of not only biological, but also social features, therefore, the phenomenon of adaptation should include psychophysiological, psychological, and social levels of analysis" [11, p. 50].

This concept is also widespread in Psychology, where it was initially used with a content close to the biological definition. In Anglo-American literature, social adaptation is designated by the special term "adjustment", in contrast to biological or physiological "adaptation" [10, p. 13].

The term "social adaptation" in Sociology was first introduced by foreign researchers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to the theory of structural-functional analysis by T. Parsons, a person or even any social system cannot survive if the problems of adaptation to the environment, integration and goal-setting are not solved. The most important evolutionary processes for adaptation are those processes that strengthen adaptive capacity within society [14, p. 34]. The concept of social adaptation is related to the concept of socialization; the essence of these two concepts is the entry of a person into the social environment, assimilation and reproduction of social ties. However, according to Dovgodko T., Jia Lia, and Tianlan Wei, these concepts have

differences: unlike socialization, social adaptation occurs most often in small groups or primary collectives, and it is connected with a specific type of activity [3, 12].

In the process of adaptation, there are objective and subjective sides. The objective side of the human adaptation process is formed by the surrounding social environment (parents, friends, peers) and various social institutions. The subjective side is connected with the personal characteristics and qualities of an individual, his/her beliefs and socio-psychological development. The process of formation of social adaptation mechanisms in an individual includes all types of educational activity and goes through three main phases, which are the basis of qualitative transformation of the personality:

- Activity (the main mechanism in the organization of adaptation of the individual, which carries out his/her active adaptation to the environment);
- Society context (mechanism of social adaptation of a person aimed at assimilation of norms and values of society);
- Self-awareness of a person (mechanism of social adaptation, with individual forms and comprehending own social role in society) [20].

Ukrainian scientists consider the concept of "socio-cultural adaptation" as an active process of interaction between a representative of another culture and a living environment, the process of acquiring work skills and knowledge necessary for life, assimilation of the basic norms and patterns of the new surrounding reality by the student, the so-called phenomenon of "entering the culture" [1]. The concept of "social and psychological adaptation" refers to the entry of a foreign student into the system of interpersonal relations, the establishment of mutual relations in the group, the formation of personal behavior in it. Socio-psychological adaptation is a rather complex, multi-level and multi-criteria process, which is studied from the standpoint of various approaches and directions [4, p. 24].

Thus, it can be concluded that today there is no single definition of the concept of adaptation in the scientific literature, but summarizing the views of scientists, the adaptation of foreign students can be considered as a complex process, which consists in the active adaptation of students to a new socio-cultural environment based on their understanding of socio-cultural ideas about this new environment. During this period, students get used to new living conditions, features of everyday life and communication with citizens of the host country.

Conventionally, the process of adaptation of foreign students can be divided into two categories: subject and social ones. The first one includes students' living conditions, the equipment of universities and the level of infrastructure development in the city where the students came. The second category includes social contacts and relationships that determine psychological atmosphere, which is either favorable or unfavorable for foreign students. The development of interpersonal relationships in the student environment can have different dynamics, but in most cases, foreign students first communicate with other students who came from the same country, but gradually integrate into the general student environment [2, 5, 15].

#### Case Study

Among 455 institutions of higher education that train foreign citizens, Kharkiv National Pedagogical University named after H. S. Skovoroda (KhNPU named after H. S. Skovoroda) takes the 50th place [18].

The activation of international relations and development of training of foreigners from different continents is an important direction of KhNPU named after H. S. Skovoroda, which increases the authority of the educational institution and makes it possible to attract additional funds for the development of its material base. Considering this, the university, along with students-citizens of Ukraine, trains 313 foreign citizens from 8 countries: Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, Turkey,

Uzbekistan, China, Vietnam, and Palestine. At the first and second educational levels, 277 students are studying according to their chosen specialty at ten faculties: the Ukrainian Language and Literature Faculty named after G.F. Kvitka-Osnovnyanenko, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Foreign Philology, Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, Faculty of History, Faculty of Primary Education, Faculty of Arts, and Faculty of Physical Education and Sports.

