

The effect of socio-psychological workshops on the process of first-year students' adaptation

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Introduction: In the constantly changing modern world, mobility of population is growing and, as a consequence, the number of young people willing to receive an education outside their region or country is increasing. This tendency is backed by 48 countries members of Bologna process which aims to support student mobility^{11,22}. This is particularly important for students of engineering specialties, as engineering is one of the professional fields free of cultural and social impact. Nevertheless, training outside of their region or country means leaving one's comfort zone and implies adaptation to new life conditions.

Socio-psychological adaptation is a process resulting in a student's successful acquisition of new functioning conditions, different formal and informal relations, a certain status in the new environment, and the development of self-affirmation³. The speed and efficiency of adaptation largely determines the success of training as a whole. It is explained by the fact that after adapting to a new environment and forming new social relations, a student becomes integrated in a new social environment. This social environment may influence the productivity of work by means of "human relations," as the Hawthorne experiment showed¹³, and in this case it may influence studying results.

Is it possible to influence the process of adaptation of first-year engineering students who came from other regions or countries and speed it up by means of specially organized psychological training programs? It is common knowledge that training programs influence socio-psychological adaptation processes^{1,2,21}. But in what way do they function and how effective are they for first-year students who came from other regions or countries?

In the adaptation process, many mental resources are engaged. Behavior control resource base is used here as individual cognitive, emotional and conative resources of a person¹⁸. During the process of socio-psychological adaptation to a new region or country in cases of insufficient knowledge and understanding of existing schemes on a cultural level, emotional resources of the human psyche is overloaded as it has to choose the proper scheme of acting. This process is often accompanied by strong feelings of worry and emotional discomfort. On the basis thereof, it is important to create a positive emotional background for activities of daily living (intellectual, emotional and moral needs gratification) as well as to develop kind student-student and student-teacher relations from the first days of experiencing the new educational institution^{1,2}. When emotional resources are low, a person is less effective in other tasks, such as studying engineering which requires precision and concentration.. Socio-psychological training can lead to long-term increase in ability to self-regulate, which is shown in our earlier research¹⁴.

Goal of research: to study the effect of workshops on the process of students' adaptation. The subject of our research is the structure and dynamics of first-year students' adaptation components in the process of socio-psychological workshops.

Methods of the Study: This research included the following methods:

- 1) Socio-psychological workshops, aimed at developing students' resources in adaptation in the context of university training. The workshop program was oriented at creating an atmosphere of trust and safety in forming student groups, developing constructive communication skills, learning cooperation and self-study, understanding techniques of

acceptance, and developing motivation in university study. Workshop duration: 2 to 4 days.
Stages and aims:

One: creating safety and emotional comfort for every member, and reducing psychological distance among members by means of psychogymnastic exercises⁹. As a result, the state of each member was changed and the group was formed as a whole⁷.

Step Two: the formation of interest development and self-respect and respect to others. Exercises of this stage focused on self study and getting information about other group members, getting to know other members' interesting traits and common characteristics. Additional skills included communication development²⁰, and the mastery of listening to and understanding the others.

Step Three: strengthening social cohesion by means of art therapy, group painting, which forms the feeling of group belonging^{19,15}, sense of respect to others and to oneself. Pole games and case studies allowed participants to acquire cooperation experience on a team, achieving group goals, and increasing cohesion and group belonging.

Step Four was oriented at leadership qualities⁶ and constructive communication skills development and integrated the experience of the whole workshop¹².

The difference between the programs lasting 2 and 4 days was in the structure of the adaptation workshop. Two-day workshop focused mainly on the feeling group belonging and not safety or emotional comfort or leadership. Four-day workshop included all four steps. It must be noted that group dynamics was better in four-day workshops.

2) socio-psychological adaptation diagnostic test by N.V. Akhmetzyanova and D.R. Nugmanova². To study the influence of the workshop on the figures of socio-psychological adaptation of first-year students, we developed and distributed a questionnaire based on a survey by Rogers and R. Dymond⁵ translated into Russian by A.K. Osnitsky¹⁶.

R. Dymond points out different elements of disadaptation, such as a low level of the acceptance of others, emotional discomfort, strong dependence on others, and the desire to dominate⁵. Other authors point out such criteria of adaptation as the feeling of belonging to the group and respect for others^{4,8}. E.I. Pilugina speaks about the importance of self-respect and self-esteem in order to adapt successfully¹⁷. In this way, previous research studies create a foundation for developing the socio-psychological adaptation diagnostic test. This express-method includes six criteria of socio-psychological adaptation – emotional comfort, sense of safety in the group, self-respect, self-esteem, respect for others, and an interest in others^{1,2}. Every criteria is measured in the scale from 1 to 7. Every criteria is measured in a scale from 1 to 7. The changes were measured before and after the series of workshops. To fulfill consistency, there was a testing of statistical hypotheses with the help of Student's t-test. Significance levels were set at $p < 0.001$ with twotailed testing. Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistica-10 software package (StatSoft). In addition, observation, interviews, and talks with the participants were used.

