

Language Animation as a Method of Foreign Students Communicative Adaptation

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Abstract

Internationalization is a priority for many universities around the world. Adaptation of international students to study conditions in the university is one of the main problems that the university management, psychologists, and teachers have to solve. The issue of adaptation of international students and their socialization implies implementing everyday interaction between carriers of different values and developing a constructive dialogue between representatives of other cultures; it is multi-cultural communication. The article considers language animation as a tool for the adaptation of international students, which contributes to the achievement of a stable focus on learning; international students can use that for better transformation at host universities. It will lead to a better understanding of the host culture and thereby develop intercultural communication among students. The overall effect would be a harmonious relationship between students of various cultures and improved learning and team activities to make them better professionals.

Keywords: Adaptation, international students, international communication, language animation, language department, socialization.

Introduction

We live in a rapidly changing world. The information society is changing the system of education and also the values of society. International migration processes have made Russia a center for connecting many cultures and faiths (Federova, 2018). Against the background of ongoing changes in Russian society's spheres under an innovative development in Russia's professional education, they keep internationalization as the primary focus. The definition adopted in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research shows that the Internationalisation of higher education at the national, sectoral, and institutional levels is generally understood as a process in which the goals, functions, and organization of educational services acquire an international dimension (Girdzijauskaite et al., 2019).

One of the indicators of the success of a university is the number of international students. The percentage of international students studying is one of the key performance indicators, among other things, affecting the university's place in the overall rating (Brain, 2018). As a rule, educational institutions strive to attract international students contingent

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on increasing their university students' number. A logical consequence of this process is that the composition of study groups is becoming increasingly multi-ethnic and, as a result, inevitably multi-level. Consequently, for effective communication, both the students themselves and the teachers must possess subject material. They know the characteristics of someone else's culture, the original mentality, and the possession of intercultural competence.

Not knowing the cultural heritage of different peoples can lead to inter-ethnic tensions, an atmosphere of increased conflict, and stressful situations in the educational process. All of this will negatively affect the lives of both Russian and foreign students. Moreover, it is worth noting that currently, there are no tools for developing tolerance, team building, and improving the psychological microclimate of the interethnic educational group of a modern University. This factor needs to be studied and developed.

If we turn to the foreign colleagues' existing experience of foreign universities, then, for example, in the Federal Republic of Germany, similar processes of increasing the number of international students at universities in the country began in the middle of the last century. Therefore, Germany has a unique experience and practical experience organizing and implementing the educational process, including many multi-cultural groups and international students. In this case, German practical methods and developments can be studied and analyzed to suit the Russian conditions. They can be effectively used in the changing conditions of the modern academic environment of Russia. The proposed study then aims to determine the extent to which foreign gaming technologies - elements of language animation - will help harmonize the emotional state of members of a multi-cultural and an interethnic study group.

This article aims to analyze and solve the adaptation and socialization of international students in the language department of Kazan Federal University. The method of language animation is considered a means of achieving an optimal transformation level for international students. To achieve this, the following tasks are to be completed:

- (i) Determine the features of socio-cultural adaptation of Russian and international students in the Russian Federation, in particular at Kazan Federal University, and interpret the factors of its success or failure;
- (ii) Identify the main problems and contradictions;
- (iii) Consider game technologies as a tool for students' adaptation in the language department;
- (iv) Describe the language animation technique used in the context of multi-cultural language learning and analyze its applicability in Russian universities; and
- (v) Conduct a comparative analysis of the indicators of social adaptation of international students, taking into account language animation in foreign language classes.

Methods

The following methods are supposed to be used based on the study's purpose and objectives: logical analysis, synthesis, systematization, comparison, targeted psychological and pedagogical observation. The study of the results of activity, questionnaires, testing, pedagogical interpretation of the research results is to be done to measure effectiveness. The article focuses on modern approaches to learning, including European methodological trends that consider globalization and intercultural communication problems. In 2016, Moscow hosted the all-Russian Educational Forum "German-the first, second foreign language," held by the Goethe German cultural center. The authors have used materials from this Forum.

