

INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES INTO NEW EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

K. Prosyukova¹, O. Babenko²

¹Kazan (Volga region) Federal University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

²Kazan (Volga region) Federal University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The aim of our global study is to analyze the transformations of national systems of education in response to any crisis, political, economic or social. Education is a social institution and therefore highly sensitive to crisis. At the previous stages of our research we studied the internal transformations of national systems of education in Syria, Libya and Iraq. All three countries are currently going through a protracted political and economic crisis, facing the need to overcome the consequences for local educational system at all levels – elementary, secondary and higher education and transform the key elements – learning objectives, content and structure.

However, in each case when a state goes through a prolonged political crisis, heavy immigration of citizens is another ubiquitous trend besides all the internal factors mentioned above. As an example, the Syrian crisis became one of the massive social crises of our time: thousands of refugees flooded into the territory of the European Union, constituting full proof that Syrian crisis was not a local Middle Eastern problem, but a global conflict that would have the after-effect for all states of Western and Eastern Europe.

This study is an attempt to analyze the other side of the Middle Eastern crisis and consider the process of integration of Syrian refugees into new educational environment. Of course, the problem of psychological adaptation to new conditions and the social integration of representatives of another culture into European society are also the essential parts of the study.

The results of the study will be useful for the countries in crisis, as well as for EU countries, Eastern Europe and North America that are faced with the need to transform their national education systems in order to adapt them to the needs of refugee students.

Keywords: Syria, Syrian Arab Republic, education, integration, educational environment, system of education, crisis in education, refugee students.

1 INTRODUCTION

We live in the era of globalization and crises. Any local political crisis has consequent effect not only for the state itself, but also, as a rule, an impact on neighboring states, which have to cope with the outflow of refugees, protect their own borders and eliminate the consequences for the economy caused by such a neighborhood. There are countless examples of local crises in countries that are unable to cope with the globalization challenges. However, the Syrian political crisis that erupted in the Middle East in 2011 differs from any possible example. The key differences are:

- Syria, due to its historical multiculturalism and polyethnicity, previously demonstrated the potential for a peaceful settlement of interethnic conflicts, and for decades had the status of a secular state with a diverse religious structure. Now it became a battlefield of the ideas of radical Islamists and secular state ideologists. Once the fertile ground for interfaith and interethnic dialogue, Syria became the birthplace of the largest interethnic and interfaith confrontation. And the scale of this confrontation quickly ceased to be regional.

- The number of refugees from Syria to the nearest countries and the EU states broke all the records and caused the largest migration crisis of our time. The main burden of the migration crisis fell on the bordering states (Lebanon and Jordan), the coastal EU countries (Greece, Italy, Spain) and the EU economic leaders who demonstrated the potential for a quick resolution of the migration crisis and showed the ability to bear the financial burden (Germany, Austria). However, it is unlikely that there is a single state in both Western and Eastern Europe that has not experienced the consequences of the

Syrian crisis and has not faced the need to create opportunities for adaptation and integration of refugees.

- The cultural experience of migrants, who have arrived in Europe, varies. It creates the risk of conflict between migrant groups, as well as migrants and citizens of host countries.

- The majority of migrants are adults of productive age – it creates challenges for the systems of education in host countries, especially the system of vocational training, which, on the one hand, should create opportunities for refugees. On the other hand, the system of education, which is a social institution and extremely sensitive to any crisis, faced the need to promote education for tolerance, psychological rehabilitation and adaptation of students, providing opportunities for social integration, etc [1].

Taking into account all the characteristics of the political crisis mentioned above and analyzing all the possible consequences of the crisis, we came to the conclusion that the processes initiated by the host countries are the external consequences of the political crisis. First of all, it indicates the global nature of the crisis. Stabilization of the situation inside the country and development of social and economic conditions so the refugees get a chance to get back to their motherland, is the primary task of Syrian leaders and representatives of international organizations. However, all of us, as representatives of the international community, should understand that the key feature of this crisis is its permanent impact on the EU society. Refugees are not a temporary “inconvenience” experienced by EU residents; they are active members of society who will participate and have influence on social processes; whose needs go beyond the basic needs and include the need for realization of personal potential in profession and career, etc. All of these opportunities depend on the adaptation of migrants to the way of social life in host countries. Within the context of this study we use the term “integration”, which, in our opinion, reflects the reality. However, the process of integrating migrants into society and the new educational environment is undoubtedly more complex than commonly associated with the term “integration”. In the framework of this study, we made an attempt to analyze the term “integration”, as well as definitions related to this term - “adaptation” and “socialization”, and reveal the key components of the process of integration of migrant students into a new educational environment.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research is aimed at:

- identification of the following definitions – “integration”, “adaptation”, “socialization”;

- analysis of the key components of integration process into a new educational environment.

To test the hypothesis we used general scientific theoretical methods of observation, analysis and synthesis, as well as special empirical methods, such as interviews with migrants from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries.

