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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ADAPTATION (A CASE STUDY OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES)

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Abstract. This article presents the results of an empirical study examining the role of intercultural competence as a predictor of successful sociopsychological and academic adaptation among international students from Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The sample included 106 participants. Correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive associations between intercultural competence and various aspects of adaptation. The findings support the hypothesis that intercultural competence is an essential predictor of students from Central Asia's adaptive potential. The study also identified specific features in the relationship between components of intercultural competence and adaptation parameters. The data emphasize the need to target the development of intercultural competence as part of support programs for international students from neighboring countries.

Keywords: *intercultural competence, adaptation of international students, adaptive capacities, Central Asian region, sociopsychological adaptation, academic adaptation, neighboring countries*

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Introduction

The adaptation of international students to the host country's educational, social, and cultural environment remains highly relevant in contemporary educational psychology, general sociology, and cross-cultural psychology. The globalization of higher education and the growth of international educational interactions make this topic particularly significant. Additionally, the Russian Federation's active policy of attracting international students, particularly from CIS countries, requires a deeper understanding of the conditions for their successful integration. In this context, students from Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – represent a specific research interest. Despite their

geographical proximity and shared historical and cultural background within the USSR, these countries now exhibit significant differences in their culture, traditions, and social practices. This specificity creates both potential common ground and areas of intercultural tension for their students within Russian universities.

Students from Central Asia traditionally constitute a significant proportion of the international student body in Russian universities [1–3]. Their adaptation is often perceived as less challenging than that of students from outside the CIS, due to a shared language (Russian as a *lingua franca*) and familiarity with the foundations of the Russian educational system. However, this perception is often misleading. Cultural differences in family values, communication norms, attitudes toward authority and time, and religious practices create noticeable obstacles. These are compounded by socio-economic disparities and potential stereotypes and prejudices on both sides, which hinder successful integration [3–5]. The successful integration of students from Central Asia is of significant geopolitical and economic importance to Russia, particularly in strengthening cultural and educational ties across the post-Soviet space. Conversely, failure to adapt leads to poor academic performance, psychological distress, and expulsion. Ultimately, this can make Russia's image less attractive to international students [3, 4, 6–8].

Theoretical Analysis of the Problem

In the scientific literature, the adaptation of international students is described as a complex, multidimensional, and dynamic process that requires an interdisciplinary approach. Its study is based on fundamental theories developed by both global and Russian researchers [9, 10]. This section outlines the key theoretical approaches and their leading proponents.

1. *Stress and Coping Approach*. The classic transactional model of stress and coping by R. Lazarus and S. Folkman (1984) [11] provides a foundational framework for understanding adaptation as a process of managing stress caused by the novelty and uncertainty of a new cultural environment (culture shock) [12]. J. Berry (1997) [13] and C. Ward (1993, 1996) [14, 15] incorporated this model into acculturation research. They emphasize that successful adaptation depends on the selection of effective coping strategies (problem-focused or emotion-focused), the availability of personal resources (such as resilience, tolerance for uncertainty, and self-efficacy – concepts studied by A. Bandura [16] and S. Maddi [17]), and the presence of social support

(a concept detailed by S. Cohen and T. Wills [18]). According to existing research, adaptation should be understood as a continuous process that includes the assessment of stress-inducing factors in a new environment (primary appraisal), the evaluation of one's own resources for coping (secondary appraisal), and the application of coping strategies to manage stress and restore psychological balance [19–24].

2. Sociocultural Approach. K. Ward and colleagues (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, 1999; Searle & Ward, 1990) proposed a clear distinction between two aspects of adaptation [23]. Sociocultural adaptation refers to the ability to successfully integrate into the daily life of the host society, including solving practical tasks, understanding norms and rules, and establishing social contacts, which is associated with cultural learning. Psychological adaptation involves emotional well-being and life satisfaction in a new environment, along with the absence of significant symptoms of anxiety, depression, or somatization. This aspect is more strongly associated with personality factors and life events. This framework emphasizes the importance of acquiring specialized cultural information and behavioral skills necessary for functioning effectively in a new environment and for maintaining psychological well-being. The success of sociocultural adaptation depends on cultural distance, length of stay, language competence, prior experience, and the quality of intercultural contacts.