This study hypothesizes that using language animation in classes with students will also contribute to a more successful course of adaptation processes among

international students and will make it possible to adjust the educational process considering multiculturalism principles. It is assumed that the development of such methods will make it possible to apply them in the future to enhance students' tolerance, build a constructive dialogue between the "western" and "eastern" world and equip a modern teacher with the necessary tools to ensure the optimal level of socialization of foreign students and the inclusion of an intercultural component in the educational process to improve the psychological microclimate of educational groups.

Discussion

First of all, it is necessary to carefully study the main features and factors that affect international students' adaptation. In many ways, the most challenging and defining stage of international students' adaptation is the university's first year of study. The features of the educational process for international students are (i) teaching in a non-native language for students, (ii) training in a multi-cultural educational environment, (iii) study of major subjects with mastering the language of training, (iv) national specific educational experience, and (v) active biological, educational and socio-cultural adaptation.

As the researchers (Gamezo, Gerasimova, Gorelova, & Orlova, 2001) note, "youth is nothing more than a transition from purely physical maturity to social maturity. Its main content is involvement in "adult" life, the assimilation of those norms and rules that exist in society." For Russian-speaking and Tatar-speaking students, this assimilation (including the university's scientific and public life) will be relatively more painless and natural. The international students will inevitably encounter differences concerning educational institutions' activities and traditions of vocational education and their primary, general education level. The differences can be in the social status of studying youth groups, with differences in Rye and forms of social activity, with differences in the manifestations of the mentality and peculiarities of education, cultural stereotypes, and behavior. They also need time to get used to the peculiarities of climatic and weather conditions, changes in life and nutrition, adapt to their individual physiological and psychological reactions to the situation.

Scientists such as Italiyazova A., and Yeremina N.K. (2013) agree that "the adaptation of a foreign student is a complex, dynamic, multi-level and multilateral process of restructuring the need-motivational sphere, the complex of existing skills, abilities, and habits according to new conditions for him. This requires enormous costs of the physical and psychological resources of man". Moreover, the primary barrier in this process is the language barrier. As a rule, most teachers adhere to the point of view that international students' language skills and skills in junior courses are insufficient for mastering large volumes of professionally-oriented educational material. Also, inadequate language preparedness significantly slows down socio-cultural interaction and the establishment of new social ties. It prevents the mastery of the new culture's features, the assimilation of its basic norms and rules, and the new social environment's moral values. For this reason, the uncomfortable and problematic existence in the new social space, associated with significant difficulties in the educational process, which, in turn, is related to difficulties in assimilating the material under study, can cause a state of psychological stress and rejection from the realities of the new fact acquired by international students. As researcher L. Thierry (2012) emphasizes in his work, "The socio-cultural adaptation of foreign students to everyday life in Russian society is applied and compulsory. It is a prerequisite for inclusion in the educational process and is not accompanied by an internal spiritual unity with Russian culture. The external behavior of adaptations is governed by social norms accepted in the host culture, and the internal - by the norms of their national culture."

The solution to this problem is seen by many as opportunities for cultural exchange, active interaction with representatives of local academic and public organizations, and the implementation of informal communication. Friendly communication in the host country's language can significantly contribute and greatly facilitate adaptation to new international students' realities.

Therefore, there is no doubt that international students' adaptation support to realize their potential and overcome adaptation barriers should be carried out through an integrated system of measures. To reduce emotional tension and acquire the necessary communication skills, educational institutions have conducted and carried out various preventive measures to familiarise themselves with the culture, traditions, and features of the national mentality and the communication process's actualization. It can be all sorts of evenings, elective classes, round tables, meetings of discussion clubs, etc.). However, these events are organized, as a rule, mainly after school hours. And based on the difficulties described above in forming social ties with the new environment, international students often prefer to spend free time with their national representatives, communicating in their native language. Also, a close relationship with the diaspora is of great importance for representatives of eastern cultures. For the same reason, mastery of the host country's language and culture may be ignored simultaneously. The communication process's activation is hindered by some supranational aspects, some psychological and pedagogical features of the modern "Generation Z," including Russian and foreign students.