3 RESULTS

A comprehensive analysis of the term “integration” has been carried out: in education its content is reduced to internal processes of the system - combining elements of the structure, content of education, structure of governmental institutions, being focused on the adjacent nature of academic disciplines and teaching methods.

Addressing the content of “integration” as a term in social sciences, we have come to the conclusion that social integration is only one of the components of the process, which is so important and necessary, but not a single component. Integration of migrant students into the educational environment is not only a task related to the need to create the concept of freemen, who are able to communicate with citizens of the country in various communicative situations and experience the need to communicate and exchange opinions and emotions, but also the solution for other specific challenges in the field of education. Most of them cover cultural background, psychological characteristics of individuals, etc.

The term of “adaptation” is also quite often used by educators in this case. At Kazan University a structural unit responsible for foreign students is also called the department for adaptation of foreign students. However, this term does not seem to be a proper one: regardless of the scope of the term, “adaptation” mainly means “addiction, adaptation of an individual to new conditions and new environment”. The specific feature of the political crisis, as we have already mentioned before, is

based on the idea that migrants from the Middle East are a new, not temporary, but permanent social element. First of all, this statement necessitates not only the adaptation of migrants themselves to the new social and cultural environment, but also adaptation of citizens of host states to transformations of the existing order, changes in society, cultural and social life.

Another term that is often used by experts (sociologists, psychologists, educators) is socialization and inculturation, both of them are extremely important, but these phenomena are the components of a more powerful, complex, integrated process. And its basis is interpenetration of cultures and mutual influence of civilizations.

Thus, within the process of analysis, we still adhere to the term of "integration" as the most comprehensive and precise one; the one having a complex nature. However, in accordance with our principles, the definition of integration needs to be clarified, and the wording should contain the reference to the integration of migrants into the educational environment in the context of the European migration crisis.

The following components of integration have been revealed:

- psychological adaptation of migrants;
- psychological stability and rehabilitation of migrants with post-traumatic syndrome;
- socialization and social integration of migrants;
- stereotypes maintenance (ways to reinforce positive stereotypes and deactivate negative stereotypes);
- education for tolerance;
- development of civic identity;
- prevention of conflicts and bullying;
- development of cultural competence at universities

Let us substantiate each of them separately:

3.1 Psychological adaptation

Under psychological adaptation we mainly understand the process of harmonization of internal and external conditions of living and activities of both an individual and the environment including the absence of internal discomfort when performing basic social roles, adherence to norms of behavior, adherence to etiquette standards adopted in society, ability to work, study, the ability to provide self-service and mutual service in family and work communication, the variability of behavior in accordance with expectations of members.

3.2. Psychological stability and rehabilitation of migrants with post-traumatic syndrome

Psychological stability is, first of all, the ability to maintain the most optimal mode of operation of the human mind in the context of constantly changing circumstances and their stress effect. The work on psychological stabilization of an individual under stressful conditions is a complex, structured and multi-stage joint work of psychologists, sociologists and medical personnel. In particularly serious cases, the elimination of the effects of post-traumatic syndrome caused by witnessing military operations, severe stress, injuries, loss of relatives and friends as a result of armed hostilities. Without proper psychological stabilization and rehabilitation of migrants, further socialization and adaptation of individuals is impossible.

3.3. Socialization and social integration

The concept of "integration" came into social sciences from physics, biology and other natural sciences, where it means coherence of separate differentiated parts into a single process. The most viable kind of social integration is formed from the unity of diversity, formation of integrity based on the concordance of goals and interests of different social groups, social cohesion, solidarity and partnership. An individual as a member of society is, first of all, a part of a social group he belongs to, professional community or organization, etc. The individual is considered as an element of the whole, his role is determined by his contribution to the whole.

3.4. Stereotypes maintenance

A wide range of techniques and methods for stereotypes maintenance are being developed in social psychology and theories of intercultural communication. First of all, their aim is to train an individual how to manage his own stereotypes. The key task of any method is to help an individual to realize that his attitude to another individual or a group of individuals is based on his stereotypical ideas about them. Since the task of each communicator is to build the most effective way of communicative interaction, it is necessary to understand stereotypes, activate positive stereotypes and deactivate negative stereotypes.

3.5. Education for tolerance

Under tolerance we understand the vital ideological position “for” or “against” certain principles, norms, beliefs, developed as a result of ethnic, cultural and spiritual experience of an individual. The basic idea is that tolerance is not a concession, condescension or indulgence, it is, above all, an active attitude, formed on the basis of recognition of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. There are many ways to foster tolerance, many of them are based on implementation of art classes into the educational process. The project group of Kazan University, in particular, is working toward development of “educating tolerance through drama” concept which is based implementation of modern literary works in the educational process aimed to form a friendly attitude to representatives of other cultures via acquiring additional knowledge about these cultures, activating positive stereotypes and deactivating negative ones [2].

