

## **Socio-Psychological Adaptation of Migrant and Russian School Children to Polycultural Educational Environment of Modern Schools**

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### **Abstract**

*The article deals with the issues connected with the peculiarities of socio-psychological adaptation of migrant and Russian school children of different age groups to the polycultural educational environment of schools in Russia. The study was conducted in a number of schools in Krasnoyarsk and Sosnovoborsk in Krasnoyarsk region( Siberia), Russia, and **comprised 200 school children**. The research revealed that the level of socio-psychological adaptation of Russian children was higher only among junior school children in comparison to migrant children, whereas both Russian and migrant adolescent and senior school children feel adapted enough. The research results proved that psychological work on development and improvement of adaptation problems among migrant school children should be aimed at development of communicative and behavioural competence, emotional and personality well-being and self-actualization.*

**Keywords:** socio-psychological adaptation to polycultural educational environment, junior, adolescent and senior migrant school children, communicative and organizational skills, conflict and coping behavioural strategies, anxiety, emotional well-being, self-acceptance, self-actualization

### **Introduction**

It is common knowledge that migration has become a worldwide phenomenon. This trend is mirrored in Krasnoyarsk region in Siberia. Last year over 150 thousand migrants visited our region and currently thousands of them live in it with their children.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

This article addresses the comparison of socio-psychological adaptation of migrant and Russian school children to polycultural educational environment of modern schools.

The article aims to address three questions about the socio-psychological adaptation experience of Russian and migrant school children:

How do Russian school children deal with the polycultural educational environment of modern schools?

How do migrant school children adapt to this polycultural educational environment?

What is the relationship between these two groups of school children?

Much attention in the discussion of this similar issue has been provided by Alexandrov et.al. ( 2012 )who surveyed all students in entire classes with the same questionnaire, allowing for comparison between children of different ethnic origins and with different migration histories. The survey was limited to students from grades 8 to 10 (age 14-16) in St. Petersburg ( Western part of Russia). The questionnaire included items about educational and professional plans, school grades, socio-demographic characteristics, multiple items on learning motivation, sense of belonging in school, and anti-school attitudes. They included detailed questions about the family's migration history (internal and transnational), language spoken at home, native languages of the child and his/her parents, ethnic self-identification. These researchers came to conclusion that the migrant status is always conceptualized through the fact of birth in a foreign country. In case of Russia this simple criteria does not work because people born before 1991 in 'newly independent states' (Azerbaijan, Armenia Georgia, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan and all other, Russia included) were in fact born in one and the same country, namely the Soviet Union. Prior to 1991 the USSR had substantial internal migration, with a long history going back into the days of the Russian empire, which was populated with different ethnic groups – for instance, in St.Petersburg, an Armenian diaspora lived almost since the city's foundation, and different religions were prominently present in the city: large mosque was built in 1910-13, and a Buddhist temple, in 1909-15. What is obvious, though, is that in education the discourse about migrants has been dominated by such categories as language and culture. From the point of view of school, linguistic and cultural differences are much more important than the formal attribute such as citizenship or the country of parent's birth. Russian speaking migrants from Belarus and Ukraine, although not citizens of Russia, are not thought of as migrants by the teachers, whereas arrivals from Chechnya or Dagestan which are parts of Russian Federation are considered migrants.

According to Portes( 1998), ethnicity may have a different effect in different types of schools: for students of privileged schools ethnicity may be of far lesser importance than social background, whereas in bad, troubled schools it may matter more because migrant children in a bad school keep close to their ethnic group.

International and cross-cultural research examine changes in intercultural and intercultural factors, such as identity, values and language, over generations as well as broader adaptation and well-being, including mental health and academic performance (Ward et. al.2001).

In recent decades in Russia there has been a significant flow of migrants from the former Soviet Union countries in search of employment or better life conditions. The government policy towards them is quite tolerant and encouraging, the authorities run special supporting programs for adult and infant migrants. One of the major issues in this respect is the socialization and psychological adaptation of migrant children to the educational environment of Russian schools. According to the statistics, in some schools the number of migrant children can comprise up to 40-50% of the total number of scholars. Thus not only migrant children have to get adapted to the new environment, but also teachers and the Russian learners (not to mention their parents) have to get adapted to the polycultural educational environment of the modern Russian school.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The problem of migrant children' adaptation to school has become the focus of attention of scholars recently (Barazgova E.S., et al. 2010) In the past two years (2012-2013) we have done some research work concerning the peculiarities of psychological adaptation of junior, teenage and senior migrant school children to the polycultural educational environment of schools in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. In total 200 school children took part in the research (95 Russian children and 105 migrant children – representatives of the Armenian, Uzbek, Kirghiz, Georgian, Tajik, Azerbaijan nationalities).