The generation of modern students is generation Z, which has significant differences from previous generations. This generation grew up and was formed during the explosion of multimedia technologies in society. Generation Z is characterized by clip thinking; that is, they instantly perceive information from all channels, switching quickly and forming a General picture in their head. Modern students strive to get results immediately with minimal effort.

Considering the peculiarities of the modern Generation of students, it is necessary to transform education consistently. Such transformation should consider changes in the perception of information and new generation students' thinking. Such transformation should consider changes in the perception of information and the peculiarities of thinking by students who belong to the digital generation. One way to transform education is to integrate the virtual environment in which students spend most of their time (Korableva et al., 2019). The integration of the virtual environment, in our opinion, is one of the most effective ways to attract and adapt international students since the Internet evokes a positive attitude of students of Generation Z and offers excellent opportunities for self-realization and adaptation.

The use of Internet learning space undoubtedly has many advantages. However, we should not forget that virtual space also has its drawbacks. One of them is the reduction of Physical contacts and communication. A distinctive feature of working in the virtual space is the preference for written (virtual) communication over oral, the desire for voluntary social isolation (Hrabala et al., 2017; Volchik & Maslyukova, 2019). This inevitably leads to the fact that classmates cannot contact each other in a real-life communication situation, which will cause a low communicative culture and cross-cultural competence.

Results

The University educational system, while using tools and methods of international students, should consider the modern Z generation's psychological and intellectual characteristics. Such characteristics of the modern generation of students such as the inability to focus on

the details of information, the ability to think big, a tendency to compete, restlessness, impatience, unwillingness to wait for anyone or anything, infantilism encourage teachers to look for new methods of teaching, as well as ways to adapt international students. In these conditions, the technique of language animation proposed by the animators of the Goethe Cultural Center can be considered. The visibility, dramatization, and dynamism used in it can serve as a counterweight to computer individualization and carry out a compensatory function concerning increasing direct human communication volume. The possibility of using a sufficiently large number of game elements in the learning process also usually causes students' active interest.

Many researchers agree that the principle of pleasure, entertainment is put at the forefront today and becomes quite significant for current students (Tarman, 2020). The widespread enthusiasm for modern children and youth in computer games and staying in a virtual environment has led to the emergence of the term gamification and the application of game techniques or their attributes in a wide variety of areas. Therefore, the use of entertainment and attractive tools typical of computer games for the implementation of typically educational and developmental tasks can also serve as a methodological task in training and education (Kopish & Lane, 2019; Nureeva et al., 2019). The students spend a large part of their time on gadgets which have, representatives of the modern generation. They may perceive gaming reality as part of not as a second reality, but as a leading one or at least occupying an important place in their life. On the other hand, the vast possibilities of the entertainment spectrum of mobile devices, as a rule, has to lead to a decrease in the motivation for mastering educational material in classical "school" conditions. The search for a solution to the above problems created such a popular foreign methodology as language animation.

Moreover, as teachers and theorists' experience, the game is one of the effective teaching methods. As Stronin M. F. (2001), the specifics of the game lies in the fact that "educational tasks do not appear before the child in an explicit form, but are masked. While playing, the child does not pose a learning task, but he learns something as a result of the game." Being inside the game situation, the student is passionate and focused on achieving the goal. Therefore he is forced to comprehend and remember much of the past; however, he performs these actions and looks for solutions by himself without specific guidance. This feature of the game makes it the most important means of developing mental actions and developing voluntary attention. Game methods in teaching, especially foreign languages, have become quite firmly established in the teaching system because they can reproduce and simulate real communicative situations, which can significantly facilitate language acquisition. For example, the use of games in foreign language lessons allows you to achieve individual, meta-subject, and subject results; in particular, it helps in (i) development of cognition (in the field of the formation of the language itself); (ii) development of speech skills; (iii) development of communication skills; and (iv) memorizing speech material, etc.

