



Physical Training of International Students at University: Educational Potential of Teaching Experience



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Abstract

The article updated the issue of new approaches to physical education (also known as Phys Ed) of Russian university students in the context of internationalization in higher education. The research conducted in the field of defining peculiarities of Russian university's physical education aspects at the current stage of university internationalization. The research results fall into two types: first, to identify urgent professional development's priorities of the university Phys Ed professor as an instructor as well as a subject of the international teaching and learning interaction; second, to determine current trends of students' Phys Ed in the university global environment, and to distinguish the most productive forms, methods, and means of Phys Ed in the internationalization process. The research centered on two Universities of the city of Tomsk, Russia. The applied methods were the following: first, interviews and questionnaires, involved observations, and the expert assessment method. The authors offer well-reasoned organizational and educational answers to ensure the successful integration of the physical and international education of Russian university students.

Keywords

*educational potential;
higher education
internationalization;
international students;
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interaction;*

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1 Introduction

One of the significant characteristics of the current stage in the development of the Russian university education system is internationalization. Most Russian and foreign experts designate internationalization as a strategic focus on university education development in world exposure. The following distinctive features are inherent to the internationalized university:

- a) University administration and executive staff understand the priority and significance of international activities;
- b) The university faculty achieve educational practices of international specialization;
- c) The university implements educational programs for training Russian students in any foreign languages and introduces courses of cross-cultural communication into the curriculum;
- d) The university community is actively involved in international events of different orientation like cultural, sports, scientific, and educational;
- e) The number of international students, professors, and researchers increases in the university;
- f) The university staff creates conditions for students to educate, run scientific research and educational internships abroad, including academic exchanges;
- g) The university faculty are engaged in the processes of teaching, conducting research and consultations abroad;
- h) The university evaluates the partnership with foreign universities ([Ellingboe, 1998](#)).

Statistics data confirm the manifestation of internationalization in Russian Universities on the growth aspect of international students learning ([Arefyev, 2007](#); [Sheveleva, 2015](#)). The amount of international students in Russian Universities is steadily growing from year to year. Moreover, the geography phenomenon is expanding. Students from not only the Commonwealth of Independent States - the former constituent republics of the U.S.S.R. - but also other countries of the Asia-Pacific region, Africa, and European countries study at Russian Universities.

International students represent diversity, bring social and cultural attitudes into Russian education. The situation creates a problem of building new productive pedagogical mechanisms that can facilitate educational interaction among the subjects of the teaching and learning process. The most typical forms of university communication are "student-professor," "student-student," and "student - administration." Achieving success in building appropriate communication processes requires a systemic transformation of the university educational environment. The analysis of the current Russian university situation demonstrates wholly insufficient organizational and educational conditions for the productive interaction of international students with all the other subjects of the teaching and learning process.

We consider physical education one of the essential tools in conducting the systemic transformation of the Russian university for the benefit of international students. The paper discusses the educational potential of the teaching activities of the university physical education professor. Teaching is an essential part of the university teaching and learning process designed to improve student success rates and to enable students to achieve their professional goals ([Ruiz & Fandos, 2014](#)). The advantage of teaching in student physical education is that it uses as a primary strategy for student learning, student guidance, individualization, and monitoring.

2 Materials and Methods

Physical education is a sort of education that aims at developing the motor skills and improves such physical qualities of the students as ability, flexibility, strength, endurance, and some others. Phys Ed also masters various techniques of sports activity as well as strengthens them and focuses on improving the student's physical state in a holistic unity with the upbringing of spiritual and moral qualities. As a result, Phys Ed

ensures the successful socialization of a person in the process of growing up (Federal law, 2007; Ilinich, 2000; Kholodov & Kuznetsov, 2003). Specific methods of Phys Ed include a method of strictly regulated exercises, a game method, and a competitive method. The use of Phys Ed specific methods requires the combination with general educational ones like verbal and visual.

