

# SPECIAL COURSE AS A FORM OF STUDENTS' ADAPTATION TO THE EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM

G. Eremeeva, N. Sigacheva, M. Sigachev

*Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)*

## Abstract

The relevance of the scientific work lies in the need to create and enter a unified educational space to increase the competitiveness potential of higher education. The article is devoted to the problem of students' adaptation to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The purpose of the article is to analyze ECTS specifics and to develop a form of adaptation to this system. The theoretical and methodological base of the research is conceptual ideas of the person-oriented, information and system-based approaches. As a result of the study, the term "adaptation to ECTS" is defined as a purposeful process of students' adaptation to the conditions of study at a university based on the active interaction of subjects of education with each other and the new didactic environment, which ensures the success of educational activities. Characteristic features of ECTS are analyzed. A special course "Introduction to the European Credit Transfer System" is developed. The course allows first-year students to receive the necessary knowledge about the essence of the new educational system, its organizational forms, features of control and assessment of the knowledge, and conceptual and terminological apparatus. It provides an opportunity to build trusting relationships with the participants of the educational process. The special course involves the use of active teaching forms and methods. The materials of the article can be useful for teachers, students, and researchers working in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Students, teachers, education, learning, European Credit Transfer System, adaptation, special course.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to higher education of the countries participating in the Bologna process is an objective pattern. Countries are focused on a unified educational space aimed at the following tasks: to increase the ability of graduates to find employment; improve the mobility of citizens; strengthen the competitiveness potential of higher education [1].

The reality of life shows that neither teachers nor students are ready for the transition to ECTS due to its features and differences from the traditional system of education. Hence the need for education communities to adapt to it appears and becomes relevant. The problem of our research is the adaptation of first-year students to the European Credit Transfer System. However, before pointing out the specificity of this process and describing one of its forms, we will consider the key concept of the term "adaptation".

Adaptation to higher education is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, as evidenced by the variety of interpretations. Various researchers have interpreted it as:

- "the process of interaction of its participants", "its goal is to find the optimal correspondence between the person and the social environment represented by the university level of education" (R.A. Absalyamova) [2];
- "the process of the individual's entry into a new pedagogical system under the guidance of teachers, forming their structure of activities in connection with the new organization of learning ..." (L.G. Egorova) [3];
- "organizationally and scientifically controlled process of active adaptation of a young student to the conditions and requirements of the university environment ..." (Kh.A. Lopes Gonsales) [4];
- "targeted process and result of interaction between the participants of education and the new didactic environment of the university, regulated with the help of special didactic means and methods of private didactics, ensuring coordination of the participants' expectations, their capabilities and didactic environment" (T.P. Chernyavskaya) [5].

The analysis of the existing definitions of “adaptation to studying at the university” has made it possible to identify several general points. Firstly, adaptation is the process of adapting the individual to a new educational environment and the result of such adapting. Secondly, adaptation always involves interaction between the subject and the environment, the effectiveness of which depends on many factors. Thirdly, adaptation is a prerequisite for successful educational activities. Taking these provisions into consideration, we consider adaptation as a purposeful process of adapting the individual to the new conditions of existence based on the active interaction between the subject and the environment, ensuring the success of the activity.

Traditionally, most researchers (A.G. Gorshkov, L.K. Zubtsova, M.A. Kuznetsov, D.D. Nauruzbayev and others) distinguish three stages of adaptation: stage 1 - pre-university (pre-professional training, pre-adaptation); stage 2 - university (vocational training, direct adaptation); stage 3 - postgraduate (independent professional activity at the enterprise, post-adaptation). We share this view and believe that students’ adaptation to study at the university within the framework of the new educational system should take place in the first year, otherwise it leads to the fact that students do not learn educational material effectively; they lack the desire to master the methods and techniques of independent work perfectly; the ability to adjust their activities is not formed; there is a low need for self-control, self-education, average cognitive activity, insufficient effectiveness of educational, research and social activities.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The theoretical and methodological base of the research is conceptual ideas of the person-oriented, information and system-based approaches.

The person-oriented approach was chosen by us as a theoretical and methodological strategy for studying the problem of students’ adaptation to the European Credit Transfer System. This approach made it possible to create conditions for the formation of students’ activity through partnership, trust, subject-subject relations with other participants in the educational process, and work in cooperation through inclusion in educational activities taking into account their age and individual characteristics.

The goal of the person-oriented approach is to stimulate, self-realize and assert the personality as a true subject of the educational process. In the modern interpretation of this approach, both the activity of the individual and the orientation of their needs are equally important. One of the basic conditions for the implementation of the approach is the teacher’s desire to ensure that the stage of students’ self-determination in professional activities and the implementation of the corresponding value-oriented and transformative activities begin as early as possible. This condition is ensured when the stage of first-year students’ adaptation is completed successfully in a shorter period as well as the orientation to knowledge and upcoming professional activity, its values and the transformation of oneself in accordance with them appear as early as possible. The person-oriented approach requires a qualitatively different structure of interaction between teachers and students in contrast to the traditional one. It suggests the equality of positions of the teacher and students.