It is necessary to get the individuals' attention in the game situation-specific language skills and realizing one's potential, world perception, and self-expression. Of course, the game itself has many different functions. However, in the context of our study, we should first of all note its possibilities in the didactic perspective, in terms of the use of students for the socio-cultural adaptation (which automatically includes the presence of some educational tasks). Since ancient times, it was a gaming activity that was for children to reproduce real-life situations. Therefore, it facilitated the acquisition of some life experience and orientation in public life and facilitated integration into it. Etsuko Toyoda (2016) noted this feature of it, who defined "play as a feasible way for a child to

enter into the complexity of the world of adults around him.” In his opinion, children’s games reflect the surrounding social environment, which gives “... the material is much more diverse and valid than the one offered by the toy store.”

In the educational game, specific human activity was expectedly reproduced; therefore, various aspects of life, stereotypes of behavior, and ways of building social connections, the characteristics of relationships between people were reflected. Therefore, it seems logical to assume that all this specificity could most easily be reflected in the game activity with other communication forms when students get into another society with a different lifestyle and mentality. In the future, with its systematic implementation, could contribute to a more efficient course of adaptation, socialization, and integration into the educational process. D. B. Elkonin (2019) also emphasized that “the game belongs to the symbolic-modeling type of activity in which the operational and technical side is minimal, operations are reduced, objects are conditional. The game makes it possible for such an orientation in the external, visible world, which no other activity can give.

Of particular importance for the socialization process is that the game is a collective form of work in which students are forced to contact and interact with each other in its process. During the game, a person has to evaluate his capabilities, correlate them with other people’s capabilities, and change his knowledge about himself and the world around him. The game situation’s educational function is realized again in a quick, involuntary form in the game itself. But at the same time, an entertaining, festive atmosphere, which is accompanied by the holding of any exciting game, can smooth out acute situations or moments of tension.

The use of entertainment to teach communication often performs a somewhat pragmatic function. The communicative approach to teaching, firmly established in the European practice of teaching a foreign language in the eighties of the last century, would seem to be designed to solve the eternal problem of numerous complaints about the insufficiently developed communicative competence of foreign language learners in the school system. However, despite the communicative orientation in learning, it was often possible to observe that students’ coercion, pronounced language barrier, and the fear of making a mistake is a byproduct of mastering the language. To some extent, all these consequences are evened out by using language animation since, in the case of its application, the game component and the communicative situation are combined. The name “animation” a priori implies the amusement and emotional involvement of the participants in the process, and not their fixation on possible mistakes. Acting as a language animator, the teacher, in a sense, performs the same tasks that are set, for example, by the animator in the hotel, namely, to attract people to join activities during the game situation, creating conditions for communication in the language being studied. The situation can also be a game one and quite real if, for example, a language animator inspires young people to have a conversation and actively communicate in a foreign language during a youth meeting. Thus, using this technique, the teacher can act not only in the role of a person typical of him, transmitting and testing knowledge but also in a language animator’s role to attract students to informal communication.

The animation language has several advantages in using it as a tool of adaptation for international students: it removes the language barrier, makes the learning environment friendly, and makes students more confident. During language animation, creativity, players’ imagination, the ability to work in a team, and the ability to perceive someone else’s culture develop. Students acquire an interest in the traditions, values, and behavioral patterns of a foreign country. Thanks to this new vocabulary, grammar rules and new concepts are remembered easily and for a long time. The advantage of language animation

is that it can be used at the initial stage of training and the advanced stage. Thus, language animation objectives motivate students to study the subject, language training: games for repeating and reinforcing words and expressions, grammar, rules, and grammatical constructions; systematization of acquired knowledge; overcoming communication difficulties and forming a communicative culture.

