Nowadays Russian universities have the goal of taking a firm position in the international education system. New programs created by Russian government such as 5-100 are aimed at supporting high schools and integrating them into the world international scientific society. Twenty one Russian universities participate in this competitive advantage program, that helps to create a pleasant and competitive image of the whole educational system and thus to increase the number of foreign students completing various courses read not only in Russian but also in English.

Consequently university students in our country started to get education in a multilingual environment. Alongside with positive moments foreign students may face certain problems concerning intercultural communication and adaptation to a new pedagogical system. Although the ability of a student to adopt to a certain educational environment depends on the ability of the environment to consider the interests and demands of a particular student.

This article aims to analyse various factors influencing the effective educational process organized in the foreign language environment. To achieve this, the authors consider different peculiarities of such process among foreign students on the example of South Ural State University and determine the strategy of its improvement by examining some strong and weak points of the process organization.

By using a mixed methods approach (traditional research methods of observation, product analysis, comparing and questionnaire) the authors present the effective model of classes with the diverse range of modern interactive educational technologies. The authors also identify the structural elements of the model, methodology, motivation and assessment components. In conclusion the most important points directed to the development of the educational process organization within the foreign language environment are listed.

keywords: intercultural communication, adaptation, foreign language environment, educational environment.

1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Nowadays Russian universities have the goal of taking a firm position in the international education system. The task is to make at least five native universities top-100 according to the international THE or QS ratings. Twenty one Russian universities participate in the competitive advantage program. As one of the assessment criteria is the proportion of foreign students to the total number of students studying at an institution, Russian universities do their best to attract more foreign students on their undergraduate as well as graduate programs. Consequently university students in our country started to get education in a multilingual environment.

The international students’ mobility is an important part of modern higher education policy. But the feelings of foreign students and their adjustment to the academic environment are important issues as the benefits student mobility provides. Academic adjustment refers to the degree of students’ with various educational demands such as motivation, application, performance and satisfaction with the academic environment [1].

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the adjustment process of international students studying at South Ural State University (national research university). In quite a different socio-cultural and educational environment, foreign students face certain problems, completing adjustment to new lifestyle, educational, social and cultural environment. The relevance of the work is summarized in the following three tasks:

- to find out the challenges foreign students encounter;
to understand and describe how the foreign students react to those challenges;

to analyze how and what mechanisms they employ to overcome those challenges.

2 METHODOLOGY

For identifying the level of foreign students’ adjustment to Russian educational environment both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used. Quantitative approach represents the performance of questionnaires to obtain statistical data on the basis of which we are going to conclude about the process of foreign students’ adjustment to a new educational environment, the challenges students face and how they overcome them. The qualitative approach is designed to study adjustment from the individual point of view. This approach is achieved at interviewing students to get a detailed answer to the question.

The questionnaire for monitoring foreign students’ adjustment includes not only responses of the closed type (“Yes”, “No”), but also offers an opportunity to give an answer in detail. Such criteria for determining the degree of foreign students’ adjustment as language proficiency, professional orientation, adjustment to new educational environment are taken into account. The procedure of data collecting is a meeting started with providing all the recipients with the information concerning aims of the study, procedure, conditions and guaranteed anonymity. The total number of the recipients is 60.

There are two questions related to our inclusion criteria: country of origin and nationality, five questions about difficulties and problems caused by the multinational educational environment (being trained mainly in English, different cultural background, political views, taboo topics, language barrier and other issues and a question devoted to the motivation of learning foreign languages possibly caused by such environment. In the survey with foreigners, one of the issues is also to learn their opinion on Russian educational system: what they consider as its advantages and disadvantages and whether the students find it difficult to study in Russia. (Appendix I).

In order to understand the inner world of the foreign students the association method is used in this research. A person perceives and fixes the world in his consciousness in the form of various images which he “actively takes out” from objective reality [2]. These images being the category of consciousness do not always authentically represent reality as they are formed under the influence of subjective tendencies, interests and ideals of the individual and are also painted in intimate and personal tone, inseparable from personal life and experience.

