

Adaptation of Migrant Children in a Multicultural Educational Environment in Conditions of the Municipal Experimental Platform

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Abstract

The adaptation of migrant children in a multicultural learning environment requires taking new roles in an unfamiliar sociocultural situation. An educational institution must create a psychological atmosphere of mutual respect between children as well as between pupils and teachers, based on positive motivation to develop multicultural competencies.

The problem addressed in this study, namely the need for the successful adaptation of migrant children to a multicultural learning environment helps to define its aim. The research seeks to demonstrate the efficiency of the municipal experimental platform model in the adaptation of migrant children at a multicultural school.

To test the hypothesis that a municipal experimental platform can be instrumental in the adaptation of migrant children, three groups of methods were used. Theoretical methods included the analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature on migration pedagogy as well as the study and identification of best pedagogical practices for modelling a learning environment. Empirical methods comprised observations, surveys of teachers and parents, and interviews with parents. The third group consisted of mathematical data-processing methods.

Monitoring looked into how the experimental platform model was introduced into schools in the city of Kaliningrad. To that end, the rate of multicultural competency of multicultural schoolteachers was calculated. The parents of migrant children were surveyed to assess how favourable school environment was. Children's satisfaction with interpersonal relationships, their attitude to school, and academic performance in younger schoolchildren were measured.

The results obtained may benefit specialists in educational management as well as experts working with migrant children.

Keywords: migrant children, migration pedagogy, adaptation, multicultural learning environment, multicultural school, municipal experimental platform.

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Introduction

In a modern multinational state, social stability depends on how much attention is given to the pedagogy of multiculturalism and tolerance.

Analysis of the literature shows that, on the one hand, the groundwork has been laid for research into the general problems of creating a multicultural learning environment. On the other, there is no unified vision of the content and structure of a multicultural learning space.

National practices suggest that successful adaptation to a new learning space will, in the long run, determine the preparedness and ability to interact with the social and cultural environment. The adaptation of migrant children in a multicultural learning environment is closely linked to taking new roles in an unfamiliar sociocultural situation.

Against this background, migration pedagogy emerged as an integrated field of contemporary pedagogical research. Studies in migration pedagogy have been undertaken by Bondarevskaya (2007) and Gukalenko (2003).

Within the theoretical framework of migration pedagogy, it was proposed to solve problems relating to the adaptation of migrant children by creating a multicultural learning environment at a given educational establishment. Such an environment is usually implemented as a municipal experimental platform for the adaptation of migrant children in a multicultural environment.

At a multicultural school and in a multicultural classroom, such a platform makes it possible to employ universal technology for developing multicultural competency in students, regardless of their nationality.

Purpose and objectives of the study

This study aims to demonstrate the efficiency of the municipal experimental platform model in the adaptation of migrant children at a multicultural school.

Literature review

The mission of education today is to prepare responsible citizens while adhering to the principles of equality and justice and thus ensure full personality development.

Studies in comparative pedagogy (Vulfson, 2003; Nikandrov, 2000) have proposed innovative approaches to creating a theory of personality development in a multicultural environment.

In this study, we draw on the framework proposed by Abakumova and Ermakov (2010), Baturina (2000) and Zborovsky (2009).

Participants in social interactions come from different cultures. With this in view, Stefanenko (2009) has established that adapting to new social circumstances and embracing a new culture may have both negative and positive effects. The former are generalised anxiety, a lack of self-confidence, as well as confused values and social and personal identities. The latter include the acceptance of new values and models of behaviour, broader experience of cross-cultural and inter-ethnic communication, wider knowledge of the world, and a developed national identity.

The literature investigates and uses the notions of ‘multicultural environment’, ‘multicultural space’, and ‘multicultural education’ (Yasvin, 2001).

Our study employs the notion of ‘multicultural environment’. Throughout history, convergences and mutual influences of different national cultures have created multicultural environments. The problem of environments has been addressed by Voskresenskaya (2007) and Ilinskaya (2011). These studies define a multicultural environment as a social space in which the general process of social development takes place alongside the functioning and evolution of cultures in all possible forms.