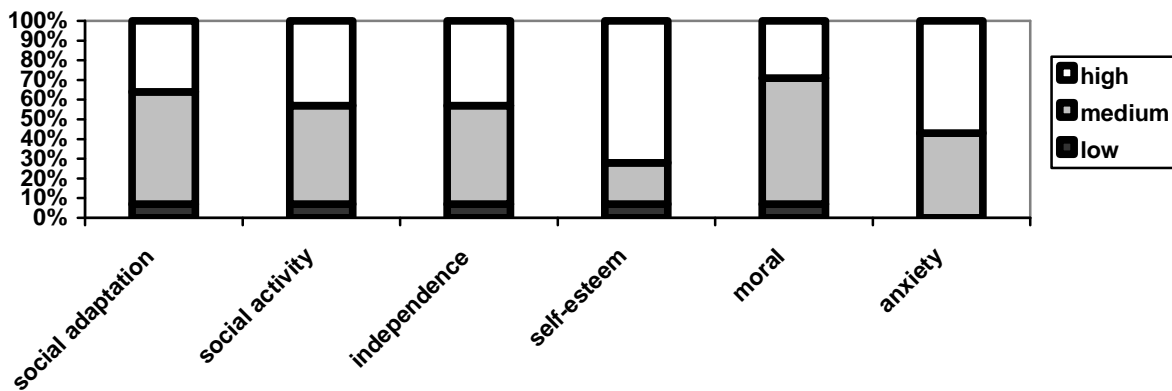
In our research we regard socialization as socio-psychological adaptation which is revealed on two basic levels: behavioural (social) and intrapersonal (purely psychological). Correspondingly two main issues have been studied with help of psychological tests and questionnaires:

- communicative competence and social skills;
- psychological adaptation and self-acceptance (self-esteem).

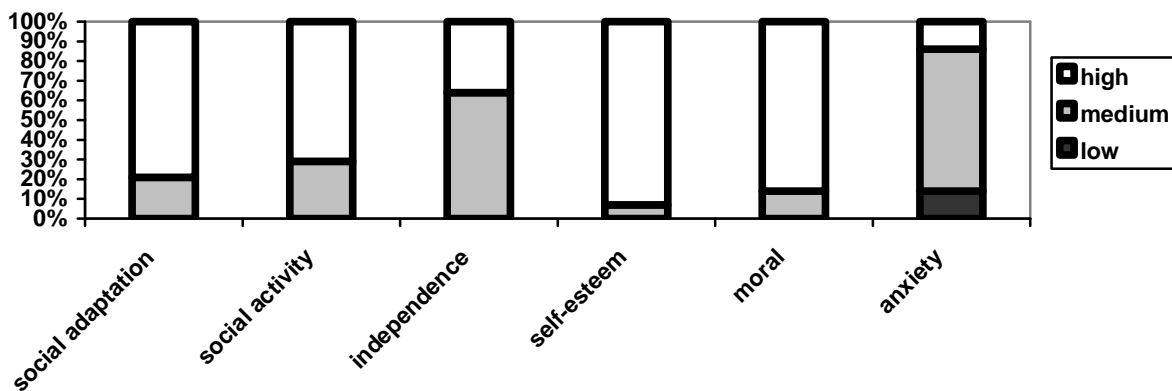
We compared migrant and Russian children of three age groups (junior, teenage and senior) and carried out a deeper research into the structure of socio-psychological adaptation using methods of mathematical processing of empirical data in psychology (correlation by Spearman and cluster analysis, statistic program Stat graphics Plus v.5.0).

**Research Methodology**

First of all, the results show that only among junior age group migrant school children are adapted worse than the Russian school children. Judging by the most significant indicators of socio-psychological adaptation in this particular age group (social adaptation, social activity, independence, self-esteem, moral and anxiety) migrant school children are more independent than the Russian scholars, but the latter are more active, better adapted and socialized, have a higher self-esteem and moral, feel less anxious. We can suppose that the problem with the adaptation of migrant junior children is aggravated by the general adaptation to school: the change in regime, the appearance of new responsibilities and social requirements connected with school life cannot but tell on infant learners. The only advantage of being more independent among migrant children probably descends from cultural up-bringing (since early age children are often left on their own and are engaged in family business of market sale or crafts). Pictures 1, 2 show the indicators levels (low, medium, high, in %) of socio-psychological adaptation among the migrant and Russian school children.



