

Personal Factors of Ethnic Tension among Russian Multinational University First Year Students

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Abstract. The paper is devoted to the inter-ethnic relations among the students of multicultural universities. The results of the empirical study of the personality factors of the ethnic tension among first year students are described. The level of the students' hypo- and hyper- ethnic identity in the intercultural interaction, the values of social distance between the students from different world regions are analyzed. The correlations between the above mentioned parameters and such personal characteristics as individual goals and values, self-control style, vitality and social creativity are revealed.

Keywords: Ethnic Tension, Types of Ethnic Identity, Social Distance, Life Meanings Orientations, Style of Self-Control of Behavior, Social Creativity, Hardiness, Multiethnic Education.

1. Introduction

The urgency of the task to harmonize the inter-ethnic relations among the students of Russian universities linked to the geopolitical position of Russia as a Euro-Asian multi-ethnic state, which is inhabited by over two hundred ethnic groups, which have different religions, history and unique characteristics of the material and spiritual culture. This empirical study was conducted at Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, which trains students from more than 140 countries from around the world. The Russian students of this university since the first year are included in the active cross-cultural interaction, that takes place is not always well. Therefore it is required to identify and study the various factors of ethnic tensions among students of multicultural university.

2. Background

Students are specific socio-demographic group, the most active agents of social processes in society. As S. Metelev notes, it is important to take into account that youth are: firstly, a certain age period; secondly, a particular social group; thirdly, an independent driving force; fourthly, ideologically formed part of the society; fifthly, most aimed at the implementation of the socialization process part of the society [1].

According to various experts, more than 30 million people of 15-29 years old are currently living in Russia. Particularly during this age period national consciousness and identity are actively formed, the formation of ethnic stereotypes - generalized images of different ethnic groups, the perceptions of their individual members is going on, contacts and relationships with them are built. A.Kulikov says that we should not forget that young people - a grateful audience for any propaganda, including the extremist one, aimed to the setting of disrespect and rejection of other nationalities. It must be considered that the younger generation, because of its age-related features, is characterized by such qualities as youthful maximalism, an acute sense of justice, romanticism [2].

According to A. Sadokhin's data, among the most important factors of inter-ethnic tension in Russia stand out ethno-cultural factors associated with difficulties with the ethnicity implementation, especially by the ethnic minorities [3]. A number of theoretical studies of ethnic tension personality factors among youth (for example Z. Sikevich, E.Chebotareva) identify factors such as self-relation, the desire to assert themselves in the new environment, beliefs, attitudes, the presence or absence of clear goals in life [4, 5, 6].

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3. The Empirical Study of the Personality Factors of Ethnic Tensions among Russian First Year Students

3.1. Objectives

The aims of our study were to identify empirically the personality factors of the ethnic tension among first year students. In particular, we set the tasks to determine the level of the students' hypo- and hyper-ethnic identity in the intercultural interaction, the values of social distance between the Russian and foreign students. Also the task of the study was to analyze correlations between the above mentioned parameters and such personal characteristics as individual goals and values, self-control style, vitality and social creativity.

3.2. Sample

The sample of the empirical study consists of 72 first-year Russian students of Russian Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, including 12 boys and 60 girls of 17-20 years old. All students were trained in multicultural groups.

3.3. Methods

As the indicators of ethnic tensions, we evaluated degree of the various styles of ethnic identity (ethnic interaction) and the value of social distance of Russian students from the other cultures representatives. For this purpose, we used the questionnaire “*Types of ethnic identity*” (G.U.Soldatova, S.V.Ryzhova) and “*Scale of social distance*” (E. Bogardus). To identify the personality correlates of ethnic tension, we used the techniques:

- Test of the Life Meanings Orientations (D.A.Leontjev)
- Schwartz Value Survey
- Style of self-control of behavior (V.I. Morosanova)
- Hardiness test (D.A. Leontjev)
- Method of social creativity estimation.

and statistical techniques - Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and Student's T-test.