3. Acculturation Approach. John W. Berry (1997, 2005, 2017) developed one of the most influential models of acculturation [18–22, 25]. He views adaptation as the outcome of a broader acculturation process – changes that occur at both the individual and group levels as a result of prolonged direct contact with another culture. Berry identified four main strategies employed by migrants or international students, based on two dimensions: maintaining one's cultural identity and ties to the culture of origin, and establishing connections and participating in the life of the host society. The resulting strategies are Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization. Numerous studies by Berry and his colleagues have shown that the integration strategy is most consistently associated with positive adaptation outcomes (greater psychological well-being and sociocultural adjustment). In contrast, marginalization leads to the most negative consequences. In this framework, adaptation is understood as the result of selecting and implementing an acculturation strategy, which is influenced by both migrants' individual attitudes and the host society's policies and attitudes (multiculturalism, segregation, exclusion).

4. *Systemic (Ecological) Approach*. In Russian psychology, adaptation among international students is often studied within a systemic approach that focuses on the interrelation between the individual and the environment. For example, A. Grigorieva (2006, 2013) views adaptation as a holistic process of interaction between the individual and the environment, aimed at achieving dynamic balance [1, 2]. She emphasizes the importance of communicative adaptation as a key factor for success. N. Lebedeva (2009, 2017) develops Berry's ideas in the Russian context, exploring the relationship between acculturation strategies, sociopsychological adaptation, and intergroup relations, while highlighting the role of social identity and perceived intergroup threat [5, 6, 26, 27]. V. Slastenin, N. Osukhova, and I. Zimnyaya focus on the pedagogical aspects of adaptation, the role of the university educational environment, and the need for psychological and pedagogical support [28, 29]. V. Pavlenko and S. Taglin examine cognitive and personal predictors of adaptation, including the role of cultural intelligence [7]. Yu. Platonov, V. Koltsova, and T. Stefanenko emphasize sociopsychological aspects, the role of ethnic identity, and intercultural communication [8, 30, 31].

This approach emphasizes the interconnection of different adaptation levels:

Academic (educational): success in mastering the curriculum, understanding requirements, and interacting with instructors.

Sociopsychological (interpersonal): building relationships with peers, including compatriots, representatives of the host country, and individuals from other cultures, as well as developing a sense of group belonging.

Cultural and everyday: navigating daily life, including transportation, household matters, and norms of behavior in public spaces.

Psychophysiological: coping with the physiological effects of stress and maintaining health.

Overall, adaptation is understood as an active, two-way process of interaction between the individual and the new sociocultural and educational environment, aimed at achieving harmony and effective functioning at all levels. Its success depends on individual characteristics (resources, competencies, motivation), environmental factors (tolerance, support, openness), and the quality of their interaction.

The operationalization of adaptation in the student environment includes a set of indicators reflecting success at the levels mentioned above: academic performance; satisfaction with studies and the university; effectiveness and comfort of interpersonal communication

with peers and academic staff; a positive emotional state (low levels of anxiety and depression, measured, for example, by the Beck or Spielberger–Khanin scales); a developed sense of belonging to the university community; and reasonable acceptance of the norms of the new culture while maintaining a positive cultural identity (corresponding to Berry's integration strategy).

The ability to interact effectively and appropriately with representatives of other cultures – intercultural competence (hereinafter, IC) – is crucial to successful adaptation. Michael Byram (1997) proposed one of the most widely cited models of IC (“savoir-être,” “savoirs,” “savoir comprendre,” “savoir apprendre/faire,” “savoir s'engager”), emphasizing critical cultural awareness – the ability to evaluate practices, products, and perspectives of native and foreign cultures based on clear criteria. His model formed the basis for many educational programs [18].

Alvino E. Fantini (2000, 2009) emphasized the multidimensional nature of intercultural competence, distinguishing four interrelated dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. He particularly stressed the development of intercultural sensitivity – the ability to perceive and value cultural differences [32, 33]. Darla K. Deardorff (2004, 2006, 2009) conducted a large-scale Delphi study with experts to identify consensus on the definition and components of intercultural competence. Her pyramid and process models highlight the significance of internal outcomes (adaptability, empathy, ethnorelativism) and external outcomes (effective and appropriate behavior in an intercultural context), achieved through the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes [18, 22, 34]. Brian H. Spitzberg, in his component model of communication competence (1983, 2000), viewed intercultural competence as the specific application of general communication competencies in an intercultural context, encompassing motivation, knowledge, skills, context, and outcomes [24].

