

Medical Education

Pedagogical Aspects of Adaptation of First-Year Ukrainian and Foreign Russian-Speaking Students of the Department of Medicine

Elena Ivanchenko^{*}, Oksana Melnikova, Svetlana Malakhova, Alexander Prokopchenko

Abstract

Timely adaptation of first-year students to new living conditions and educational activities is one of the most important challenges of high school. The objective of the research was to study and analyze the problems of adaptation to high school experienced by Ukrainian and foreign first-year students of the Department of Medicine. The questionnaires offered to students showed that the main adaptation difficulties arise in the educational sphere. At the end of the first term, most students positively assessed the degree of their adaptability and noted the leading role of groupmates and friends in its formation. The possible directions of higher educational institution activity facilitating the process of adaptation of first-year students to high school were analyzed. According to the results of the questionnaire survey which indicated that the main difficulties were a lack of leisure time and academic overload, there is a need to optimize academic overload, as well as to inform psychologists, curators and lecturers about the formation of students' ability to rationally schedule their time and the development of independent working skills.

Keywords

adaptation processes; first-year students; educational activities

Zaporozhye State Medical University, Ukraine

*Corresponding author: elenazonovna71@gmail.com

Problem statement and analysis of the recent research

There comes a time in everyone's life when habitual behavior becomes slightly or totally ineffective. The world around us is changing rapidly, new living conditions appear, and a person needs to overcome these difficulties using certain adaptive mechanisms. One of the most important stages in a young person's life is the admission to a higher education institution. A lot of difficulties have to be overcome by yesterday's schoolchildren who became students: psychological unpreparedness to new forms of learning, necessity to build new relationships with other students; very often, there may be doubts regarding a correct choice of profession. Students, who changed their residency status, experience even greater difficulties. They often miss their parents and habitual social circle; almost all male students experience certain everyday problems associated with their settling in a hostel or when renting a flat; they need to organize their own life, prepare food, manage their own budget etc. Moreover, both girls and boys have to master a new social role, namely the role of a university student. Their further stay at the university depends on the success of their first-year adaptation: successful start of high school study contributes to rapid assimilation of its new forms and methods, the development of positive relationships with lecturers and groupmates, the realization of their

scientific, creative, and athletic abilities. The first year of study lays the groundwork for professional training for all the subsequent years of study; therefore, successful adaptation of first-year students, undoubtedly, has a significant effect on their future professional activities. The inability to adapt to new requirements, in turn, could lead to severe disappointment, alienation, passivity and even unwillingness to learn and receive higher education [2, 12].

All the participants of the educational process (students, teachers, and university administration) are interested in effective adaptation. Therefore, one of the most important pedagogical tasks of each university is the work with first-year students, which is aimed at an early and successful adaptation to a new educational system as well as to new social relations.

The adaptation of students for higher education is a multi-level process that includes elements of social and psychological adaptation contributing to the development of students' intellectual and personal capabilities [11]. According to T.V. Alekseeva, O.P. Venher, V.H. Hamov, O.D. Hrechyshkina, H.P. Levkivska, Ye.O. Reznikova, O.H. Soloduhova, F.H. Khairullin, A.V. Furman [7], the process of adaptation to university study usually takes from one to three years; however, numerous researches suggest that first-year students are most sensitive to these new conditions [3, 4, 9, 11, 12].

"The main problem of successful entry into the educational process is a contradiction between the level of com-

municative competence in perceiving information and educational requirements of high school” [5].

According to researchers who believe that adaptation processes can be classified [11], there are three forms of adaptation for higher educational institution conditions: 1) formal adaptation that allows students to adapt to unfamiliar environment, the structure of higher education, new duties and requirements; 2) social adaptation that allows students to integrate into a group and student society; 3) didactic adaptation that allows students to master new methods and forms of studying at the university.

The main condition of effective adaptation process is purposeful pedagogical management of this process. The activation of social and biological resources of young people, who grow and develop, requires increased attention of teachers and the need for constant psychological and pedagogical support [11]. Pedagogical management requires a detailed study of the difficulties faced by students, the determination of measures to facilitate the adaptation processes for first-year students and the development of criteria and indicators for measuring the success of the process of adaptation for university study [3].

The objective of the research was to identify the main problems faced by first-year students of the Department of Medicine; to compare the difficulties experienced by foreign and Ukrainian students; to find out what conditions they managed to adapt to after the first term; to identify means of assistance and organize events contributing to successful adaptation of first-year students.

1. Materials and methods

Eighty-nine Ukrainian and 86 foreign Russian-speaking medical students at the age of 17-20 years who completed the first term participated in the voluntary survey. We formulated the questions through the overview of scientific literature studying the problem of adaptation of first-year students, namely the methods of detecting typical difficulties of first-year students (B.G. Meshcheryakov), methods of motivation for studying in higher education institutions (A.O. Rean, V.O. Yakunin, modification of N.Ts. Badmayeva) [6, 8].