**Picture 1: Indicators of Socio-Psychological Adaptation in Levels (Low, Medium, High, in %), Migrant Junior School Children**



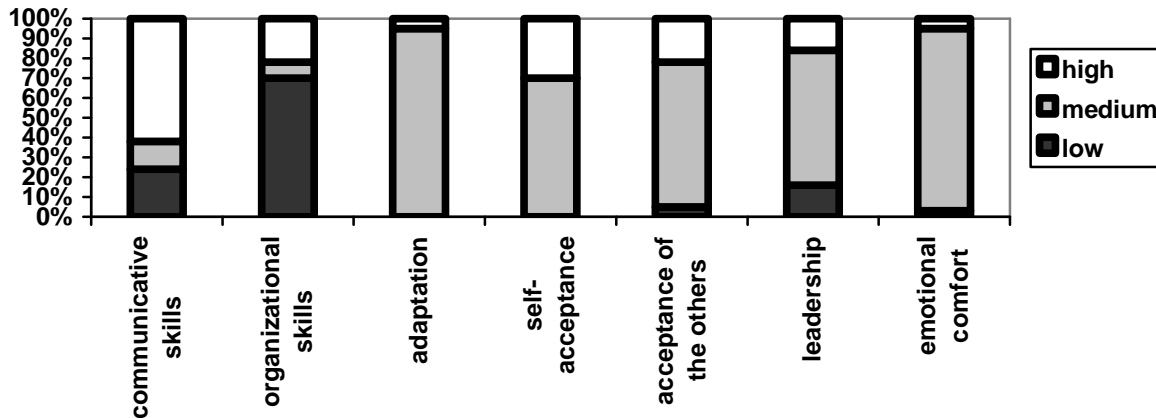
**Picture 2: Indicators of Socio-Psychological Adaptation in Levels (Low, Medium, High, in %), Russian Junior School Children**

The situation with the socio-psychological adaptation among the age groups of adolescent and senior school children is quite similar. The majority of both adolescent and senior migrant school children feel well adapted, moreover, there is no significant difference between migrant and Russian scholars.

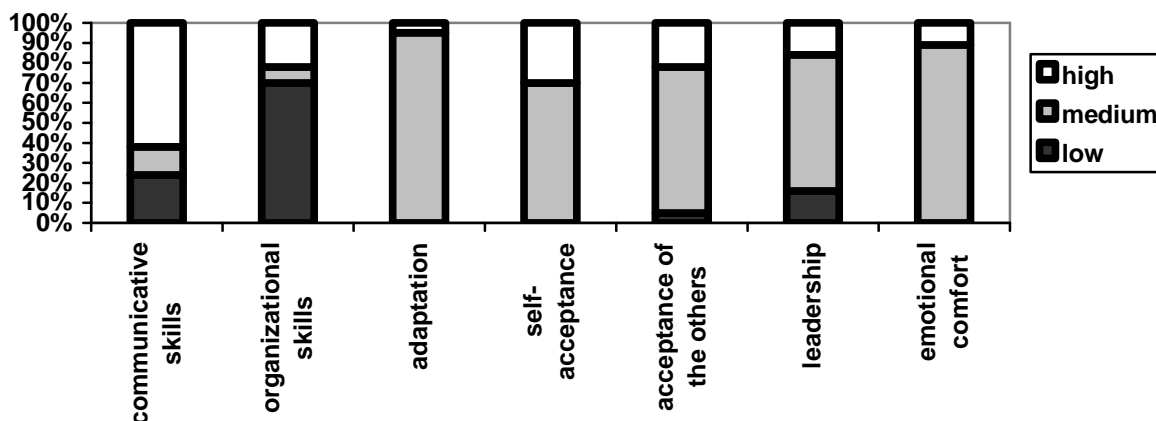
It is interesting to note that international research on migrant adaptation has revealed that children from immigrant backgrounds generally show satisfactory levels of psychological and social adjustment, and, when compared with national peers, exhibit better health, less involvement in negative behaviors and do as well as or better than non-immigrant peers with respect to academic achievement and psychological well-being (Fulgini, 1998).