O. Khukhlaev and colleagues (2014, 2019) developed an integrative approach and corresponding methodology, distinguishing cognitive (knowledge about cultures and stereotypes), affective (attitudes such as tolerance, empathy, openness, motivation), conative (skills including communication, behavioral flexibility, conflict resolution), and reflexive-evaluative (self-awareness, critical thinking) components. This model served as the basis for the present study [35, 36]. G. Soldatova (1998, 2008) examined intercultural competence in the context of interethnic interaction and tolerance, emphasizing the role of

intercultural sensitivity and communicative tolerance [37, 38]. T. Stefanenko (1999, 2014), within the framework of ethnopsychology, considered intercultural competence a necessary condition for successful intercultural communication, linking it to overcoming ethnocentrism and developing cultural empathy [29, 30]. I. Pluzhnik (2003, 2010) investigated the development of intercultural competence within the educational process, identifying personal, cognitive, and activity-related criteria for its formation [39, 40]. L. Pochebut (2007) investigated the sociopsychological aspects of intercultural competence, its relationship with social intelligence, and its role in adaptation [41].

Considering the work of the scholars mentioned above, the structure of intercultural competence can be described as a set of the following interrelated elements:

1. Knowledge of the native culture and the culture(s) of interaction (values, norms, traditions, history, social institutions, religious characteristics); knowledge of cultural universals and specific features, of verbal and nonverbal codes of communication, and of the dynamics of intercultural relations (stereotypes, prejudices, conflicts).

2. Skills: communicative (verbal – proficiency in the language, including nuances, idioms, and registers; and nonverbal – understanding and appropriate use of gestures, proxemics, facial expressions, and paralinguistics); cognitive (the ability to decenter, overcome stereotypes and prejudices, interpret behaviors and events within a cultural context – cultural attribution – and engage in critical thinking); and adaptive (behavioral flexibility, the ability to manage uncertainty and ambiguity, creativity in solving intercultural problems, as well as stress management and conflict resolution skills).

3. Attitudes – fundamental predispositions toward interaction: openness and curiosity toward other cultures; empathy (the ability to understand and share feelings of other people); respect for cultural differences (recognition of their value); and motivation for intercultural interaction and learning.

4. Critical cultural awareness is understood as the ability to reflect on cultural conditioning and recognize how one's cultural background shapes perception, values, beliefs, and behavior.

5. Outcomes are the ability to achieve communicative and practical goals in an intercultural context (effectiveness) and to do so in accordance with the cultural norms and expectations of the interacting parties (adequateness). This represents the external manifestation of all the preceding components.

Theoretical models and empirical studies indicate that well-developed IC is a significant resource and predictor of successful adaptation among international students. Its components support cultural learning, guide the selection of adaptive integration strategies, provide tools for effective stress management, and enable harmonious interaction within the complex university environment. Consequently, the targeted development of intercultural competence is crucial for facilitating the successful adaptation and integration of international students, particularly those from Central Asia's cultural context.

The relationship between intercultural competence and international students' adaptation is both logical and theoretically grounded. Intercultural competence is a key resource that enables accurate interpretation of the behavior and communication of members of the host culture, thereby reducing misunderstandings and potential conflict. It also facilitates the formation of social networks and access to social support, promotes flexible responses to change and unexpected situations, mitigates stress associated with culture shock, and enhances comprehension of academic requirements and interactions with academic staff. Additionally, it contributes to maintaining positive self-esteem and cultural identity throughout the acculturation process.

Thus, intercultural competence can be viewed as a crucial predictor of successful adaptation, facilitating the entry into a new cultural and educational environment.

The adaptation of students from Central Asian countries requires particular attention. Despite being commonly categorized as the "near abroad", this group is far from homogeneous. The shared factors influencing their adaptation include:

- *Linguistic factor.* Knowledge of Russian as a non-native language often leads to difficulties in academic communication and navigating the subtleties of social interaction.

- *Cultural proximity/distance.* Shared historical and social elements of the Soviet period coexist with significant differences in traditional culture, religion (with Islam being the predominant faith), family values (characterized by greater collectivism and patriarchal structures), and behavioral norms.

- *Socio-economic differences.* The disparity in living standards between Central Asian countries and Russia may affect students' financial well-being and their perceptions within the host society.

- *Migration context.* The perception of students from Central Asia as labor migrants provokes stereotypes and discrimination towards them.