The objectives of Phys Ed are carried out by a professor of the discipline "Physical Culture and Sports" – a trainer-professor at the university level. They solve several specific tasks of student Phys Ed: pedagogical, organizational, and managerial (Federal law, 2007; Ilinich, 2000; Kholodov & Kuznetsov, 2003). The Phys Ed professor delivers Phys Ed through the implementation of a sufficiently wide range of activities, including:

- a) Conducting "Physical Culture and Sports" classes for university students following the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standard for Higher Education, and operating the core curriculum programs in various areas (profiles), curricula, and syllabi;
- b) Organizing compulsory training and optional classes in multiple sports;
- c) Holding sports and mass sporting events among students;
- d) Coordinating student self-guided work on Phys Ed during the out-of-school time;
- e) Delivering individual support for students, experiencing difficulties in mastering the discipline "Physical Culture and Sports";
- f) Assessing Phys Ed standard tests (including the norms for "Ready for Work and Defense!" Standard), and conducting credit tests in the discipline "Physical Culture and Sports";
- g) Training student-athletes with high sports achievements and intentions to continue in professional sports;
- h) Directing students to participate in various competitions outside the university (Federal law, 2007; Ilinich, 2000; Kholodov & Kuznetsov, 2003).

To reveal the educational potential of Phys Ed, we researched the grounds of two universities in the city of Tomsk, Russia. National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU) and Federal State Budgetary Higher Education Institution "Siberian State Medical University" of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation (SSMU) are large Tomsk universities, which enroll both domestic Russian and international students and providing most disciplines in the Russian and English languages.

Forty-three professors from TPU and SSMU, sixty-seven international students from Vietnam, China, India, Africa, and Europe, and sixty-seven Russian students participated in the research.

The research included two focus groups:

- 1) Professional challenges of the university Phys Ed professors in the process of interaction with international students;
- 2) University Phys Ed development prospects from the viewpoint of internationalization in higher education.

The research took place from September 2015 through April 2017. We used the traditional research methods: the research method, involved observation, and expert assessment method. Jackson (2011), stated that the essence of research methods explained questioning individuals on a topic or topics and then described responses. The research method comprised of structured interviews and questionnaires.

3 Results and Discussions

The first focus group of the research was devoted to the professional challenges of the Phys Ed professor in the process of interaction with international students and required the analysis of the current university situation in the domain of Phys Ed teaching. The received data confirm the existence of professional challenges in the interaction of the university Phys Ed professors with international students (Smyshlyaev *et al.*, 2017). Forty-five Phys Ed university professors participated in the research. The questionnaire included ten questions to collect data for the analysis.

Among the challenges identified were the following:

- a) The insufficient involvement of Phys Ed professors into the activities of the university internationalization process – only 41% of the respondents reported some participation;

- b) The satisfactory awareness of the mission of the current educational interaction with international students – 78% of the respondents announced the positive experience of cooperation with international students;
- c) The unsatisfactory degree of understanding the national, social and mental specifics of the students, coming from different countries like Vietnam, India, China, Mongolia, and African countries – only 24% of the respondents demonstrated a fair understanding of international student peculiarities;
- d) The low competency and willingness to assist international students with sociocultural adaptation – only 34% of the respondents showed the high rate interest in the problem;
- e) The significant demand for additional training to improve the educational interaction of the national sport cultures in the teaching and learning process - 84% recognized the need for improvement on the whole.
- f) The second focus group devoted to the university Phys Ed development prospects from the viewpoint of university education internationalization required the needs analysis of the professors involved in the process. Forty-three Phys Ed university professors participated.
- g) The identified development prospects were the following:
- h) The high demand for training in English for academic and specific purposes - 97% of respondents stated the need for such training;
- i) The necessity of professional competency development to ensure the productive and psychologically comfortable interaction of Phys Ed professors and international students - 83% of respondents demonstrated a lack of such competence.

The results of the research and expert method of the focus group allowed to identify a list of necessary competencies of the Phys Ed professor that ensure the productive and psychologically comfortable international interaction of participants in the educational process, namely:

- a) The conception of the national, social and mental specifics of the foreign university students in the Phys Ed teaching and learning process;
- b) The ability to solve the existing problems of socio-cultural adaptation of international students to the Russian educational and cultural context utilizing modern educational technologies;
- c) The ability to carry out monitoring studies aimed at assessing the psychophysiological components of the social adaptation of international university students;
- d) The knowledge of the forms, methods, and tools to organize the national sports culture interaction at the university. The Phys Ed professor has to ensure the understanding of the national sports cultures, human values, and tolerant cooperation among international and Russian students;
- e) The ability to provide individual support to international university students in the integration into the Physical Culture and Sports of the university.

The university Phys Ed professor implements the listed competencies through their teaching activity. Thus, a new professional and educational type of action – a teaching function – is introduced into the teaching and learning process, and nowadays is carried out in various educational backgrounds, embracing higher education (Kovaleva, 2011; Jelfs *et al.*, 2009; Yam, 2010).