All images formed in the consciousness are combined in diverse associative connections on which educational environment, mass media, literature, social and political changes happening in society have the considerable impact. We can state that the foreign students have their own vision of how the educational process should be organized. Although when they start their education completely different from their stereotyped image, they have to overcome certain problems and challenges and the main role of the professors and teaching staff is to help them in it.

From all the foregoing the first part of this experiment is dedicated to the analysis of the hidden images of Education, University and Professor, formed in the minds of foreign students by the influence of their cultural background. These images always remain hidden for the researcher and become available to study only by means of various experiments. Among the numerous methods that can help scientists to get access to the individual consciousness we would like to allocate the associative experiment.

The technique of carrying out a free associative experiment is that the examinee answers the first word (reaction) that comes to his/ her mind in response to the shown word-incentive as soon as possible, without restriction of formal and semantic features of the reaction word. Therefore, the problem of reaction is solved automatically; the choice is not done by a thought, but by language itself offering a prepared fragment from well-known texts. Such unconscious reaction is possible only when the time interval between incentive and reaction is minimized; so that the interviewee has no possibility to think of what to say and how as the concept of association excludes the idea of answer-selection.

The associative field formed from the reactions received by means of the experiment gives the chance to describe images of consciousness of representatives of different cultures as it reflects knowledge associated with the word incentive in this or that national culture [3].
The experiment is organized among Arabic students (male and female) from various schools and institutes of South Ural State University (Institute of Linguistics and international Communication, Institute of Architecture and Construction, Institute of Natural Science, Polytechnic institute). The age of the participants varies from 23 to 28. They are given the list of 70 word-incentives that are not connected with each other (e.g. day, I, white, etc.). Among them we put the words that we are interested in, so the students give their reactions without paying specific attention to the chosen images. Thus we get the reliable data that can help us to understand the inner world of our students.

3 RESULTS

The challenges of foreign students’ adjustment differ greatly from the Russian students’ one (overcoming the didactic barrier) as foreigners have to change not only their educational but socio-cultural environment as well. These difficulties depend on geographical, economic, national, cultural and religious characteristics of the native country and they change from course to course. The research is aimed to investigate the problems and difficulties which are most typical for students from different regions of the world.

Both external and internal factors influence adjustment to multinational educational environment. Personalities of individual refer to the internal factors (age, the level of education, positive self-esteem, sociability, professional competence, readiness to adopt and respect code and traditions of a new culture, openness to changes, mobility). For the research it was important to learn external factors of the students’ adaptation to multinational educational environment caused by socio-cultural peculiarities.

Only 15% of the recipients (locals and foreigners) find it difficult to be taught in English according to the survey results. In the section of the questionnaire dedicated to disadvantages of Russian educational system 13% of foreign students point on their problem connected with the language barrier when the material is given in Russian. The students mention the language barrier in educational communication rather than communication with other students. It is based on the fact that the SUSU has not yet fully developed English-language programs. Students coming to study at the SUSU learn Russian but the language skills obtained are not good enough to perceive and handle the material in the training process sufficiently. Many studies of other researchers support the idea that the inability to speak the host language fluently is a primary inhibitor to becoming socially involved in the host society [4, 5]. That explains the difference between the native and foreign students’ answers to the question about the motivation to learn a foreign language being in a multinational environment: nearly all the foreigners (98%) find it motivating, but only 25% of the locals do. Most of the foreign students want to study the language to be integrated into the host community (integrative motivation). The wish to speak the host language well also is the reason of 31% of foreigners’ preference to do group work with Russian-speakers, but 88% locals find it indifferent to work in a single- or multinational group.

Another aspect of adaptation that the students find extremely important is differences in their cultural background: 23% of the foreigners mention that in their comments. According to the survey, the foreign students communicate well within their peer group but not well enough with other students. To avoid the isolation within the groups, the university involves its students in extracurricular activities: national holidays, international student conferences and international festivals.