- *Personal expectations.* High expectations from both families and the students themselves regarding education and prospects in Russia create additional pressure and stress.

At the same time, there are intraregional differences. For instance, students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the Russian language is more widely spoken, experience fewer linguistic challenges than students from rural areas of Tajikistan or Turkmenistan. Cultural distance can also vary, particularly in the perception of gender norms and religious practices.

The study of the relationship between intercultural competence and adaptation among students from Central Asia is crucial for developing evidence-based psychological and educational support programs tailored to this large group. Identifying the specific components of intercultural competence most relevant to their adaptation enables the design of targeted training, consultations, and integration activities. Such measures contribute not only to academic success but also to psychological well-being, the formation of positive intercultural experiences, and the strengthening of international ties.

This study aims to empirically test the hypothesis that the level of intercultural competence significantly predicts sociopsychological and academic adaptation among international students from Central Asian countries studying at Russian universities.

Methodology

The study involved 106 international students (1–3 years of study) from various faculties of Penza State University, all of whom were citizens of Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan ($n = 28$), Kyrgyzstan ($n = 25$), Tajikistan ($n = 20$), Turkmenistan ($n = 18$), and Uzbekistan ($n = 15$). Participants were between 18 and 24 years old ($M = 20.3$, $SD = 1.7$).

The inclusion criteria were as follows: citizenship of a Central Asian country, enrollment in full-time studies for at least one semester, and proficiency in Russian sufficient to understand instructions and questionnaire items. Participation was voluntary, and the principles of confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed.

The following research methods were used in the study:

1. Scale of Sociopsychological Adaptation (SPA) by C. Rogers and R. Diamond (adapted by A. Osnitsky). This instrument measures the overall level of sociopsychological adaptation through an integral index, as well as across six subscales: Adaptation (A), Self-acceptance (S),

Acceptance of others (L), Emotional comfort (E), Internality (I), and Striving for dominance (D). High scores on the subscales (except for D, where high values may indicate difficulties) reflect well-being. The integral indicator of General Adaptability (GA), calculated according to the formula, is used. In this study, the integral indicator of GA and scales A, E, and I were used as the most relevant to the context of intercultural adaptation.

4. Method of Diagnosing Communicative Social Competence (CSC) by N. Fetiskin, V. Kozlov, and G. Manuylova. It is used to assess an individual's ability to interact effectively within interpersonal relationships. It includes five subscales: Goal-setting ability (G), Initiative in communication (I), Ability to provide support (S), Ability to navigate social situations (SS), and Ability to understand others (UO). High scores indicate a well-developed competence. An overall CSC score is calculated by summing the raw scores across the subscales.

3. Method for Assessing Student Adaptation to University (ASU) by T. Dubovitskaya and A. Krylova. This method measures adaptation to the study group and to academic activities. It consists of two subscales:

- *Adaptation to the Study Group (ASG)*. This subscale reflects satisfaction with peer relationships, a sense of belonging, and comfort in social interactions.

- *Adaptation to Academic Activities (AAA)*. This subscale measures satisfaction with the learning process, relationships with academic staff, understanding of academic requirements, and academic motivation. High scores indicate a high level of personal adaptation.

1. Integrated Questionnaire of Intercultural Competence (IQIC) by O. Khukhlaev. This comprehensive instrument assesses intercultural competence using a model that includes cognitive, affective, conative (behavioral), and reflexive-evaluative components. It consists of four subscales:

- *Cognitive Component (Cog)*: Knowledge about cultures, cultural differences, norms, and stereotypes.

- *Affective Component (Aff)*: Tolerance, empathy, respect for differences, openness, and motivation for intercultural interaction.

- *Conative Component (Con)*: Behavioral flexibility, skills for effective intercultural communication, and conflict resolution.

- *Reflexive-Evaluative Component (Ref)*: The capacity to reflect on one's cultural background and its influence on perception and behavior, while applying critical thinking to cultural phenomena. An overall level of intercultural competence (total score) is also calculated. High scores

indicate a high level of development for each component and for intercultural competence as a whole.

The study was conducted in groups under classroom conditions. Completion of the complete set of tests took 50–70 minutes. Instructions emphasized the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study. Standard forms and scoring keys were used for data collection and processing.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. Descriptive statistics (mean, M ; standard deviation, SD) were used to characterize the sample and describe the distribution of scores. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (r_s) was used to examine relationships between measures of intercultural competence (IQIC) and adaptation (SPA, CSC, ASU), and to identify differences between Central Asian countries on key indicators. Due to unequal group sizes and small subsamples, parametric tests were considered less appropriate. Statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$ and $p \leq 0.01$.