Since the structure of the University does not provide for a specific school for foreigners, foreign students who are applicants of H. S. Skovoroda KhNPU are equal in their rights and obligations to Ukrainian applicants and become part of the student community of the university schools. However, the acquaintance of foreign students with the university begins with the International Center (former name the Department for Foreign Applicants for Higher Education) [9, p. 228-229].

Employees of the International Center acquaint foreign applicants with the legislative framework related to the migration policy of Ukraine, the documents they must have, the rules how and by what time the procedures for obtaining temporary residence permits must be completed in Ukraine. Also, inspectors of the Center provide applicants with the necessary information about the medical system of Ukraine, how to get medical services during a stay in the country, and peculiarities of the banking system (help how to pay for education, receive international transfers, etc., as well as register the National Identity Card) [13].

After that, students immerse themselves into student life, being in the same academic groups with Ukrainian students and facing quite a lot of problems in everyday life. According to the system of organization of educational process in KhNPU named after H. S. Skovoroda, we can state that the adaptation of foreign students mainly takes place during Ukrainian and English classes, and also informal communication with Ukrainian students. It should be noted that teachers of Ukrainian and English collaborate in order to facilitate foreign students' adaptation to Ukrainian realities.

The selection of material for the program on Ukrainian is carried out, taking into account the goals and objectives of training, determined by the communicative and cognitive needs of university students.

The basic provisions of Ukrainian language training for foreign students are the following:

- The orientation of the content and organization of the educational process to the acquisition of the entire complex of necessary skills and abilities, which provide foreign students with participation in educational activities and communication in the social, political, and socio-cultural spheres;
- All-dimensional development of students' creative abilities, fostering in them the need for creativity;
- Organization of the educational process in accordance with the individual needs of students;
- Orientation of the content and organization of the educational process to the assimilation of universal values.

The general goal of teaching Ukrainian to foreign students includes communicative and educational aspects, which are in close interaction with the tasks of training specialists for foreign countries.

The communicative goal of training is the leading one, since the educational goals are accomplished on the condition that students achieve a certain level of language proficiency. This goal is achieved by forming the necessary language and speech skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

The main communicative spheres of education, in addition to the academic sphere, are public-political and social-cultural spheres.

Learning in these areas includes students' reading and discussing works of art and articles from magazines and journals, watching movies and performances, communicating on issues of the social and cultural life of Ukraine, as well as on everyday topics among themselves and with native speakers. In particular, the following topics are studied:

- Ukraine today.
- Kyiv is the capital of Ukraine.
- From the history of the Slavs.
- Kievan Rus.
- Princes of Kievan Rus.
- Baptism of Kievan Rus.
- Ukrainian Cossacks.
- B. Khmelnytskyi.
- Zaporizhia Sech.
- Ukraine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Education in Ukraine.
- The world of science, technology, and culture.
- Ukraine is proud of them (outstanding scientists, public figures, writers, poets, etc.).
- We are for peace (Ukrainian as a foreign language: 2020).

Work experience has shown that English language classes can also be an effective tool for adapting foreign students to life in the host country. Our program is adjusted to the program on the Ukrainian language, which help students better acquire the material and deepen the knowledge on the topics. It is important to note that curricula in Ukrainian and English do not double, but complement each other.

In the first semesters of the 2018-2019 and 2021-2022 academic years, we conducted an experiment: foreign students of the first year of study at the bachelor's level were given a choice regarding the format of studying English at the university. In particular, it was suggested either to study English with Ukrainian students, or to attend a group consisting exclusively of foreign students.