Only 7% of the recipients (all of them are foreigners) point taboo topics as a source of some problems within the group and 6% (all of them are foreigners) consider different political views as the reason of it. No one thinks that the problems within the group are caused by different accents.

The survey shows that all the foreign recipients think that the educational system of their country differs significantly from the Russian one. That also leads to certain difficulties. For example 33% of the foreign students find it very problematic to work at their research work during the academic year, 15% think they have to take some disciplines not related to their major. But on the other hand the foreigners find Russian system of education kind of beneficial as the latest technologies are implemented, there are opportunities to participate in conferences, to practice and improve all the skills needed, to be taught with the use of different methods and approaches and get support from the ready-to-help teaching stuff. In general 63% of the foreign students don’t find it difficult to study in Russia and consider Russian system of higher education quite advantageous first of all because of the highly qualified teaching stuff (about 40% of the foreign recipients mention that in their comments) and good treatment (29%).
The content analysis of the questionnaires let us see the challenges the foreign students face:
- adjustment to new socio-cultural and academic environment and University culture;
- adjustment to language and instruction making;
- collaboration with group-mates;
- collaboration with the academic staff;
- heavy academic workload.

The analysis of the data of the association method gives the following results.

### 3.1 Image of Education

The most frequent reactions given by Arabic students to the incentive education are *society, learning, enlightenment, development* that means that they highlight the importance of education in the modern world and stress its necessity for the development. The general perception of the studied image can be illustrated by Table 1. The number in brackets near the reaction word shows the amount of students giving the same response.

**Table 1. Perception of the image Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Title of the group</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reactions connected with the process of education</td>
<td>Approaches (2), learning (9), process of transferring information (1), guiding the mind (1), development (7), enlightenment (4), way of enlightenment (1); skills (4), energy (2), benefit (3), progress (2), value (1), knowledge (2), books (1), teacher (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reactions of order</td>
<td>discipline (4), system (3), instructions (1), management (1), control (1), basis of society (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reactions of ethics</td>
<td>society (10), morals (1), principle (1), ethics (1), culture (4), civilization (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reactions of place</td>
<td>Foundation (2), scientific establishment (1), establishment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reactions of life necessity</td>
<td>source of life (1), necessity (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can state that there are no negative reactions to the image education as Arabic students attend university in order to develop their knowledge, to advance their career in future and thus to strengthen their country. This point of view can be proved by the answers given by them to the question: “What is the reason for studying in Russia?” Diagram 1. shows the distribution of their responses in percent.

![Diagram 1. What is the reason for studying in Russia?](image)

### 3.2 Image of University

The analysis of the University image proves the fore going information concerning the importance of education for Arabic students. The nuclear reactions *house, system, science* show that for Arabic students university is not simply the building or establishment, it is the *house of knowledge*, the *place of developing the society*, the *second house*, the *cultural house*, place of *science* and even the *place of love and friendship*. The whole spectrum of answers is shown in the Table 2.
Table 2. Perception of the image University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Title of the group</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reactions of place</td>
<td>educational center (4), the place of developing the society (3), place of researches (2), house of knowledge (1), the second house (2), house (12), world (1), the cultural house (1), place of acquiring skills (2), place of getting skills (1), place of gathering information (2), place of learning (5), place of meeting people (2), place of love (1), place of friends (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reactions revealing university as a source of</td>
<td>Science (11), respect (6), benefit (3), educated people (3), majesty (1), flourishing (1), certificate (1), source of science (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reactions of order</td>
<td>system (7), discipline (3), student’s base (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After receiving this data we asked another group of students living in the dormitory to finish the sentence “South Ural State University is...” in order to see whether their image of university somehow coincides with the chosen Russian University. We got various responses. Among the most frequent ones we can distinguish: university in Chelyabinsk, university in Russia, the university where I study, place of knowledge, scientific educational establishment, place of science, place for development, Chelyabinsk university, etc. However, no one mentions the word house that is the most frequent reaction to the incentive University. So we can conclude that although foreign students highly appreciate the opportunity to get knowledge in Russian University, they nevertheless differentiate between the South Ural State University and University as a house (University=house). That type of perception can cause various psychological problems and diseases such as for example homesickness.