Multicultural education and learning necessitate the creation and development of a multicultural learning environment, which is part of a greater learning environment (Vygodchikova, 2008; Gukalenko, 2003). We agree with the findings of Yasvin (2001) who defines a learning environment as a pattern-based system of influences and conditions of personality development as well as its potential for change and improvement contained in the social, spatial, and objective reality.

Another notion that is crucial to this study, ‘multicultural learning environment’, does not have an established definition. It is often considered as part of the learning environment of an educational establishment, a combination of conditions affecting the development of a personality who is prepared for

effective inter-ethnic interactions and who maintains his or her ethnic identity and aspires to understand other ethnic cultures (Ilinskaya, 2011).

In the course of our study, we examined the literature on the problems of tolerance since the indicator of an advanced multicultural learning environment is the tolerance of subjects comprising that environment (Bogdanova, 2012; Kretova, 2016). Remarkably, the concept of ‘tolerance’ has been used across very different fields of knowledge: ethics, psychology, politics, philosophy, and medicine.

The essence of tolerance is best described in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance: tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human’ (United Nations, 1995). The Constitution of Russia protects the right of a citizen to belong to any nationality and to use his or her native language; to choose freely the language of communication, education, and creative work. This way, the fundamental law enshrines tolerance and respect for all cultures and their members (Constitution of the Russian Federation,).

Methodologically, our study draws on the activity-based approach to understanding the adaptation of migrant children. This approach suggests preparing an adaptation-focused curriculum, using teaching techniques to take communication to a new cultural level, and training teachers specialising in working with migrant children (Leontyev 1975; Zheludkova, Mamontova, & Minina, 2014).

Pedagogical activities aimed at migrant children include the implementation of the principles of individual and targeted approaches; this led us to address the theory of multivariate education (Ignatova, 2010).

This methodological framework made it possible to attempt defining yet another concept used in this study, namely, ‘adaptation’. Overall, adaptation means becoming adjusted to the environment. It has been stressed, however, that this interpretation cannot be mechanically extrapolated to pedagogical research and practice (Dolgova & Tkachenko, 2012).

Key to our research is the understanding of adaptation as dynamic adjustment to a certain factor of the environment (Ilyin, 2000), the transformation of personality to meet the requirements of the environment (Parygin, 1971), and a behavioural change of vital significance (Mikhaylova, 2002).

We paid particular attention to studies carried out by Bekker and Melnikova (2008) who gave a definition of social adaptation. Their findings led us to focus on the adaptation of migrant children, which has been addressed by Dendeber and Myazina (2013) and Makarov (2010).

Experience suggests that successful adaptation in a new educational space will, in the long run, determine the preparedness and ability to interact with the social and cultural environment. This consideration encouraged us to investigate migration pedagogy – an integrated field of contemporary pedagogical research that focuses on the adaptation of migrant children and their families to a foreign-language cultural space (Bondarevskaya, 2007; Gukalenko, 2003; Sukhorukova, 2001).

The progress of science studies makes it possible to identify valuable resources for pedagogical research. Comprising global and regional databases of scientific knowledge, these resources have proved instrumental in studying the evolution of migration pedagogy as a global research problem. In particular, pedagogical research draws on data from UN, IOM, UNICEF, and UNESCO initiatives, from UNESCO's MOST projections, etc. An important informational contribution is made by regional organisations and research centres: the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the US Committee for Refugees, the Immigration History Research Center (Minnesota, US), the Center for Research on Immigration Policy (RAND Corporation, US), the Spanish Commission for Refugees, and the Asian Research Center for Migration.

The ideas of migration pedagogy laid the groundwork for a study into the capacity of person-centred systems, which make it possible to organise a cohesive pedagogical process based on the principles of cultural conformity. To this end, we analysed the findings of Palatkina (2006) and Sleptsova (2017), which helped to demonstrate the efficiency of a municipal experimental platform as a model of a multicultural learning environment.

This model reflects a comprehensive pedagogical process at a multicultural school. This process benefits from the principles of cultural conformity, dialogue between cultures, the multicultural education technology, and special conditions for the functioning of a multicultural learning environment (Lukyanova & Shustova, 2015; Serykh & Mychko, 2019).