In our research, the use of basic ideas of the person-oriented approach to the study of students’ adaptation to the European Credit Transfer System has been carried out through the implementation of the following provisions:

- 1 Consideration of the process of students’ adaptation to ECTS as creating conditions for their self-actualization and personal growth;
- 2 Formation of the student’s activity in the educational process of the university through partnership, trust, subject-subject relations with teachers;
- 3 Ensuring the unity of external and internal motives of educational activities in the process of students’ adaptation to ECTS;
- 4 Organization of the adaptation process as a continuous process of stating, and accepting the educational task and satisfaction with its solution in cooperation with other participants in the educational process.

Since the process of students’ adaptation to the European Credit Transfer System is informational in nature and involves the operation of a variety of information, we used the information approach as a practical-oriented tactic for researching the problem. In the interpretation of the concept of “practical-oriented research tactics”, we adhere to the definition of N.O. Yakovleva, understands it as “identifying practical aspects of solving the problem on the basis of cumulative scientific experience” [6]. We include the following aspects: a description of the process and the result of the process of students’ adaptation

to ECTS in the language of information theory, the development of its technological support and the identification of the information specifics.

The study of the information approach was carried out by V.N. Ivanov, V.I. Patrushev, V.I. Shtanko, E.V. Yakovlev. The information approach refers to “a method of abstract-generalized description and study of the information aspect of the functioning and structuring of complex systems, information relations and relations in the information theory language” [7]. The information approach is closely related to the systemic and person-oriented approaches due to the following provisions:

- The information approach is based on the general theory of systems and focuses on the interaction between systems;
- Information as the basis of the system is inseparable from it (the system cannot be non-informative);
- Any activity involves information support;
- Activities on didactic adaptation to ECTS are based on changes in the available information.

The use of the information approach to the study of students' adaptation to the European Credit Transfer System has found its expression in the following statements:

- 1 The process of students' adaptation to ECTS is informational in nature, the quality of information determines its effectiveness;
- 2 The information that forms the basis of the process of students' adaptation to ECTS reflects the participants' experience, goals and values;
- 3 In terms of the information approach, the process of students' adaptation to ECTS is an open system, involving the constant exchange of information with the external environment;
- 4 Informational support of the process of students' adaptation to ECTS should include the necessary data on the university educational process in the conditions of ECTS, its subjects, communication channels, and resources of the educational system.

The essence of the system-based approach (V.G. Afanasiev, I.V. Blauberg, L. von Bertalanffy, V.N. Sadovsky, E.G. Yudin, and others) lies in the fact that relatively independent components are considered not in isolation, but in their interconnection, in development and movement. The significance of applying a systematic approach to studying the problem of students' adaptation to ECTS as follows:

- 1 The process of adaptation to ECTS is a subsystem of professional training, which allows it to be built taking into account general didactic principles;
- 2 The process of adaptation to ECTS as a pedagogical system is open, probabilistic, flexible, dynamic, and manageable;
- 3 The effectiveness of the process of adaptation to ECTS depends on the organization of systemic influences to prepare students for the educational process at the university and the creation of special pedagogical conditions;
- 4 Readiness for educational activities under ECTS is the result of adaptation and can be considered as a pedagogical system.

The system-based approach made it possible to focus on the systematic study of a set of interrelated properties, methods, and processes necessary to create an organized and purposeful influence on students' adaptation to ECTS.

### 3 RESULTS

First-year students' adaptation to the European Credit Transfer System should be targeted. It is determined by the features of the system.

ECTS is a tool of the European Higher Education Area for making studies and courses more transparent. It helps students to move between countries and to have their academic qualifications and study periods abroad are recognized. ECTS allows credits taken at one higher education institution to be counted towards a qualification studied for at another. ECTS credits represent learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. ECTS enhances the flexibility of study programmes for students. It also supports the planning, delivery and evaluation of higher education programmes. It is a central tool in the Bologna Process, which aims to make national education systems more comparable

internationally. ECTS also helps make other documents, such as the Diploma Supplement, clearer and easier to use in different countries [8].