2. Results of the research and their discussion

The determination of adaptation criteria is a complex theoretical and practical problem of scientific research. Certainly, the success and effectiveness of students' adaptation depends on the realization of the active role of the personality in the processes of adaptation to new living conditions, and a significant inner criterion of a first-year student's adaptation to the conditions of a higher education institution is the state of their satisfaction with the process and learning outcomes. [1]. The survey results showed that 93.1% of Ukrainian students were fully or partially satisfied with their student life. However, among foreign students, this percentage was only 71.8%.

Among first-year students surveyed, there were those, who were completely or partially dissatisfied with their new status - 1.7% of Ukrainian students and 16.9% of foreign ones. To identify the level of personal inclusion of students in the adaptation process, they were asked to answer a series of questions, requiring affirmative or negative answer. For example: 1. Are you satisfied with the status of a student of our university? 2. Has your lifestyle changed for the better while studying at our university? 3. Has your lifestyle changed for the worse while studying at our university? 4. Do you almost always go to the university with pleasure? 5. Do you actively participate in your group life? 6. Do you alienate yourself from your group life? 7. Do you never participate in your group life? Fig. 1 presents the survey results. The analysis of the questionnaire responses revealed that absolutely all Ukrainian students were satisfied with the status of a student of Zaporizhzhia State Medical University. Most foreign and Ukrainian first-year students noted that they have a positive attitude to student life: their lives have changed for the better (Fig 1: 2); they study at the university with pleasure (Fig. 1: 4) and take an active part in their group life (Fig. 1: 2, 5).

These data indicated that, in general, the adaptation processes at the end of the first term were satisfactory. It should be noted that among Ukrainian students, adaptation to the educational process was more successful. For example, satisfaction with the choice of university among foreign Russian-speaking students was 65.0% only, and 25.3% of first-year students did not participate in their group life.

However, the adaptation of first-year students for university study continues and can last not only during the first year of study. It goes without saying that due to some objective reasons (moving to another country, an unfamiliar cultural environment, etc.) foreign students need more time to go through all the stages of habituation and adaptation to new conditions of existence.

Fig. 2 shows the data related to the feeling of adaptation to study at the university. The survey results indicated that the percentage of foreign students who could not adapt to study environment was approximately four times higher than that among Ukrainian students. Approximately the same proportion of Ukrainian and foreign students noted that they needed no adaptation as they felt they became students immediately after the first day of their study at the university. The data obtained indicated that the problem of adaptation is quite relevant. The comparison of the percentage of students whose adaptation was long and difficult with those whose adaptation was short and easy revealed that a detailed and more in-depth study of this issue is needed. The next question pool concerned the study of difficulties faced by first-year students. Having analyzed the data received, we found that the main problem for both Ukrainian and foreign students (75.0% and 68.0%, respectively) was the fact that a large amount of academic work has to be done independently, namely to analyze a huge amount of information, to work with textbook and original sources, to clearly formulate own thoughts, etc.