A multicultural learning environment is created at a multicultural school by introducing relevant development programmes and producing a special psychological atmosphere of mutual respect between children as well as between teachers, students, and parents to ensure a positive motivation to build multicultural competency (Vasyutenkova, 2016).

This theoretical analysis made it possible to identify the following aspects: the need for the multicultural training of participants in pedagogical interactions in a multicultural school environment; the organisation of constructive cross-cultural communications between teachers and between pupils; the knowledge and consideration of cultural-driven features of perception and behaviour.

The above theoretical perspectives are brought together by understanding what multicultural characteristics of a learning environment are necessary for organising the adaptation of migrant children within a municipal experimental platform.

Methodology

We monitored the introduction of the structural-functional model of an educational platform suited for migrant adaptation programmes at a multicultural school. Monitoring was carried out at schools in the city of Kaliningrad. We surveyed fifty-five primary school teachers and the parents of younger pupils.

- When developing the structural-functional model of a municipal experimental platform for the adaptation of migrant children, we relied on analysis of innovative pedagogical experience in learning environment modelling.

- During the diagnostic testing of teachers to calculate the rate of multicultural competency, which included the cognitive component (multicultural knowledge and theoretical skills), motivation and values (multicultural values, tolerant attitudes, commitment to cross-cultural interactions), and actions and behaviour (the skills of communication and behaviour in a multicultural society), we used questionnaires prepared by Khazova and Khatit (2015).

- When surveying parents, we measured the favourableness of the school environment, identified the nature of interpersonal relations between children and pupils' attitude to school, and analysed their academic performance (parents responded on behalf of younger schoolchildren, pupils of years one–four).

The model of a municipal experimental platform was constructed to help migrant children adapt to a new social and cultural environment. A municipal educational platform is an organisation that has gained positive experience in solving the priority problems of educational system development. An experimental platform builds a multicultural environment as a social space, in which children evolve as a group and culture functions in all possible forms.

The introduction of the model pursued the following objectives:

- to identify characteristics of migrant children in order to design individual learning trajectories;
- to establish constructive communication with pupils' parents;
- to encourage teachers to embrace best teaching practices;

- to organise the teaching process the way that ensures successful integration of migrant children into the Russian society;
- to familiarise teachers with the techniques of working in a multicultural classroom;
- to organise a series of in-school advanced training courses for teachers.

The phased plan to introduce the model (or the roadmap) included the following stages:

1. Information and motivation (diagnostic) stage.
2. Main stage.
3. Follow-up.

1. At the first stage, we identified that the principal countries of origin were Armenia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. When planning targeted work within migrant children, there was a need to take into account the cultural and historical features of the peoples of these countries. In particular, it was necessary:

- to support commitment to national customs and traditions to ensure group cohesion;
- to encourage independence and proactivity when achieving various goals;
- to take into account what temperaments were prevalent (sanguine and choleric ones);
- to highlight migrant children's respect for elders;
- to avoid confusing communication problems with poor academic performance.

2. The main stage included:

- the launch of a cohesive pedagogical process in a multicultural learning environment;
- pedagogical interactions between school and family;
- systematic methodological support for teachers working in multicultural classrooms;
- teaching various categories of educators to use innovative teaching tools;
- support for teachers in creating a reflective environment;

- to use networking to improve teachers' professional skills.