Teaching activities comprise the following responsibilities:

- a) Individual supporting of international students in their integration into sports practices of the university, city, or region;
- b) Individual counseling, organizational and methodological support to international students when selecting a sports direction to follow;
- c) Personal training of international students for participation in student conferences on the issues of Phys Ed and sports together with Russian students;
- d) Psychological and pedagogical assisting in dealing with communicative challenges in sporting interaction with Russian students;
- e) Guiding international students performed by Russian students in the course of sports and mass sporting work.

The teaching activities of the university Phys Ed professor can be a way to put into practice the listed competencies and to reveal the educational potential of Phys Ed. The Phys Ed potential defined as a set of specific educational possibilities of Phys Ed, which develop various subjects' characteristics in the educational interaction (Smyshlyaev, 2019).

To find out the current objectives and directions of university Phys Ed development, we conducted research, comprised of questionnaires and interviews. The research participants were Russian and international students of TPU and SSMU. The total number of the students was a hundred and thirty-four; there were sixty-seven international and sixty-seven Russian, respectively. The response analysis revealed several difficulties in the interaction "Russian-international students" in Phys Ed class:

- a) Disadvantages of the language "barrier" - 72% of the Russian students and 85% of the international students mentioned the language problems;
- b) A lack of familiarity with the national peculiarities of communication culture - 84% of the Russian students and 85% of the international students complained about communication problems due to the differences in cultural aspects;
- c) The low knowledge level of the national sports culture - 87% of the Russian and 81% of the international students reported difficulties in how to play widespread types of sports and games;
- d) The inefficient cooperation for problem-solving in Phys Ed classes - 61% of the Russian and 72% of the international students informed about the communicative interaction difficulties in teamwork.

The international university students, researched about the difficulties on the level "student - Phys Ed professor," provided the following ideas:

- a) Disadvantages of the language "barrier" - 76% of the international students could not communicate with their Phys Ed professor in English, as either the students or the professors were not proficient enough;
- b) The low level of cultural awareness of national educational features and student national behavioral norms, habits, and traditions - 67% of the respondents reported that their Phys Ed professors treated them the way which was not entirely appropriate in their home countries;
- c) The little interest in the student mood, feeling, and sports interests - 37% of the international students complained about Phys Ed professors' disinterest in student personalities and sports interests;
- d) The low participation in sports and mass sporting events of the university, city, and region - 61% of the international students researched felt uninvolved in the university sports activities and competitions;
- e) The insufficient Phys Ed professor background in the Russian national sports traditions - 59% of the students had no clue about the origin and variety of Russian sports and games.

Furthermore, there are different schemes of Phys Ed class delivery in TPU and SSMU. For instance, in TPU, international and Russian students are engaged in Phys Ed together in "mixed" groups. On the other hand, in SSMU, classes for international students are held in groups that do not include Russian students – the so-called "differentiated" groups. We questioned international and Russian students of the two universities about the preferable scheme in the Phys Ed class organization. The response analysis of TPU students, who studied Phys Ed in the mixed groups, demonstrated that 43% of the international students and 57% of the Russian students found being together with students from other countries quite convenient though 41 % of the international students and 31% of the Russian students would prefer to train separately.

The students from SSMU, who studied Phys Ed in the differentiated groups, expressed ideas about combining Russian and international students to train together - 57% of the global and 63% of the Russian students would like to be engaged in Phys Ed in mixed groups. In our opinion, the data obtained indicate the need for further research related to the selection of the most reasonable organizational scheme for conducting university Phys Ed training sessions. Future research is to determine the expediency principle for either group mixing or differentiation on a national basis.

The research also revealed the advantages of the "student-student" interaction in the mixed groups in Phys Ed classes and group sporting events. The international students reported on the following advantages of the interaction with Russian students:

- a) The experience of international communication - 92% of the international students researched enjoyed communicating with the Russian students in Phys Ed classes;

- b) The language skill development – 97% of the international students had an opportunity to master Russian or English in Phys Ed classes;
- c) The outlook expansion – 89% of the international students found out something new for them from communication with the Russian students;
- d) The acquaintance with the culture of Russia – 79% of the international students got to know better about Russian customs and traditions.

The Russian students, in turn, pointed out the advantages they could see in the interaction with international students in Phys Ed classes, and in sports and mass sporting events of the university:

- a) The experience of international communication - 87% of the Russian students enjoyed the communication process;
- b) English skills development – 94% had to speak English to communicate with international students;
- c) The acquaintance with the culture of other countries – 82% of the Russian students researched found out some interesting facts about home countries of international students.