In modern pedagogy, ECTS is defined as an educational system that increases the level of self-education and creative development of knowledge based on the individualization and choice of the educational trajectory within the framework of strict regulation of the educational process and taking into account the amount of knowledge in the form of credits. This system involves the creation of an individual trajectory of professional development for each student [9]. Its characteristic features are the following:

- 1 Introduction of a credit system to assess the labour costs of students and teachers in each discipline;
- 2 Direct participation of the student in the formation of his individual curriculum;
- 3 The freedom of students to choose disciplines from among the elective ones included in the curriculum when forming an individual curriculum;
- 4 The freedom of students to choose a teacher, provided that there is a sufficient number of professors and teaching staff at the university or a given locality;
- 5 Involvement in the educational process of advisors who assist students in choosing an educational trajectory and in the development of the educational program [10];
- 6 Broad powers of the faculty (educational institute) in the organization of the educational process, in determining and taking into account the types of the pedagogical workload of teachers;
- 7 Increasing the volume of students' independent work [11];
- 8 The use of a point-rating system for assessing the educational achievements of students in each academic discipline;
- 9 The use of the most optimal teaching technologies in the educational process with the mandatory use of active teaching methods;
- 10 Providing the educational process with all necessary educational and methodical materials in printed and electronic forms.

Obviously, the specificity of the European Credit Transfer System requires the choice of rational forms of adaptation to it. One of these forms is a special course "Introduction to the European Credit Transfer System".

The goal of the course is to form the first-year students' ideas about the specifics of ECTS, its organizational forms, the peculiarities of knowledge control and assessment, and the conceptual and terminological apparatus.

This course is designed for eight contact hours, during which the following topics are discussed:

- "The essence of the European Credit Transfer System",
- "Forms and methods of training organization under ECTS",
- "Organization of students' independent work under ECTS",
- "Monitoring and assessment of student's knowledge".

In the process of studying these topics, first-year students begin to get acquainted with the essence of the concepts that make up the thesaurus, which is needed to describe and explain the content, structure and features of the organization of ECTS. As a result, there is a mastery of the conceptual and terminological apparatus of ECTS, which is «the language of business communication» of participants in the educational process in its conditions, which in turn contributes to the successful adaptation of first-year students.

At the same time, as the studies of E.D. Margulis, V.A. Slastenin, N.M. Yakovleva shows the formation of skills, qualities, and abilities of students are the result of their inclusion in specially organized activity [12]. Therefore, in order for first-year students to form the necessary skills, and experience in the conditions of ECTS, the lessons of this course are built according to its requirements. For example, in each class students are offered active handout materials that serve to increase the motivation of students to successfully learn the topic (lecture abstracts, links, glossary, tasks for independent work). Moreover, active forms and methods of teaching are used in the work on the topics. In particular, in addition to the academic lecture, students are given: a) the problem lecture on the topic "Monitoring and assessment of student's knowledge"; b) the lecture-visualization on the topic "Forms and methods of training organization under ECTS". As a result, both teachers and students in the context of ECTS

become active participants in the educational process, their relations acquire a subjective character and are based on trust, mutual respect, and equality and are realized in the form of a dialogue.

Further work on students' adaptation to the European Credit Transfer System is continued by the advisors. During the course "Introduction to the European Credit Transfer System" students get acquainted with their responsibilities. However, it is only through individual and group counselling by the advisors that the students realize that the advisors are actually representing the academic interests of the students, helping to build an individual learning trajectory and learning program, and providing information materials on the educational process organization.

The group consultation of the advisors is planned for the introductory week according to the schedule. It is of an organizational and methodological nature since it is devoted to acquainting the first-year students with the rules of the educational process organization, and the contents of the learning information package. The group consultation is preceded by an individual consultation, in which the advisors help the freshmen determine their individual learning trajectory based on their needs, interests, inclinations and capabilities. Providing assistance to students in the preparation of individual curricula, they rely on data obtained during the questionnaire applicants, self-assessment of the personality and learning abilities of first-year students, as well as the unified state testing.

It should be noted that the preparation of an individual curriculum is an important psychological moment for a first-year student. Designed with individual characteristics in mind, it makes the learning process for the student personally significant, and more motivated.

Under the conditions of the European Credit Transfer System, the role of the library, which is responsible for the storage, processing and transmission of information, increases significantly. The availability of information sources is a prerequisite for the effective organization of the educational process, so during the introductory week, students get acquainted with the work of the library, and learn to search for the necessary information using the electronic catalogue.

Thus, after the introductory week, first-year students have a certain understanding of ECTS. They are familiar with the content of the information package, and know exactly where to get the necessary information. They lose the sense of fear, of insecurity that is typical of people in unusual situations. The opportunity to study in the new system, corresponding to modern requirements and world standards, causes students positive emotions, interest in it, and the desire to test their capabilities.

The criterion for students' adaptation to ECTS is their readiness for educational activities in the new system. Indicators of readiness are 1) a motivational-values-based attitude to ECTS; 2) the body of knowledge about ECTS and training skills; 3) the ability to reflect.