3.6. Development of civic identity

Formation of civic identity is mainly related to the peculiarities of the social and cultural, economic and educational situation in the host country. Religious, ethnic, social and cultural diversity of the society poses a difficult task for the system of education to ensure consolidation of various strata of civil society and reduction of social tension between people of different faiths and cultures. All these possibilities, provided that representatives of society, with all external differences and peculiarities of life experience and cultural background, recognize themselves as representatives of one nation, members of a single society. The development of civil consciousness is inextricably linked with the development of tolerance, but it is still a special type of individual self-consciousness, and therefore highlighted as a separate component of the model.

3.7. Prevention of conflicts and bullying

Conflict and bullying prevention, first of all, refers to development of measures to prevent psychological and physical violence in communication. In accordance with the UN data, every tenth individual is a victim of conflicts and bullying in educational environment, and considering the migration crisis in Europe, this indicator has recently doubled [3]. Aggressors can be students themselves - whether they are migrant students or citizens of the host countries, as well as professors and university staff. Bullying can be hidden and unconscious, which, however, always becomes an obstacle to effective socialization, psychological adaptation and integration of an individual. When developing measures to prevent bullying, it is necessary to prepare recommendations for the teaching staff and define the consequences of a “victim” behavior in order to avoid cases of hidden, unconscious bullying [4]

3.8. Development of cultural competence at universities

Cultural competence is a set of interrelated personality traits connected with spiritual culture of people's lives and their relationships in society. The criteria for a cultured person are ungradable, they cannot be measured. Their content depends on social and economic development of the society to which this person belongs, on national and cultural traditions of the environment where an individual was raised, i.e. from cultural literacy. According to A.V. Khutorskiy “the general cultural competence is a circle of issues a student must be well informed about.” [5] Namely:

- development of ethnic and cultural phenomena and traditions in society;
- understanding of the role of science and religion in human life;
- understanding of the connection between current and past events;
- awareness of the importance of political and legal culture;
- understanding, perception and interpretation of literature and art;

- ability to discuss and substantiate their own opinion;
- systems of value orientations and preferences adopted in society;
- etiquette norms of behavior in different life situations;
- more or less generally accepted interpretive approaches to various phenomena and events;
- certain knowledge in the field of national and social traditions, dominant morality, principles, worldview, customs, rituals;
- knowledge of social and humane values prevalent in a certain society, etc.

Thus, a competent person is an individual rooted in a national culture and capable of cultural activity. The basis of cultural competence formation lies in integration of training courses, namely the subjects of the humanitarian-aesthetic cycle as literature and music. At present, development and search for new pedagogical solutions, methods, forms and methods of teaching literature that contribute to development of creative potential are continuing. Integration of subjects in modern higher education is one of the ways to improve education. In integrated lessons, students develop additional knowledge about cultures, broaden their horizons and implant common cultural values.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The main intermediate results obtained by the authors include:

1. Analysis of the terms "integration", "adaptation", "socialization" and "inculturation".
2. Definition of a process as "integration of migrants into the educational environment in the context of the European migration crisis".

Comprehensive analysis of the process of integration of migrants and identification of all stages of the process, namely: psychological adaptation of migrants, psychological stability and rehabilitation of migrants with post-traumatic syndrome, socialization and social integration of migrants, stereotypes maintenance (ways to reinforce positive stereotypes and deactivate negative stereotypes), education for tolerance, development of civic identity, prevention of conflicts and bullying, development of cultural competence at universities

All of the components mentioned above create opportunities for joint work of psychologists, education experts, conflictologists, cultural scientists, political scientists, sociologists, etc.

The potential results of further cooperation can include:

- development of a training course on integration into a new educational environment for migrant students
- designing of a course for professional development of education experts and academics
- creation of a platform aimed to hold round tables and debate clubs meetings providing opportunities for open discussion of the migrants' problems
- preparation of recommendations aimed to improve the educational environment in the context of the migration crisis.

REFERENCES

- [1] Prosyukova K., Babenko O., Abrosimova N., Fominykh A. POLITICAL CRISIS IN SYRIA AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION, INTED 2017: 11TH INTERNATIONAL TECHNOLOGY, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE, 2017, p.8602-8605.
- [2] Lisenko A.R., Shevchenko E.N., The Performative Nature of Modern Theater (As Exemplified by the Performances of the 'Rimini Protokoll' Group and the Projects of Christoph Schlingensiefel) Ad Alta-Journal Of Interdisciplinary Research, 2017, Vol.7, Is.2., p.210-212.
- [3] Shats M. Bullying v shkole: vyjavlenie, ustranenie i profilaktika, Yakutsk, 2017.

- [4] Babenko O.V. Deviancy-prone behaviour as a modern challenge for teachers; III International on-line academic conference "Exploring languages and cross-cultural communication", Kazan, February 01, 2018.
- [5] Rakhimberdieva I.M., Kurmaeva I.I. Inclusive approach to teaching foreign languages in higher education. The 10th international conference on Education and New Learning Technologies, Palma Mallorca, Spain, 2-4 July, 2018.