It was assumed that classes in English allow forming and improving communicative competence, which involves not only language practice, but also the mastery of social skills that are accepted in the country where they came to study. We assumed that this is why the study of a foreign language by foreign students in separate groups can contribute to their faster adaptation to life in Ukraine by adjusting the work program of the discipline. Regardless of the group chosen by foreign students to learn English, at the first class they were asked to complete the questionnaire, which consisted of the following questions:

- Do you have problems with the process of adaptation to the new conditions of study at KhNPU after H. S. Skovoroda? (question 1);
- Do you have problems during the educational process at KhNPU named after H. S. Skovoroda? Specify which ones. (question 2);
- Do you have everyday difficulties? If so, which ones (question 3);
- Do you have organizational difficulties? If so, which ones (question 4);
- Does the curator contribute to the creation of a favorable psychological atmosphere for the harmonious development of the personality of each member of the group? Justify your answer (question 5).

A summary of the answers is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Results of the questionnaire on the process of foreign students adaptation

The number of foreign students who have relevant problems, %				
1	2	3	4	5

Question	Ukrainian Language and Literature faculty named after G.F. Kvivka-Osnoyanyenko	Faculty of Arts	Faculty of Physical Education and Sports	Faculty of Law
1	80	89	75	80
2	70	65	40	75
3	93	95	90	85
4	75	80	60	75
5	10	11	5	10
6	70	65	40	70
1	2	3	4	5

On the basis of analysis of students' responses, it is possible to reveal essential problems, which foreign students face with when coming to a host country:

- Language barrier;
- Mastering the skills of individual work;
- Problems of self realization;
- Difference of educational systems of the host country and their home country;
- Psychophysiological difficulties associated with personality restructuring at the stage of initial adaptation and entry into unfamiliar ethno-cultural and international environment;
- Household problems associated with the conditions of living in a hostel, decision-making and problems solving;
- Medical system;
- Problems of safety;
- Homesickness.

There were 18 students in the group which consisted exclusively of foreign students, the other 42 people decided to study English as part of academic Ukrainian groups. It should be pointed out that when working with groups of foreign students, mainly communicative methods were used, aimed more at the development of conversational practice than at purposeful work with texts and their translation. It has been proven that this method allows students to better master the educational material and understand the scope of its use. It should be noted that foreign language classes were aimed not only at developing students' language skills, but also at acquainting them to the realities of Ukraine and at the same time providing psychological support.

Definitely, not all problems, which the students have, can be solved with the help of English language classes, but at the same time, English language classes greatly simplify the process of adaptation. Thus, we believe that English classes contribute to the elimination of the language barrier both in English and Ukrainian, because it has been proven that the language barrier is an exclusively psychological problem that cannot be solved through the study of additional vocabulary and grammar. To solve such a problem, during each class, we organize work in pairs or small groups, roleplaying situations that occur in everyday life (a visit to the doctor, shopping in a store, communication with government officials, etc.). Before acting out the dialogue, we provide the students with clichés both in English and Ukrainian and practice their pronunciation. A feature of the work is that it is advisable to speak dialogues not only in English, but also in Ukrainian, because these two languages are foreign to students and require a lot of practice.

We also emphasize that at this stage their main task is not perfect pronunciation and correctly constructed sentences, but conveying the main idea of the message. We focus the students on the following points:

- Making mistakes is natural and nothing terrible will happen if students make a mistake in pronunciation or grammar;
- Do not use complex phrases; it is better to use simple sentences, because the simpler the construction is, the less possibility is to make a mistake there;

- It is a unique opportunity to communicate with native speakers, which also helps overcome the language barrier [16, p. 60].

We believe that a foreign language teacher often acts as a psychologist, helping young people find answers to questions that bother them. It is also important to discuss such problems as nostalgia, differences in cultures, peculiarities of behavior in Ukrainian society and their nation.