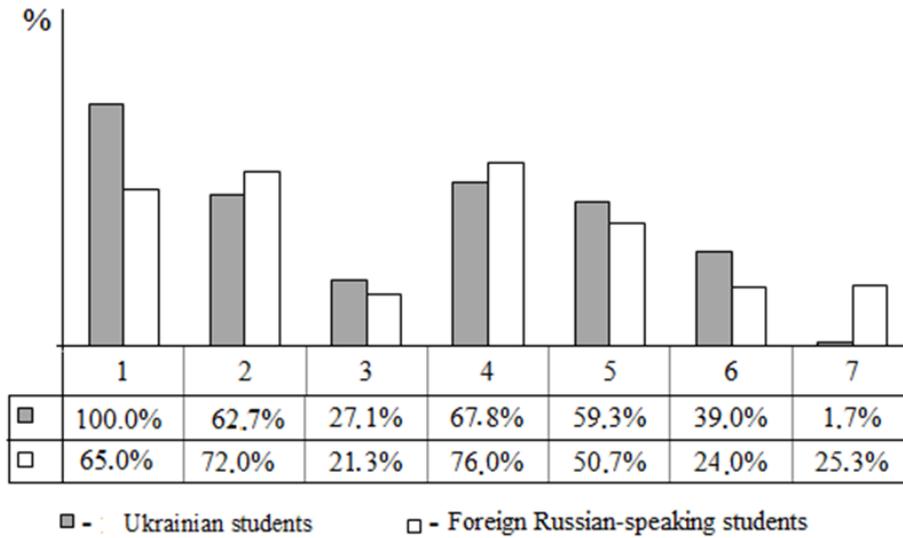


Figure 1. Level of personal inclusion of students in the adaptation processes

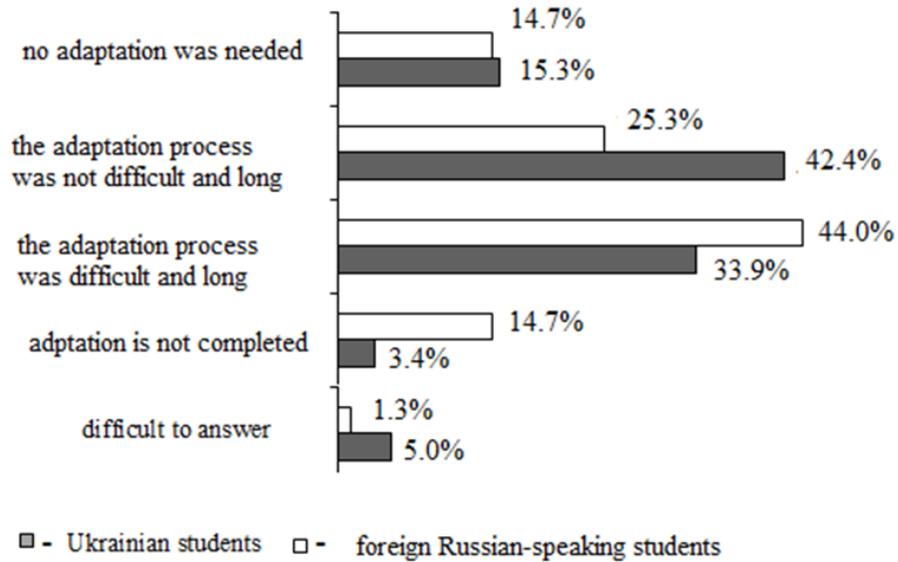


Figure 2. Process of adaptation of first-year students of the Department of Medicine (after the first term)

The academic load was enormous for 53.3% of Ukrainian students and 38.7% of foreign students. After the first term, adaptation of medical students to new forms of studying was not completed. Having analyzed the data received, we can conclude that among Ukrainian first-year students at the beginning of their study, seminar was the most difficult form of studying (50.8% of all respondents). After the first term, approximately 32.2% of first-year students answered in the same way. Practical work was difficult for 37.3% of students, and after the first term, it remained difficult for 25.4% of students. Foreign students reported lecture as the most difficult form of studying - 39.0%, and 17.2% of foreign students eventually have not adapted to this form of education. Certain difficulties arose for students during seminars as well. This was reported by 32.8% of foreign first-year students at the beginning of the academic year and 20.3% of students after the first term. Only 7.8% of foreign Russian-speaking students coped with all forms of studying easily and quickly, and after the first term, this percentage was 34.4%. Among Ukrainian students, the percentage of student adapted to new forms of studying after the first term was 35.6% (at the beginning of the year, it was 6.8% only). Gaps in knowledge acquired at school were considered as the main difficulties when studying by 17.9% of Ukrainian students and 12.0% of foreign students. According to 32.0% of Ukrainian students and 28.8% of foreign ones, the inability to rationally schedule their time caused the greatest difficulty in their student life as well. Due to all the difficulties that arose at the beginning of their study, 70.7% of Ukrainian students noted their results in mid-term exams as the main cause of their dissatisfaction with student life. Among foreign students, this percentage was 55.2%.

To analyze possible professional difficulties of students, they were asked to answer questions about the motives of their entry to this university. Interest in future profession was the leading motive in 59.3% of Ukrainian students and 42.6% of foreign students; 37.6% of Ukrainian and approximately 35% of foreign students believed that it was the best careers to suit their abilities. Among foreign students, 18.8% of first-year students admitted that one of the most important reasons to study at the university is to obtain a diploma. The fact that the percentage of students received a piece of advice about their difficult and responsible future profession from specialists in professional orientation being very low deserves special attention: 4.6% of foreign first-year students and 5.4% of Ukrainian first-year students. The results of the survey showed that within the first study year, the internal and external positive motivation to studying prevail. Students understand the importance and reasonability of studying subjects within the first year of their study; they are satisfied with the range and content of educational disciplines, as well as the organization of their educational process as evidenced in the survey: 62.7% of Ukrainian and 70.7% of foreign Russian-speaking students reported their satisfaction with the above-mentioned sides of university life. All this indicates that in most of students, the problem of professional adaptation was not expressed.

However, among foreign respondents, 13 first-year students admitted that they lost interest in their future profession. The survey was conducted anonymously; however, some work should be done with such students with their consent.