The first indicator is characterized by awareness of the importance of studying at a university with an actively positive attitude to ECTS; focus on the future specialty; orientation on self-educational activity; the need for collaboration with the participants of the educational process; awareness of personal responsibility for the results of educational activities; satisfaction with studying in ECTS environment. The second indicator suggests knowledge about the goals of higher education; knowledge about the features of ECTS; use of its conceptual and terminological apparatus; knowledge about active forms and methods of teaching, organization of independent work, methods of educational cooperation; the ability to work with a large amount of information and perform various information functions; development of scientific organization skills of mental work, skills of independent work; the ability to join collaborative activities, to take an active position in the educational process at the university. The third indicator includes development of scientific organization skills of mental work, skills of independent work; the ability to join collaborative activities, to take an active position in the educational process at the university.

The experiment was carried out with the first-year students of the Institute of Economics and Finance of KSU named after A. Baitursynov (110 respondents). Four groups were involved in it: one control group (CG) and three experimental groups (EG-1, EG-2, EG-3).

Due to the fact that the readiness for educational activities under the conditions of ECTS can manifest itself at three levels: low, medium and high, it became necessary to distribute the students of the control and experimental groups according to the levels of their readiness as a whole. The zero section of the experiment results is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of the students' distribution by levels of readiness for educational activity under the conditions of ECTS (zero section)

Group	Number of students in the group	Levels					
		Low		Medium		High	
		Number of students	%	Number of students	%	Number of students	%
CG	28	20	71,43	8	28,57	0	0,00
EG-1	26	19	73,07	7	26,93	0	0,00
EG-2	27	19	70,37	7	25,92	1	3,71
EG-3	29	21	72,41	8	27,59	0	0,00

The analysis of the experimental data has shown that at the zero section the level of students' readiness for educational activities under the conditions of ECTS is insufficient. Statistics demonstrate the following: 70-74% of the students have a low level, 25-29% - medium, 1-4% - high. The experimental groups are the same in terms of the level of readiness for educational activities under the conditions of ECTS, that is, they have statistically insignificant differences.

The final section was made immediately after the special course "Introduction to the European Credit Transfer System". According to the levels of formation of the students' readiness for educational activities under the conditions of ECTS, we have obtained the following data, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of the students' distribution by levels of readiness for educational activity under the conditions of ECTS (final section)

Group	Number of students in the group	Levels					
		Low		Medium		High	
		Number of students	%	Number of students	%	Number of students	%
КГ	28	16	57,14	10	35,72	2	7,14
ЭГ-1	26	9	34,62	14	53,84	3	11,54
ЭГ-2	27	8	29,63	15	55,55	4	14,82
ЭГ-3	29	7	24,14	16	55,17	6	20,69

Let's compare the data on the level of students' readiness for educational activities under the conditions of ECTS at the zero and final sections (Tables 1 and 2). The obtained results show that in the experimental groups the number of students with a high level of readiness for educational activities in ECTS increased: in EG-3 - up to 20.69%, in EG-2 - up to 14.82%, in EG -1 - up to 11.54%. Significant shifts in the experimental groups occurred at a low level: the number of students decreased in EG-3 - up to 22.14%, in EG-2 - up to 29.63%, in EG-1 - up to 34.62%. The students who are at the medium level made up 55.17% of the total number in EG-3, 55.55% in EG-2, and 53.84% in EG-1.

In this regard, we can conclude that students' adaptation to ECTS is more effective in the groups where the students studied the special course "Introduction to the European Credit Transfer System". The students have formed a motivational-values-based attitude to ECTS. They have good knowledge about ECTS and training skills. They also have the ability to reflect.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the course "Introduction to the European Credit Transfer System" students

**Know:**

- The basic concepts that make up the essence of ECTS;
- The main differences and features of the independent work organization;

- Peculiarities of active forms and methods of teaching;
- The basic provisions of the rating system for monitoring and evaluating knowledge and skills;

#### **Are able to:**

- Make an informed choice of elective disciplines;
- Develop an individual plan with the help of the advisor;
- Organize their own individual work;
- Be included in the activities when teachers use active forms and methods of teaching;
- Exercise self-control and self-assessment of their educational activities.

Thus, there are some advantages of the special course developed by us.

Firstly, the course allows them to enter the European Credit Transfer System when first-year students receive the necessary knowledge about the essence of the new educational system, Doing so, they develop initial skills in educational activities within the framework of it.

Secondly, the special course provides an opportunity to establish trust between the subjects of education. From the first days of their stay at the university (the course is held during an organizational week) they get acquainted with each other, and learn about their rights and responsibilities.

Thirdly, the special course involves the use of active forms and methods of teaching because of the specifics of ECTS.

It is reasonable to conclude that the special course “Introduction to the European Credit Transfer System” allows students not to experience an informational shock and ensures their primary adaptation to the new educational system.

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