Thus, speaking about nostalgia, we point out that it is a natural feeling and almost everyone has experienced it at least once; we also pay attention to the fact that modern doctors consider it a normal and even positive emotion. For example, according to research of scientists from the University of Southampton it was proven that nostalgia will increase the level of optimism in the future, and it is very important for getting rid of loneliness and isolation [6, 7].

Having discussed students' problems and life stories, we first theoretically sum up that there are three types of nostalgia: nostalgia for motherland, nostalgia for the past, and nostalgia for emotional links.

We draw students' attention to the fact that it is impossible to dwell on the past for a long period of time. Nostalgia presents all emotional symptoms. We immerse ourselves in memories, and the organism receives positive emotions. After that, as it is filled with this feeling, the usual rhythm of life is reached. There is no need to regret such moments, and it is better to be satisfied with the past. There is no need to run away from nostalgia as everyone experiences it [19].

Then we encourage students to tell how they struggle with this feeling and at the end of the discussion we write down some effective advice (be realistic, trying to understand the origin of such feelings, communication with positive people, avoiding stimulus which make you feel pain, understanding that you can change the situation, setting new goals and having active lifestyle, etc). It should be noted that such practice is very useful and students really take the advice, as they share their experience later.

The adaptation of foreign students is also facilitated by extracurricular activities that are characteristic of foreign countries - such as "Halloween" and "Christmas", as well as in Ukraine "Cossack Day", "New year", and others with a subsequent tea party. Students take a direct part in the preparation and holding of the events, become more united and liberated.

The atmosphere of goodwill and mutual assistance encourages students to think, work, and achieve success, because respect and mutual support strengthen their sense of self-worth, stimulate the development of intellectual abilities, independence, and self-confidence. A smile, good humor, high pedagogical culture of the teacher are also effective tools. Under such conditions, the student gets rid of the fear of making a mistake, the threat to his/her fullness is eliminated.

It should be also mentioned that the main principle of foreign language learning is the principle of ensuring motivational sufficiency. At the same time, it is important that internal incentives have the leading role, as they ensure the formation of more stable motivational connections, necessary for achieving high results. A sufficient level of internal motivation is the main prerequisite for successful interaction between the teacher and students. Students should be given maximum opportunities to reveal their personal potential through the means of a foreign language. It is necessary for the teacher to take care of such educational situations that would allow students to show the ability to think originally and creatively, find non-standard solutions in the environment created during the lesson. This will be facilitated by the use of exercises that are dynamic in nature, ensuring the presence of sustained interest [8].

After a semester of work in this format, foreign students of both groups were again asked to complete the questionnaire, which included the following questions:

- Is the adaptation process successful?
- Does the educational institution help solve the problems you have?
- Do you have everyday problems? If so, which ones?
- Do you have organizational difficulties? If so, which ones?
- Do you have difficulties with teachers? If so, which ones?
- Are there teachers who contribute to the adaptation process more than others? If so, which ones?

It should be noted that there were no significant changes in the answers of students who chose to study a foreign language as part of Ukrainian academic groups. In the explanations and detailed answers to the questions, they noted that due to the heavy academic load, they do not have enough time to familiarize themselves with the realities of the country in which they study, they feel a strong language barrier, and they do not feel close and have no friendly relations with Ukrainian students.

However, the students who chose to study English in a separate academic group showed more positive results. Thus, regardless of the faculty at which they study, 90 percent noted that the process of adaptation is much easier than at the beginning of their studies and noted that English classes greatly contribute to solving problems that arise during the educational process, solving everyday problems, overcoming the language barrier.

## 5 Conclusion

Therefore, the study of English by foreign students can significantly simplify the process of adaptation of students and contribute to the development of cognitive and research skills, the ability to work in a group, ability to work on projects; development of information culture, expansion of horizons and improvement of general culture and knowledge of students, education of tolerance and respect for spiritual values, customs and traditions of different countries and peoples. However English classes should be considered as a supplementary means of adaptation, as significant work must be done by curators and psychologists.

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**Secondary Paper Section: AM**