The analysis of the research results shows the recommendations set to improve the university Phys Ed practice in the context of internationalization of the educational environment of the Russian university.

Firstly, the research updates the objective of integrating the processes of international Phys Ed of Russian university students. Specialized literature quite unambiguously interprets the content of the concept of "international education" as a pedagogical process of teaching students to respect the cultural beliefs of other nationalities. In the course of international education, students learn to tolerate the national features of people and obtain the desire for federal consolidation (Dzhurinskiy, 2007; Sheveleva, 2010; Tavadov, 2011). We applied the theoretical analysis method to describe the essential characteristics of international education as a sort of process aimed at building behavioral norms based on the values of internationalism.

The process of international education has several levels: *theoretical* or *worldview*, *psychological*, and *practical* (Tavadov, 2011). On the *worldview* level, internationalist values expressed as the basis of a similar worldview. On the *psychological* level, the internationalism of the content and functions of human feelings, moods, habits, and norms of behavior, including communication, is developed. The *practical* level of international education implies a different form of the student life organization, which means that the principles of internationalism begin to turn into beliefs, conscious types of behavior, and into the daily norms of life.

To achieve the goals of international education, educators need to organize interactions with real-life situations. The student must get engaged in the experience of direct international communication in its socially approved forms. The analysis of specialized literature and practical knowledge of the Russian university on the grounds of TPU and SSMU shows that the current directions of the international student education within the framework of Phys Ed can be:

- a) The exposure of international students to the peculiarities of sports cultures in Russia, and, besides, the exploration of national sports cultures of foreign student home countries by Russian students (Baka, 2004). We developed a workshop for extra-curricular Phys Ed classes for students on "Mobile and sports games of the peoples of the world." The participants of the seminar were some Russian and international students. They had to interact in studying the games within the framework of sports and mass sporting events;
- b) The organization of sports events to develop the interaction between Russia and other countries, represented by international students. The sports events may perform in the form of quests, sports holidays, relay races, competitions, quizzes, performances, and the like;
- c) The increase in the volume and depth of the Physical Culture and Sports component in the content of foreign language courses for Russian and international students. The university Phys Ed and language training combined can update the resource-based practice in the internationalization of the Russian university.

Secondly, the capabilities of university Phys Ed classes, both regular and extra-curricular, can be a solution to the problem of how to assist international students in the sociocultural adaptation to the Russian educational

and social context. Socio-cultural adaptation is a complex process of interaction in the new socio-cultural environment, where international students are required to overcome various kinds of psychological, social, moral, and religious barriers, to master new life activities and forms of behavior (Krivtsova, 2011).

Studying the national traditions of Russia in the university Phys Ed practice is a way to overcome the difficulties of socio-cultural adaptation of international students to the conditions of the Russian reality. There are several ways possible to facilitate the process:

- a) To develop organizational and methodological mechanisms for the integration of international students into sports and mass sporting practices of the city or region;
- b) To motivate global student engagement in studying the national history of Russian sports in the regional or municipal context;
- c) To update the potential of the most efficient foreign experience of international education of students in the Russian context.

Thirdly, the most productive way to integrate the processes of Phys Ed, international education, and socio-cultural adaptation of international students can be through the use of interactive forms and methods of work. The most effective ways in an internationalized university are sports and mobile national games, quests, video reviews, and the like. Besides, Russian professors and students can perform the teaching activities and engage international students in university sports and mass sporting. Teaching has a considerable potential to solve the problems of the university Phys Ed system in the context of internationalization.

4 Conclusion

The set of recommendations given in the paper can not only support and facilitate the university educational environment internationalization but also open new possibilities for Phys Ed. The general cultural competence developed through university Phys Ed is considered essential for building a successful career in the globalizing international world. The internationalization of educational interaction can widen the range of objectives for university Phys Ed development, as well as its content. The integration of the Phys Ed processes, international education, and the promotion of socio-cultural adaptation of international students can serve as organizational and methodological mechanisms to introduce a new model of the Russian university students based on the foregrounding of global components.

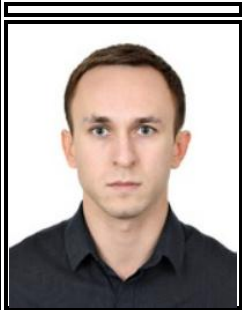



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