If we consider language animation features in contrast to the usual language game, then the word “animation” is emphasized. On the one hand, it is entertainment; on the other hand, it is a process of “revitalization.” The leading principle for the teacher and students is an attempt to “revive” any material studied (to portray, play, draw, show with gestures, appear in the role of the material under study, etc.). From here, you can identify the benefits of using language animation:

- (i) As a game technique, it combines the training, educational and developmental aspects of training in the context of a forced game situation.
- (ii) In creating a game situation, a change in social roles occurs. The teacher is seen more as an equal participant or accompanying moderator and not as a judge of indisputable authority. This aspect can be important for young people, as representatives of generation Z, whose psychology is characterized by a distrust of any authorities. S.A. Shmakov (2019), in his work “Student Games—A Cultural Phenomenon,” notes that experience shows that no matter how well trained the teacher is, how much he owns the subject, but all the same, students prefer his explanation to a good game, where they will learn the world, will learn from each other. They will be happy to accept and assimilate the information of an adult mentor, but without fail as a participant in their game, that is, a valid information carrier, the teacher must learn to play. Creating a relaxed atmosphere and informal interaction in the classroom contributes to developing trusting relations between the participants in the game situation, contributing to group support and fruitful joint work.
- (iii) The presence of amusement, creative search, spontaneity, unexpected decisions, the formation of communicative competence in an attempt to “revive” this or that studied material.
- (iv) The possibility of “switching,” introducing diversity, dynamic pauses in the presence of monotonous, uniform work, and rapid fatigue of students since the incomplete adaptation process is also manifested by physiological symptoms such as fatigue, low mood, lack of energy, and as a result, a falling interest and motivation.
- (v) The multivariate presentation and processing of material, useful for teamwork practice, where it becomes possible to create mobile groups with different ethnic compositions and students.
- (vi) The ability to use the elements of problem-based learning, setting creative tasks.
- (vii) Application of modular technologies, flexible task changes depending on the situation.
- (viii) Modeling real-life situations, “acting out” the specifics of mentality, etiquette, and other characteristic features of the host social environment.
- (ix) The ability to engage all students in a game situation and consider their characteristics and barriers, using them precisely to the extent that they can use tasks with different difficulty levels.
- (x) The involvement of all senses, therefore, the best memorization of the material and the emotional “imprinting” of the situation.

The following are some examples of language animation proposed by the Goethe German Cultural Center at an Educational Forum in Moscow. For the most part, they aim to enhance verbal skills and be effectively used precisely at this stage of the lesson (Figure 1).

At the Goethe Seminar of the German Cultural Center, game situations of language animation are used in every lesson, which not only increases the effectiveness of training but also shows a systematic effect concerning constant communication, interaction, and strengthening social ties of group members, which are precisely the factors of successful socio-cultural adaptation.