3.4. Results

The average levels of Russian students' various styles of ethnic identity expressions are reflected in Figure 1. We can see that for the majority of Russian students the predominant style of ethnic identity is the ethnic indifference, that is, the questions of ethnicity have little relevance for them, their ethnicity is uncertain. Ethnic nihilism in the sample is average.

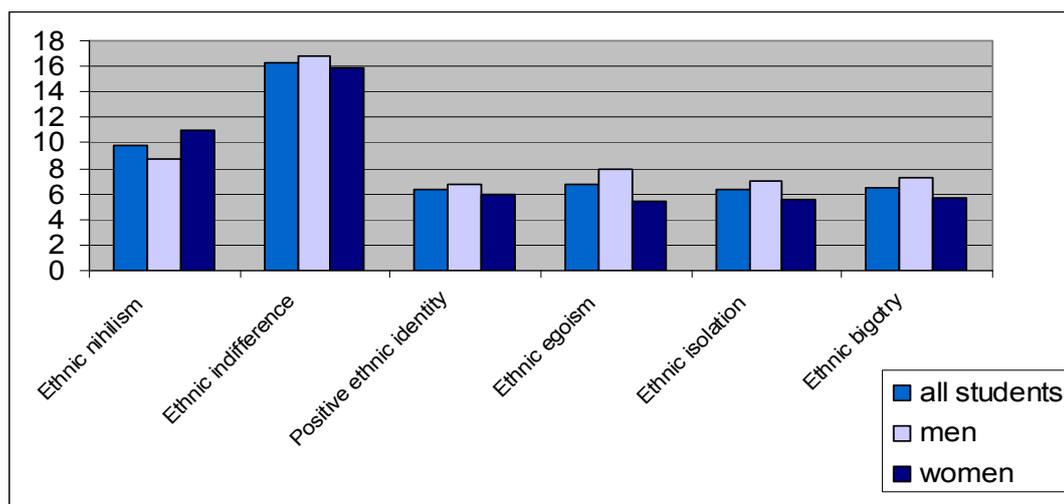


Fig.1: Ethnic identity styles of Russian students

That is, first-year Russian students often tend to move away from their own ethnic group, to build their social identity on other grounds. All other styles of ethnic identity in this group are expressed at approximately the same level - below the average. Statistically significant differences between boys and girls

were detected. The girls usually show higher level of ethnic nihilism than boys, while boys show higher level of ethnic egoism and ethnic bigotry than girls. Summarizing we can say that the girls are more inclined to the manifestations of hypo identity styles and the boys - to the manifestations of hyper identity.

Figure 2 shows the average number of the social roles that Russian students are ready to give the foreigners from the different regions of the world. We can see that Russian students are ready to give the maximum number of roles to people who come from Central Asia, so the Russians estimate their social distance from Central Asian people as minimal. The social distance from the other cultures, including the Russian one, are average. These results correlate with the data of the ethnic indifference predominance in the Russian first year students' structure of ethnic identity.