To identify the factors being able to accelerate the process of adaptation, we offered the students to determine the most crucial factors accelerating adaptation for university study. According to the results, most respondents (69.6% of Ukrainian students and 48.0% of foreign students) believed that everything depends on the person himself/herself, and his/her character, sociability, openness, whether he/she is non-confrontational, etc. Respondents considered favorable social climate in the group as the crucial factor (69.5% of Ukrainian students and 46.7% of foreign students). Almost all students expected external support (provided by groupmates, friends, relatives, teachers). The support of first-year students by their parents was especially important as reported by 48.2% of Ukrainian student and 51.4% of foreign student. First-year students admitted that at this stage of their life, the relationship with parents is the most important type of interpersonal relationships. Almost all students indicated that in case of difficulties in their personal life or study, they will primarily turn to their relatives for aid. The role of parents in the formation of successful adaptation is undeniable [13]; it consists in continuous monitoring of their child's progress in studying, his/her living in a dormitory or in an apartment. Relatives should come to the university, communicate with the Dean and the curator and take interest in all the sides of university life, as well as in learning outcomes and adaptation of first-year students. Certainly, parents are almost always ready to support their child at a difficult stage of life; however, for everyone it is very important to be able to ask other people for help when they experience difficulties either in education or in a certain life situation. We offered the students to choose several people (except for parents) with whom they are ready to share their problems. Fifty per cent of Ukrainian students and 40.0% of foreign students expected to be supported by their group monitor; 50.8% of Ukrainian students and 61.0% of foreign students would ask lecturers for help; 22.0% of Ukrainian students and 37.3% of foreign students would turn to the university administration for aid; only 3.4% of Ukrainian students and 8.0% of foreign first-year students were ready to see a psychologist. However, according to our survey, 64.4% of Ukrainian and 42.7% of foreign students believe that it is necessary to try to solve their problems on their own.

After the first term, most first-year students practically adapted to the new conditions. "Who helped you in adapting to a new social role of a student?" - this was the last question in the survey. First-year students responded to it as follows (Fig. 3). The survey results indicated, that students received the main help in adapting to the new living conditions in their environment (groupmates and friends), which is understandable considering the age of respondents. Many Ukrainian students noted that they adapted to their new life

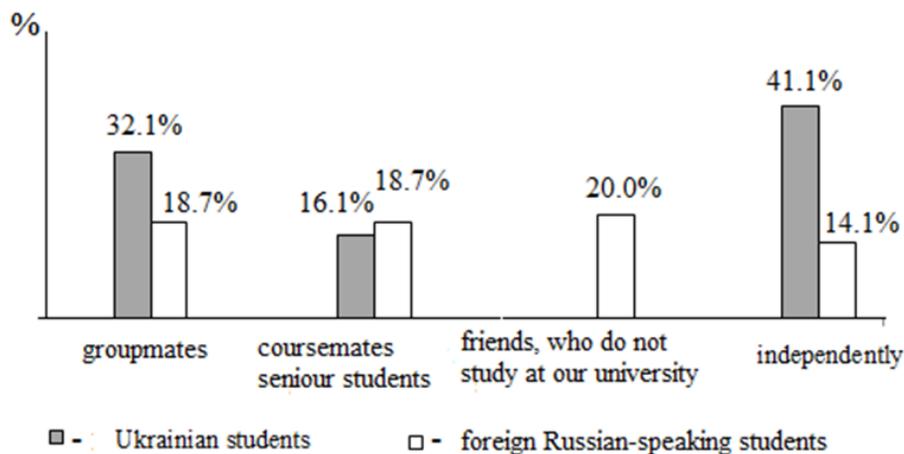


Figure 3. Aid to first-year students in adapting to new study conditions

independently. However, the actual problem is the necessity to increase the influence of curators and lecturers being professionals in this field on the process of adaptation of first-year students [2].

3. Conclusions

Timely adaptation of first-year students for higher education is an important, difficult and relevant issue. We obtained the data indicating that most students have a very responsible and conscious attitude to studying at the university. Nevertheless, first-year students have problems that sometimes cannot be successfully solved by themselves. According to the results of the survey, students consider they can overcome the difficulties of adaptation by themselves or with the support of groupmates; however, they do not reject the possibility to ask the Dean, curators, teachers or psychologists for help. In our opinion, it is necessary to significantly increase the role of professionals in successful overcoming the challenges faced by students. The help and support of specialists in this sphere is necessary and should be systematically organized. This can include the following tasks:

1. To study the individual characteristics of first-year students.
2. To identify the difficulties of the adaptation period, analyze and summarize the collected data to prepare recommendations for students and lecturers, curators and parents to optimize the adaptation period.
3. To conduct the course “Introduction to the profession”, where students would receive a clear idea of organizational issues related to university study, new methods and forms of learning, rational scheduling of their time.

4. Prospects for further research

The clarification of the student’s needs in support and the strengthening of the role of professionals in timely, efficient and successful adaptation of first-year students are promising.

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