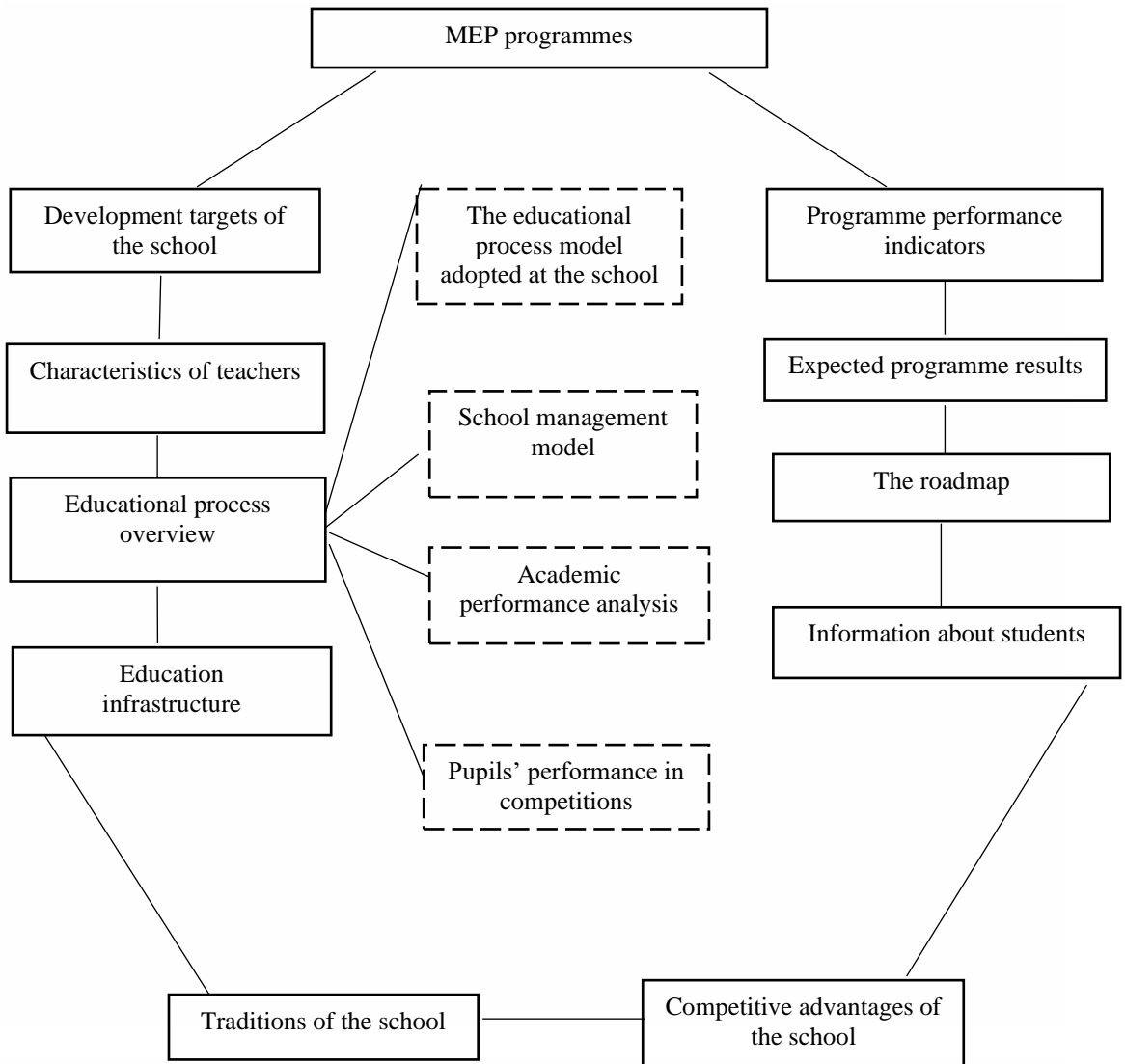


Figure 1. The structural-functional model of a municipal experimental platform.

3. The follow-up stage consisted of a SWOT analysis aimed to identify factors of the internal and external environment.

Results

Below we will present the results by implementation stages.

At the first stage, we obtained an expert opinion that made it possible to grant municipal educational institutions the status of municipal experimental platforms. Acquiring this status meant that the school had sufficient resources to contribute to the development of the municipal education system within the priority area, i.e. multicultural education.

The introduction of the structural-functional model of a learning platform into a multicultural school demonstrated that:

- 100% of primary school pupils had transitioned to secondary school;
- the proportion of students whose final secondary school exam results were above the regional average had increased by 7%;
- the quality of primary education had grown by 15%;
- migrant children had increased their participation in all kinds of events;
- migrant children were overcoming the communication barrier;
- anxiety was decreasing in migrant children; they had improved their sociometric status among peers;
- Russian language skills and the knowledge of Russian literature had progressed in migrant children;
- the number of teachers proficient in techniques for working with multicultural groups had risen;
- various contacts with the parents of migrant children (parent-teacher conferences, counselling, online communications) had become more frequent;
- a decrease in the number of children from high-risk groups had contributed to a better educational system.