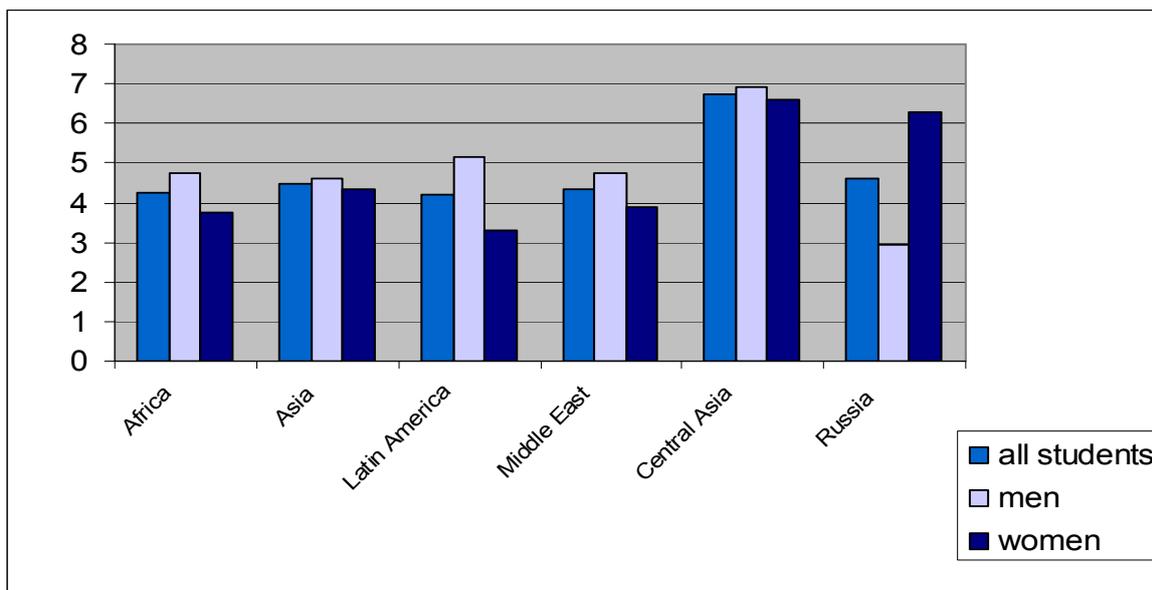


Fig.2: Number of social roles, approved by Russian students for foreigners

In order to identify personal characteristics of the students with different levels of the foreign students' acceptance, we have conducted the comparative study of two students groups selected by the level of hyper identity.

It should be noted that the two considered groups have the significant difference not only in terms of hyper identity, but also in terms of positive ethnic identity. In the group of students with high level of hyper identity also a higher level of positive ethnic identity was revealed, perhaps, the intolerance for the other ethnic groups is associated with the positive attitude to their own ethnic group. In terms of ethnic indifference, on the contrary, higher values are observed in the group with low hyper identity. That is, in general, the students who are inclined to hyper identity can be described as indifferent to the issues of ethnicity, clearly acknowledging and accepting their own ethnic identity, but feeling some tension and frustration in dealing with the members of other ethnic groups, recognizing the right of their ethnic group to solve their problems for the others expense, sometimes even denying the other nations' right to use some resources and social privileges.

In this group we have found a rather large social distance from the other ethnic groups. In general, these students are willing to provide the foreigners with less than half of the traditional social roles. Significant differences were found between this group and the group of students with low hyper identity in the magnitude of social distance from the representatives of Latin America, Middle East and Central Asia. The students with hyper identity are less likely to interact with Latin Americans and Arabs than the other students, but the Central Asian culture is perceived by them as closest one. We can say that the students with hyper identity, establishing social distance with the other ethnic groups are more likely to rely on common social stereotypes. Central Asia and Russia earlier were the parts of the common state, they have common history, and many Central Asian students speak Russian well. But these similarities are valued by many as the

external. As pointed out by several studies, some ethnic groups in their psychological characteristics are closer to Russian culture than Central Asia, for example, Latin American culture is closer to Russian one, in particular, because Russian and Latin Americans belong to the Christian religion, and Central Asians – to Muslim religion.

A statistically significant difference in terms of the sense of purpose is revealed. Students, who are more inclined to hyper identity, have higher general level of comprehension of life and, in particular, greater sense of purpose, clear awareness of their life goals. Perhaps for the students, this result is explained by the fact that for the first year foreign students, because of poor Russian language skills, have a lot of difficulties in understanding the teacher's explanations and expressing their own thoughts. All this complicates the process of training for the entire group. Accordingly, most motivated Russian students have more negative attitude towards the foreigners, undervaluing their intellectual level.

Comparative analysis of the two groups' individual values shows that the groups significantly differ in importance of such values as universalism, kindness and stimulation. That is, the students who experience less tension in the interaction with the foreigners mostly recognize the importance of tolerance, wellbeing of all people and the nature protection. Also, such students strive for new impressions and deep experiences. Apparently, meeting with the other cultures for these people is perceived as an opportunity to expand their horizons, acquire new experiences. For other considered personal characteristics the significant differences between groups of students with high and low hyper identity have not been revealed.