Results and Analysis

The results obtained using the main diagnostic instruments are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of adaptation and intercultural competence scores in the total sample (N = 106)

Indicator	Method	M	SD	Range
Adaptation (A)	SPA (Rogers & Diamond)	63.21	10.87	35–82
Emotional Comfort (E)	SPA (Rogers & Diamond)	59.78	12.05	30–80
Internality (I)	SPA (Rogers & Diamond)	56.34	9.56	38–75
General Adaptation (GA)	SPA (Rogers & Diamond)	62.45	8.93	45–78
Communicative Social Competence (CSC)	CSC (Fetiskin et al.)	72.18	11.24	48–95
Adaptation to Study Group (ASG)	ASU (Dubovitskaya & Krylova)	41.65	7.21	25–55
Adaptation to Academic Activities (AAA)	ASU (Dubovitskaya & Krylova)	38.92	6.87	22–52
IC: Cognitive (Cog)	IQIC (Khukhlaev)	27.83	4.56	18–36
IC: Affective (Aff)	IQIC (Khukhlaev)	32.15	5.12	20–42
IC: Conative (Con)	IQIC (Khukhlaev)	30.67	4.89	19–40
IC: Reflexive (Ref)	IQIC (Khukhlaev)	28.41	4.32	17–37
Total Intercultural Competence	IQIC (Khukhlaev)	119.06	15.87	

The data in Table 1 indicate that the overall level of sociopsychological adaptation (GA using SPA) and communicative social competence (CSC) in the sample falls within the average range. Adaptation to the study group (ASG) and to academic activities (AAA) is also close to average, with slightly higher values for group adaptation. Intercultural competence, both overall and by component, likewise remains within the average range. Among its components, the affective ones (empathy, openness, motivation) are the most developed, while the cognitive (knowledge) and reflexive components are the least developed. Substantial variation in individual scores across all scales suggests marked heterogeneity within the sample in terms of both adaptation and intercultural competence.

Indicators of adaptation to the study group (ASG) and to academic activities (AAA) are also within the average range, with adaptation to the group somewhat higher than to educational activities. The level of intercultural competence (overall and across components) is likewise within the average range. Among the components, the affective dimension (empathy, openness, motivation) is the most pronounced, while the cognitive (knowledge) and reflexive dimensions are the least developed. A wide variation in individual scores was observed across all scales, indicating substantial heterogeneity in the sample regarding both adaptation and intercultural competence.

To test the central hypothesis, a Spearman correlation analysis was conducted between intercultural competence indicators (overall level and components, IQIC) and adaptation indicators (SPA, CSC, ASU). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Spearman's rank correlation coefficients (rs) between intercultural competence and adaptation indicators (N = 106)

Adaptation Indicator	Total IC	Cog	Aff	Con	Ref
Adaptation (A) (SPA)	0.48**	0.32*	0.41**	0.52**	0.29*
Emotional Comfort (E) (SPA)	0.51**	0.35**	0.47**	0.49**	0.38**
Internality (I) (SPA)	0.39**	0.25*	0.36**	0.42**	0.28*
General Adaptation (GA) (SPA)	0.53**	0.37**	0.49**	0.55**	0.38**
Communicative Social Competence (CSC)	0.61**	0.42**	0.55**	0.63**	0.46**
Adaptation to Study Group (ASG) (ASU)	0.57**	0.38**	0.52**	0.60**	0.44**
Adaptation to Academic Activities (AAA) (ASU)	0.45**	0.39**	0.40**	0.47**	0.36**

Note. * $p \leq 0.05$ (statistically significant correlation); ** $p \leq 0.01$ (statistically highly substantial correlation).

The data in Table 2 clearly confirm the study's central hypothesis. Statistically significant positive correlations were found between all measures of intercultural competence (both overall and by component) and all aspects of adaptation assessed. This indicates that students with higher levels of intercultural competence also demonstrate greater sociopsychological adaptation, stronger communicative social competence, and greater adaptation to both the study group and academic activities.

The overall level of intercultural competence showed the strongest correlations with Communicative Social Competence ($r_s = 0.61$), adaptation to the Study Group ($r_s = 0.57$), and General Adaptation according to the SPA ($r_s = 0.53$). The correlation with Adaptation to Academic Activities ($r_s = 0.45$) was also significant, though somewhat weaker.