SWOT analysis helped us to compile a list of problems that pose threats to the effective functioning of a municipal experimental platform at a multicultural school. These were:

1. management problems (establishing contacts with parents; choosing a communication channel; dividing responsibilities between family and school);

2. professional pedagogical problems (predicting the effects of pedagogical influences; analysing pedagogical situations and relevant solutions; preparing the syllabus; mastering innovative teaching techniques and new curricula).
3. occupational psychological problems (identifying a pupil's zone of proximal development; forecasting possible academic problems; developing learning skills in children; overcoming negative attitudes to learning).

At the second stage, the analysis of the structural component of multicultural competency used the following criteria: cognitive criteria (a complete system of multicultural knowledge acquired for practical and creative purposes); motivation and values (the recognition and acceptance of multicultural values, consistent interest in the cultures, and commitment to cross-cultural interactions); actions and behaviour (cultural appropriateness and success of the actions taken). By the end of the main model implementation stage, all the analysed measures had a conclusively higher rate of multicultural competency. The cognitive competency rate increased from 28.6% to 60.7%, the motivation and values rate from 21.4% to 39.2%, and the actions and behaviour rate from 39.3% to 67.8% (present high level indicators) (according to G-sign test, with $p < 0,01$). Table 1 shows the obtained results.

Table 1. Changes in the development of multicultural competency components in municipal experimental platform teachers

Components	Before the launch	After the launch
cognitive component	28.6%	60.7%
motivation and values	21.4%	39.2%
activities and behaviour	39.3%	67.8%

The above suggests that the introduction of a structural-functional model of a municipal experimental platform into the learning environment of a multicultural school translates into stronger development of each multicultural competency component in teachers.

At the third stage, surveying the parents of migrant children made it possible to assess how favourable school environment was, to identify the nature of interpersonal relationships in a multicultural group, and to analyse the academic performance of schoolchildren.