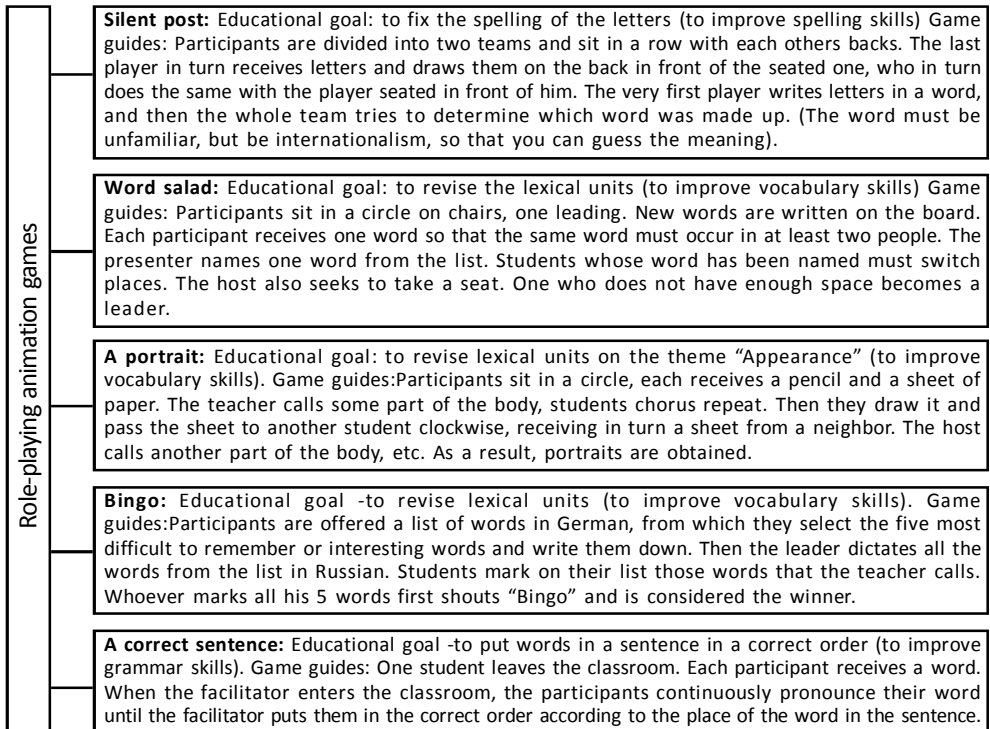


Figure 1. Role-playing animation games

To test the hypothesis about the positive impact of language animation on students' socio-cultural adaptation, we selected two student groups: Russian-speaking, Tatar-speaking students, and international students. An entrance test was also conducted among the foreigners of both groups, which confirmed the presence of a language barrier, and as a result, the difficulties with socio-cultural adaptation within the educational process. Both groups as a whole (including Russian-speaking and Tatar-speaking students) attended classes in the German language. In one group, studies were conducted traditionally, that is, with the help of the teacher presenting the teaching material, its analysis, and consolidation through exercises and homework. In the second group, the study's presentation was more in the form of a problem character (since game and problem learning are inextricably linked by the presence of the aspect of creative search). The exercises' implementation was accompanied by creative tasks and game situations using language animation methodology. When conducting a verification of the assimilation of material, students of the second group showed a 9% higher result than the first group's academic performance. Also, when filling out a repeated questionnaire on the subject of satisfaction with the educational process and the level of comfort of the psychological state in the lesson in a foreign language, the second group showed a result that is 12% higher than the result of the first group. Of course, like any other game technique, language animation can

be used only in combination with different teaching methods. In this way, it can give the teacher a tool to improve academic performance and improve the learning of the material studied and harmonize the relationship between representatives of different ethnic communities in training groups.

Conclusion

The process of adaptation of international students is conducted at different levels. It is the process of psychological, social, and cultural accommodation, which includes the acquisition of social standards and norms of behavior and communication and traditions, values of Russian culture, and linguistic specifics necessary for international students' comfortable life. Language animation in teaching foreign languages as a tool of socio-cultural adaptation of international students is currently a promising direction that considers the intellectual and psychological characteristics of students' modern generation. The language games described in this article can be successfully used to teach foreign languages and teach other disciplines. They involve such methods as gamification, dramatization, animation, and most importantly, they affect the study of culture, traditions, and customs of a foreign country. This method is effectively used for the adaptation of international students. According to the survey results, language animation in German language classes revealed an improvement in the psychological climate and the lack of severity of interethnic tension in the study group. As a potential result, a higher level of harmonization of foreign, Russian- and Tatar-speaking students was achieved. However, more reliable statistics require longer-term experiments. In any case, participation in the game allows the student to develop the ability to convince, create a sense of tact about a communication partner, politely and benevolently bring him to the desired results of negotiations, and resolve conflict situations.

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