3.3 Image of Professor

Having analysed the images of Education as an integral part of society and University as a second house for the majority of Arabic students, we cannot be surprised by the fact that the nuclear reactions to the word Professor are father and brother. Underlining psychological connections between Professor and the closest family relatives students show their trust and respect to the educated person who “builds the country”. On this stage, it is also important to mention that the studied image reveals the masculinity perception of the word-incentive the man who guides people, the man who seeks to help the others, the man who helps people, man of knowledge, man of morals, man of a highest value. The ideal images of professor are presented by Aristotle, Al-Farabi. Table 3.

Table 3. Perception of the image Professor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Title of the group</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reactions of family connections</td>
<td>Father (14), brother (9), big brother (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reactions revealing masculinity of the studied image</td>
<td>the man who guides people (3), the man who seeks to help the others (1), the man who helps people (1), leader (6), the man who builds the country (1), man of knowledge (1), man of morals (1), man of a highest value (1), the man who delivers lectures (1), the man who is going to get benefit from him (1), gives lectures (1), respectful man (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reactions revealing educational background</td>
<td>the base of society (1), friend (6), source of future (2), educated person (3), encyclopedia (2), culture (4), supreme example (1), mean of science (1), base of the process of education (1), science (2), knowledge (3), respect (3), university (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reactions of ideal images</td>
<td>Aristotle (1), Al-Farabi (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, in the Russian educational environment the female teaching staff prevails over the male one. And this fact should be taken for granted by the Arabic students, who have to adapt to the new reality. Among the most important qualities of the Russian professors, students distinguish numerous qualities that can be illustrated by the Diagram 2.
Social adjustment largely depends on the perception we have of others and how we interpret their behaviors. Some of the international students reported that it was difficult for them to socialize with the local students.

Language ability plays an important role in the success of international students in the new culture.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we can state that challenges that foreign students face in a new educational environment are inevitable. They can be connected with language barrier, different cultural background and numerous peculiarities of educational process organisation. So the main aim of the teaching staff is to get acquainted with the main features of the students through various methods and after that help them to overcome all possible difficulties by turning stumbling blocks into motivating points. If we meet the need for developing a coherent strategy for integration of foreign students in educational environment of the university we will be able to form their socio-personal, cultural and professional skills. At the same time these students in some way enhance the academic performance of university in which they study, as they show a good level of academic training. They enrich the cultural diversity and help to develop cultural sensitivity and skills of working with people from different social and cultural backgrounds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REFERENCES


Dear students!

Please, fill in the following form.

Faculty: ; Age: ; Nationality: ; Your country:

Answer the questions and where necessary write your own answer. Thank you in advance!

1. Do you find it difficult to study in Russia?
   - Yes
   - No

2. What advantages and disadvantages of Russian higher educational system can you distinguish?
   - Advantages:
   - Disadvantages:

3. What are the main differences between the organization of educational processes in Russia and in your country?

4. Do you find it difficult that all comments, visual material and explanations – vocabulary, grammar, etc. are given in English?
   - Yes
   - No

5. Which group work would you prefer?
   - with foreign students
   - with Russian-speakers only\ single-nation
   - it’s indifferent to me

6. The problems within the group (if here are any) are usually caused by…?
   - different cultural background
   - different political views
   - different taboo topics
   - different language barrier
   - different accents
   - add your problems not listed here

7. Do you find break-time long enough to get to the next class, do some review (if needed), etc.?
   - Yes
   - No

8. Do you find foreign students in the group a kind of motivation for learning foreign languages? Why?
   - Yes
   - No
   WHY?