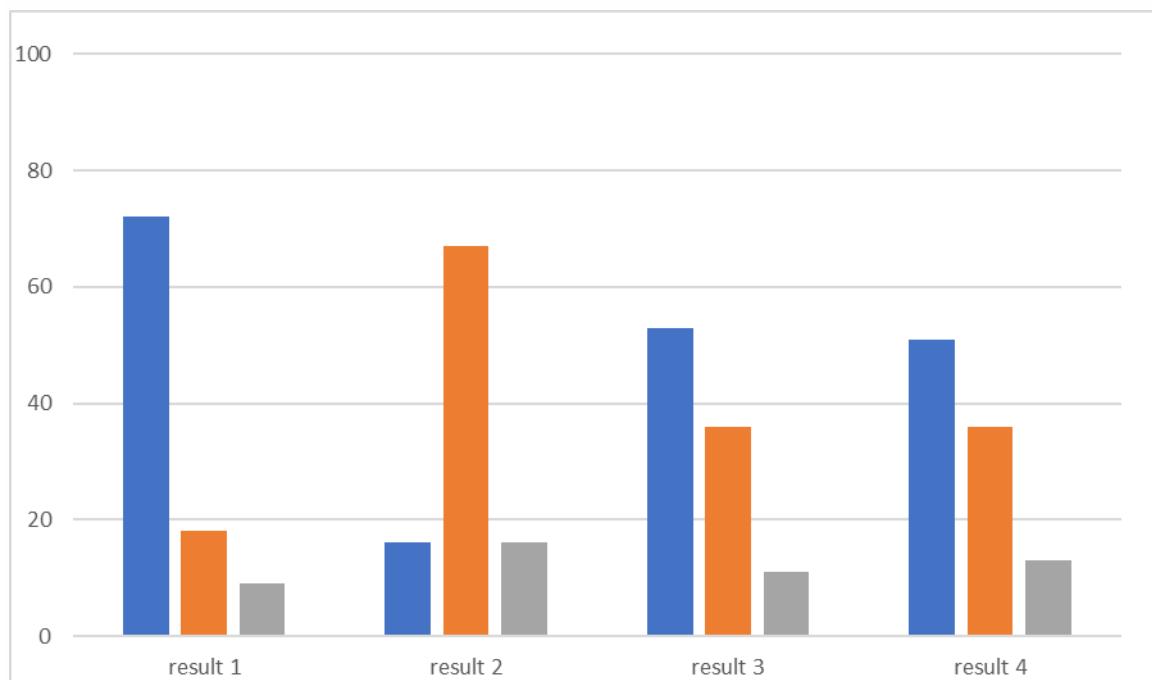


Fig. 2. The results of diagnostic testing of migrant children's parents by aggregate measures.

The assessments of the favourableness of the school environment (result 1) as reported by the parents of migrant children were as follows. Forty people (72,7%) said that their child was treated well, they never encountered any problems relating to a poor command of Russian, and individual tasks and assistance from teachers were available. Ten people (18,1%) described the school environment as largely favourable, yet not free from organisational problems. Five people (9,1%) called the school environment and the situation in the multicultural classroom unfavourable.

As to relationships between migrant pupils and other schoolchildren (result 2), 16,3% (9 people) said that relationships depended on the situation and various personal factors; 67,3% (37 people) reported amicable relationships with classmates and the absence of conflicts; 16,3% (9 people) believed that interpersonal relationships required normalisation and intervention from adults.

The diagnostic testing of migrant children as to their attitude to school (result 3) showed the following results. Twenty-nine people (52,7%) said that, based on the behaviour of their children, they viewed that attitude as positive, calling it a result of joint efforts from family and school. Twenty people (36,3%) called the attitude 'largely positive', albeit strongly affected by academic performance, teacher's control, and relationships with classmates (a volatile attitude). Six people (10,9%) spoke of their child's negative attitude to school. These results may be explained by the fact that most respondents were parents of year-one pupils, who have some serious problems with adaptation to school.

The measures of academic performance (result 4) as reported by the parents of migrant children showed a significant correlation with children's attitudes to school. Twenty-eight people (50,9%) said that their child was interested in a better command of the Russian language and that that circumstance affected his or her performance in major subjects. Twenty people (36,3%) stressed that their child needed catch-up classes since he or she was capable of better academic performance. Seven people (12,7%) emphasised that they could not provide sufficient help for their children and thus teachers' assistance was necessary. The fact that many children speak only their native knowledge at home does not contribute to a better command of Russian or the knowledge of Russian literature.

A solution to the problem of integration and psychological adaptation of migrant children to school requires teaching them to cooperate. These efforts should start as soon as a migrant child joins the school. This way, producing and reinforcing stereotypes, including ethnical ones, may be prevented. Focus should be on teaching children to be friendly to others and ready to discuss problems and look for effective solutions.

Discussions

As our experimental findings suggest, firstly, successful adaptation requires effective interpersonal interactions between pupils both in and outside the classroom; secondly learning and education at school should incorporate techniques for developing multicultural competency in children, regardless of their national identity; thirdly, successful adaptation is reinforced by collective tolerant consciousness.

Work with migrant children should engage as many shared resources as possible to create a multicultural learning environment for each student at school.

A preliminary analysis of the survey results points to the success of the proposed structural-functional model for the adaptation of migrant children in a multicultural learning environment and makes it possible to produce recommendations for model improvements.

Conclusion

At the current stage of social development, the idea of multicultural education should be at the core of curriculum planning. This idea can be further developed at educational establishments boasting sociocultural diversity.

As an education institution, a municipal experimental platform creates a multicultural environment, i.e. a social space that ensures a cohesive pedagogical process, the development of pupils as a group in a multicultural classroom, and the emergence of migrant children as full members of that environment.

Expert teachers and state-of-the-art teaching techniques make an experimental platform an efficient tool to achieve a high quality of learning and education.

The multicultural educational institutions that have been given the status of municipal platforms are charged with the task of helping migrant children to adapt. These establishments will contribute to the creation of a system of value priorities and facilitate the growth in national wealth.

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