The Experimental Base of the Study: Pilot research was done during the 2014-2016 academic years on the basis of Kazan (Volga) Federal University. Volunteers (first-year students from CIS and other Russia's neighbouring states) took part in the research, including

engineering and technical students. The total number of students engaged in the experiment was 149. Students were divided into 3 groups: “group one” consisting of 50 people who took part in the adaptation workshop lasting 4 days, “group two” consisting of 50 people who took part in the adaptation workshop lasting 2 days and control group consisting of 49 people. They were Russian-speaking students from different regions of Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Ukraine. Gender distribution was 57% men and 43% women.

Results: The experiment undertaken shows that after the workshop all mentioned criteria changed. As a result of the experimental research, statistical analysis of the obtained data was carried out in order to examine changes in the criteria of adaptation processes in all sampling groups. Based on the students’ answers to the questionnaire, we organized a summary record and calculated average values for each criterion of adaptation before and after the workshop (see tables 1 and 2).

Table 1.

Changes in adaptation criteria (Group One).

Adaptation criteria	Before the workshop (average value)	After the workshop (average value)
Emotional comfort	4.24	6.61*
Sense of safety in the group	4.50	6.84*
Self-respect	5.41	6.55*
Self-esteem	5.12	6.21*
Respect for others	5.91	6.90*
Interest in others	5.65	6.63*

Note. * — $p < 0.001$ — statistically significant differences of adaptation criteria before the workshop to after.

Table 2.

Changes in adaptation criteria (Group Two).

Adaptation criteria	Before the workshop (average value)	After the workshop (average value)
Emotional comfort	5.51	6.42*
Sense of safety in the group	6.18	6.54
Self-respect	5.91	6.41*
Self-esteem	5.63	6.19*
Respect for others	6.08	6.60*
Interest in others	5.81	6.27*

Note. * — $p < 0.001$ — statistically significant differences of adaptation criteria before the workshop to after.

As the tables show (see tables 1 and 2), the workshop resulted in the change of all stated adaptation criteria. The most significant change can be seen in the criterion of emotional comfort (2.4 points in group one and 0.9 point in group two). By comparing changes in adaptation criteria, one can observe that changes in all adaptation criteria in group one are much more noticeable than in group two. This trend is particularly prominent in the changes of the criterion “sense of safety in the group.” In the first group, this change, along with the criterion of emotional comfort, is the biggest and constitutes 2.3 points. In the second group, the changes in this criterion is on the contrary the least and constitutes only 0.2 points. The change in all criteria by all means shows that the workshop was efficient and it influenced the adaptation criteria. The fewest changes in group one can be seen in the criterion

respect for others (1 point), although before the workshop this criterion had the highest level of importance. The least valuable criterion, among all adaptation criteria after the workshop, is the level of self-esteem (6.2 points in group one and two), seen in both groups.

To check consistency of changes in adaptation criteria before and after the workshop, testing of statistical hypotheses was carried out with the help of Student's t-test separately for each group. The results obtained show that in group one the changes in all criteria are valid with the level of significance $p < 0.001$. In group two the changes of five criteria are valid. The criterion "safety in group" has invalid changes (see tables 1 and 2). In the control group the results of two observations in adaptation criteria 4 days apart showed the absence of statistically significant changes in all six adaptation criteria.

In order to study the influence of the workshops on the adaptation criteria, a coefficient variation calculation scheme for adaptation criteria before and after the workshop was carried out in each group¹⁰. The degree of variation after the workshop decreases in both groups. Moreover, the degree of variation change depends considerably on the length of the workshop. Thus, in group two it decreases slightly in all criteria, and in group one coefficient values of variation decrease in different criteria several-fold. This demonstrates that the data become more consistent, and the longer the workshop the more consistent the result is.

Conclusions: The results of this research let us conclude that workshops affect all criteria of the adaptation process, but the largest influence is in emotional comfort. The impact of the "sense of safety in the group" criterion shows the most intricate evidence for this. The fewest changes can be seen in the criterion "respect for others." With the four-day workshops we observed valid changes in adaptation criteria, with their variation decreasing slightly. As the results have shown, the workshop should last at least four days. Longer workshops are seen as pointless, as they take valuable time and material resources needed for the educational process.

Therefore, the research shows high efficiency of the developed workshop for first-year students lasting four days. Our experience demonstrates that workshops can be used to develop and sustain students' mobility. They can be useful for universities attracting foreign students and students from other country regions as they help student adapt to a new environment. It is necessary to take into account inconsistency of workshop influence on adaptation criteria and make more consistent changes by adding suitable exercises into the program of the workshop.

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