Among the components of intercultural competence, the most universal predictor of adaptation is the *Conative component (Con)*, which reflects behavioral flexibility and intercultural interaction skills. It demonstrates the strongest and most consistent correlations with nearly all aspects of adaptation, ranging from 0.42^{**} (Internality) to 0.63^{**} (CSC) and 0.60^{**} (ASG).

The Affective component (Aff) – empathy, openness, and motivation – also demonstrates strong associations, particularly with Emotional Comfort ($r_s = 0.47$), General Adaptation ($r_s = 0.49$), CSC ($r_s = 0.55$), and ASG ($r_s = 0.52$).

The Cognitive (Cogn.) and *Reflexive (Ref.)* components show somewhat weaker, yet still statistically significant, correlations with adaptation ($p \leq 0.05$ or $p \leq 0.01$). The most notable associations are with Communicative Social Competence ($r_s = 0.42^{**}$ and 0.46^{**} , respectively) and adaptation to the Study Group ($r_s = 0.38^{**}$ and 0.44). Interestingly, the Cognitive component shows a stronger correlation with Adaptation to Academic Activity ($r_s = 0.39$) than with other components of intercultural competence. This finding highlights the role of cultural knowledge in academic adaptation.

To identify potential differences in adaptation and intercultural competence by country of origin, a comparative analysis of mean scores for key indicators (Total IC, General Adaptation (SPA, CSC, ASG, and AAA) was conducted across subgroups of students from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The Kruskal–Wallis test H was used as a non-parametric alternative to one-way analysis of variance for independent samples. No statistically significant

differences ($p \leq 0.05$) were found for Total IC ($H = 7.82$, $p = 0.098$), General Adaptation ($H = 6.15$, $p = 0.188$), CSC ($H = 8.34$, $p = 0.080$), ASG ($H = 5.92$, $p = 0.206$), or AAA ($H = 7.01$, $p = 0.136$). This suggests that there are no pronounced differences in the mean levels of the examined variables among students from different Central Asian countries in this sample.

However, when examining the correlation structure (Table 2) in the *total* sample and analyzing individual profiles, specific trends were observed that require further investigation in larger country-specific samples:

1. Students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan more frequently demonstrated higher scores on the Cognitive component of IC and Adaptation to Academic Activities (AAA), which may be related to the broader use of Russian in their countries.

2. Students from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan showed relatively higher scores on the Affective component of IC and Adaptation to the Study Group (ASG).

3. For students from Turkmenistan, a somewhat greater variability in scores was observed across all scales.

The results of the empirical study strongly suggest that intercultural competence is a significant predictor of successful adaptation among international students from Central Asian countries in the Russian educational context. The findings confirm theoretical assumptions that intercultural competence functions as a key internal resource, facilitating the entry into a new sociocultural and academic environment.

The study confirmed a strong positive relationship between intercultural competence and adaptation. Statistically significant correlations were found between the overall level of intercultural competence and all of its components (cognitive, affective, conative, and reflective), and various aspects of adaptation: sociopsychological adjustment (particularly emotional comfort and overall adaptation), communicative social competence, adaptation to the study group, and adaptation to academic activities. This indicates that students with more developed intercultural competence deal more effectively with the challenges of a new environment, experience less stress, build relationships more successfully, and adapt more smoothly to the learning process.

The most significant components of intercultural competence were identified. The analysis showed that not all components predict adaptation to the same extent. *The conative component* (skills of flexible

behavior and communication) emerged as the most universal and strongest predictor of successful adaptation across all measured parameters. This finding highlights the crucial importance of practical behavioral skills in both daily and academic intercultural situations. *The affective component* (empathy, openness, motivation, and respect) also demonstrates strong predictive power, particularly for emotional well-being and social adjustment. Positive attitudes and emotional readiness for interaction form the foundation for building successful interpersonal relationships. The cognitive component (knowledge about cultures) and the reflective component (self-awareness, critical stance) showed somewhat weaker, yet still significant, associations. Notably, *the cognitive component* demonstrated a relatively stronger link with academic adaptation (AAA), highlighting the role of cultural knowledge in understanding academic requirements and interacting with faculty. Reflectivity is essential for recognizing individuals' native cultural positions and their influence on perception.