The evidence available suggests that the socio-psychological adaptation in these age groups was studied via the indicators of communicative and organizational skills, conflict and coping behavioural strategies and personality adaptation. Some indicators of socio-psychological adaptation of senior scholars are shown in Pictures 3, 4.

The overwhelming majority of children (both Russian and migrant) have sufficient communicative skills and leadership qualities, feel quite adapted, accept themselves and the others well enough. The problem appears to be only with the level of organizational skills – only a quarter of migrant and a third of Russian senior school children assessed themselves as having a satisfying (medium and high) level of organizational abilities. The situation with the adolescents is alike (medium and high levels of all indexes prevail), so we will not dwell on it separately.



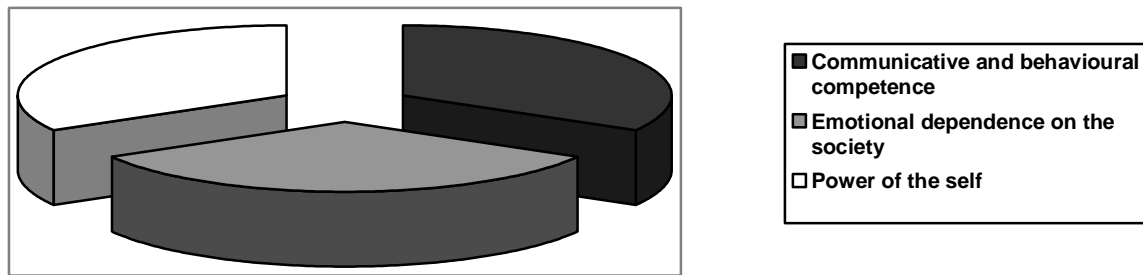
**Picture 3 – Indicators of Socio-Psychological Adaptation in Levels (Low, Medium, High, in %), Migrant Senior School Children**



**Picture 4 – Indicators of Socio-Psychological Adaptation in Levels (Low, Medium, High, in %), Russian Senior School Children**

It may be valuable to outline some of its general features. Our researchers have found out that in a new stressful situation migrants suffer from disadaptation. The most typical difficulties for them are the following. Differences from their style of life, their native language and their school curriculum etc.

Additionally, we found some peculiarities concerning the interconnection of the basic indexes of socio-psychological adaptation. With help of Spearman correlation and cluster analysis we ascertained the structure of socio-psychological adaptation. First of all, the indexes of communicative and organizational skills, conflict and coping behavioural strategies and leadership are closely connected and form a separate cluster. Another cluster appears from the connected indexes of acceptance of the others, dependence, emotional comfort, external locus of control and escapism. The third cluster is composed from the connected indexes of psychological adaptation itself, self-acceptance and internal locus of control. Thus we can make a model of socio-psychological adaptation including three basic components: “Communicative and behavioural competence”, “Emotional dependence on the society”, “Power of the self” (Picture 5).



**Picture 5: Components of Socio-Psychological Adaptation**

### ***Conclusion and Recommendation***

We can conclude that psychological accompaniment of disadapted migrant schoolchildren should be provided in the three mentioned directions and aimed at the development and correction of the communicative, emotional and personality problems. Moreover, the psychologist should take into consideration that the three basic components of socio-psychological adaptation are not closely connected with each other and making accent on one component doesn't automatically imply the improvement of the other. The results of our research showed that school children with a high and medium level of communicative skills and effective conflict and coping behavioural strategies do not necessarily have high indexes of psychological adaptation and self-acceptance. We can say that they are well socialized but not psychologically adapted. Consequently, if we need socialized school children we should work on the development of their social and behavioural competence, but if we endeavour for psychologically adapted school children we should work on their personality development (self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-respect, self-actualization, internal locus of control). The specialist should consider the situation with each child separately and decide whether to develop all components of socio-psychological adaptation equally or to concentrate on the most deficient one.

In short, future research should attempt to examine the effect of migrant concentration on specific racial/ethnic groups, given there are substantial differences across subgroups within each race and ethnicity.

In a word, according to some scholars, the latest wave of migration is likely to have a greater impact on society than any other social issue (Martinez and Lee 2000). For this reason, studies such as this are critical in redefining public perception.

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