The correlation analysis has mainly confirmed the results of comparative analysis and revealed some additional relationships between the studied parameters. First, we have revealed the significant direct relations of the positive ethnic identity with ethnic egoism and ethnic bigotry and the inverse relations - with ethnic isolation. That is, we can conditionally speak about two main strategies of ethnic identity and interethnic interaction of the first year Russian students in multicultural university: hyper identity, including positive ethnic identity and hypo identity. The students' hyper identity is associated with the increase of social distance from the other cultures and with preference for their own culture. The hypo identity, by contrast, is associated with lower acceptance of the members of their own culture and with the decrease of social distance from the other cultures.

The significant direct links between hyper identity and general level of comprehension of life are revealed. Positive ethnic identity and ethnic egoism also are directly related to presence of clear goals in life, the students' confidence in their ability to control the events of their lives. Hypo identity is inversely related to average level of life comprehension, sense of purpose and internal locus of control. Comparing these results with the other studies results we can suggest that this is specific for the first-year students, when the foreign students have great difficulty in learning and complicate learning for their Russian classmates. Correlation analysis of the ethnic identity indicators and the students life values shows that hyper identity is inversely related to values such as universalism, kindness, conformity, and directly related to the values of power, achievement and hedonism.

Positive ethnic identity, although associated with ethnic egoism, shows some specific relations to some personal values. In particular, it is directly related to values of independence and security and inversely - to values of kindness, tradition, hedonism, power and new experiences. Hypo identity is directly related to values of kindness, tradition and hedonism and inversely - to values of independence and security. Apparently, students who choose the strategy of hypo identity need close relations and are ready to take the risk of interaction with the new cultures.

Some correlations of the interethnic interaction strategies and some parameters of self-regulation have been found. Ethnic bigotry and positive ethnic identity are inversely related to the students' ability to plan and program their activity. Perhaps, weak ability to plan their own activities do not allow these students to accept the other cultures' outlook and style of acting. Also positive identity is inversely related to the average level of self-control and in particular to the students' ability to evaluate their performance. Perhaps these characteristics of self-regulation are associated with the reduced of the students' self-criticism, which in turn determines a higher level of positive ethnic identity. Ethnic indifference is directly connected with almost all parameters of self-regulation, except for the flexibility and independence. Thus, we can assume that a well-

developed self-regulation reduces the significance of ethnic differences in the students' interaction with people.

The average level of hardiness is directly linked to the indicators of hyper identity. Only the ties with the indicator of risk taking have not reached the level of significance. Most close ties have been found between the rates of personal involvement in the affairs and the locus of control, on one side, and the parameters of ethnic bigotry, on another side; that once again confirms the data above. Positive ethnic identity is inversely associated with assuming the control over the life events.

Among the indicators of social creativity, the greatest number of inverse relations to ethnic hyper identity has been found for the rate of imagination. This confirms the idea expressed above that the students who tend to hyper identity in their inter-ethnic contacts are mainly focused on external, formal features, social stereotypes. In addition, ethnic bigotry is directly related to curiosity and interest in the challenging tasks. Apparently, it also confirms the correctness of our interpretation of the above results about the causes of direct relations between the students' sense of purpose and hyper identity in their cross-cultural interaction.

4. Conclusion

Thus, this study has allowed us to identify some factors of ethnic tension among first-year students of Russian multinational university. The students who demonstrate more negative attitude towards other cultures, have higher average level of life meaningfulness, in particular, greater sense of purpose, a focus on achievement, power or hedonism, and less concern for the goodness and justice for all society. Also, the students with high hyper identity are characterized by weak ability to self-regulation, a poor imagination and by high level of hardiness.

The students with positive ethnic identity are also characterized by meaningfulness of life, good sense of purpose, willingness to take on the responsibility for the events of their lives, the desire for security and independence, poor self-control, not taking risks.

Ignoring the issues of identity in interpersonal relationships is associated with low reflection and low ambition, the desire to preserve tradition and to maintain good relations with others, high level of self-regulation.

5. Acknowledgements

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