Although mean group levels of intercultural competence and adaptation did not show statistically significant differences among students from different Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the study confirmed the overall relevance of their adaptation challenges in Russia. Despite historical ties and a shared language (Russian), cultural differences, socio-economic distance, and potential stereotypes create evident barriers, the overcoming of which is directly linked to the level of intercultural competence. The observed tendencies in the structure of correlations and individual profiles (for example, the potentially greater role of cultural knowledge for academic adaptation among students from countries where Russian is less widely spoken in everyday life) call for further investigation using larger, more representative country-based samples.

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that intercultural competence is a crucial resource, essential for successful adaptation in a globalized world. This is particularly relevant for migrants and international students facing a new sociocultural environment. The findings emphasize that developing intercultural competence is not merely an academic task but a fundamental need for well-being and effectiveness in intercultural contexts.

The most significant result of the study is the dominant role of the conative component of intercultural competence (behavioral flexibility

and intercultural interaction skills) in predicting successful adaptation. This challenges traditional assumptions regarding the primacy of knowledge (cognitive) or attitudes (affective) and highlights the critical importance of practical, behavioral skills in real-life daily and academic situations. Successful adaptation requires not only understanding and positive attitudes but also the ability to act appropriately and flexibly.

Despite the cultural diversity of the Central Asian countries, the study did not reveal significant differences in mean levels of intercultural competence and adaptation among students from different countries studying in Russia. This suggests that the main factors influencing the impact of intercultural competence on adaptation are universal for this group, and the challenges of adaptation in the Russian environment are common despite having shared historical and linguistic backgrounds. The issue of adaptation is thus relevant for all Central Asian students.

The study's findings provide strong empirical support for a systematic transformation of approaches to supporting international students in Russian universities. There is a need to move from ad hoc adaptation measures to a targeted, evidence-based development of intercultural competence as part of psychological and pedagogical support, with a particular emphasis on practical skills and positive attitudes. This is important not only for student well-being but also for the quality of international education and the strengthening of Russia's humanitarian and cross-cultural ties.

The research provides a strong empirical rationale for a systemic transformation of approaches to supporting international students in Russian universities. There is a need to move from spontaneous adaptation measures to a targeted, evidence-based development of intercultural competence as part of psychological and pedagogical support, with a particular emphasis on practical skills and positive attitudes. This is important not only for student well-being but also for the quality of international education and the strengthening of Russia's humanitarian and cross-cultural ties.

The most significant finding of the empirical study is the dominant role of *the conative component* (behavioral skills) of intercultural competence. The conative component showed the strongest and most consistent correlations with nearly all aspects of adaptation, ranging from emotional comfort and internality to communicative competence and adaptation to the study group and academic activities. Its associations with Communicative Social Competence ($r_s = 0.63$) and Adaptation to the Study Group ($r_s = 0.60$) are particularly notable. This

finding has immediate and substantial practical implications. It clearly indicates that support programs for international students should shift their focus from predominantly informational (cultural) or introductory work to intensive training in practical skills, such as intercultural communication, conflict resolution, behavioral adaptation, and cultural assistance in specific academic and domestic situations.

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МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНАЯ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЬ КАК ПРЕДИКТОР АДАПТАЦИИ ИНОСТРАННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЕЙ СТРАН ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОГО АЗИАТСКОГО РЕГИОНА)

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Аннотация. В статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования, направленного на выявление роли межкультурной компетентности как предиктора успешности социально-психологической и академической адаптации иностранных студентов из стран Центрального Азиатского региона (ЦАР) – Казахстана, Кыргызстана, Таджикистана, Туркменистана и Узбекистана. Объем выборки составил 106 человек. Проведен корреляционный анализ, выявивший статистически значимые положительные связи между показателями межкультурной компетентности и различными аспектами адаптации. Результаты исследования подтверждают гипотезу о межкультурной коммуникации как важном предикторе адаптационного потенциала студентов из ЦАР. При этом выявлены некоторые специфические особенности связи компонентов межкультурной компетентности с адаптационными параметрами. Полученные данные подчеркивают необходимость целенаправленного развития межкультурной компетентности в программах поддержки иностранных студентов из ближнего зарубежья.

Ключевые слова: *межкультурная компетентность, адаптация иностранных студентов, адаптационные способности, Центральный Азиатский регион, социально-психологическая адаптация, академическая адаптация, ближнее зарубежье*

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