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## ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

# El impacto de las prácticas socialmente responsables en el bienestar subjetivo de los estudiantes migrantes\*

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**Resumen.** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo establecer la relación entre el bienestar subjetivo, el desarrollo lingüístico y los resultados académicos de estudiantes internacionales en Nizhny Novgorod. Una encuesta cuantitativa realizada en tres universidades (n=324) examinó las motivaciones para elegir una universidad, las barreras para la adaptación y los factores relacionados con el bienestar y el éxito académico. Los resultados muestran que las principales motivaciones para elegir una universidad rusa fueron la relación calidad-precio, las oportunidades relacionadas con el idioma y el trabajo, la calidad percibida de la educación y la influencia del entorno social, incluyendo las recomendaciones de amigos y familiares. Entre las barreras, los estudiantes identificaron varios factores sociales e institucionales, como las tasas de matrícula (44,7%), las dificultades para dominar el idioma, la disponibilidad de residencias universitarias (55,8%), las limitadas oportunidades para estudiar ruso (25,6%) y la preocupación por la seguridad en la universidad (10,1%). Los encuestados indicaron que su deseo de continuar sus estudios en la institución elegida aumentaría si las universidades y las autoridades municipales prestaran una atención más sistemática e implementaran enfoques de tra-

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bajo social adaptados a sus experiencias. En general, el estudio indica que el bienestar subjetivo actúa como un factor clave para fortalecer la competitividad sostenible de las universidades regionales. Las políticas destinadas a atraer y retener a los estudiantes internacionales deben integrar medidas de trabajo social que creen un entorno propicio para la comunicación y la convivencia, apoyen el desarrollo lingüístico y cultural, amplíen las oportunidades de empleo y proporcionen garantías legales claras.

**Palabras clave:** trabajo social, apoyo social, universidad, adaptación sociocultural, apoyo jurídico.

## The impact of socially responsible practices on the subjective well-being of migrant students

**Abstract.** Subjective well-being significantly influences migrant students' academic performance, the attractiveness of the host region, and their self-assessed quality of life. This study aimed to establish the relationship between subjective well-being, linguistic development, and academic outcomes among international students in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, with a focus on identifying socially responsible practices that support their adaptation and continued studies. A quantitative survey conducted at three universities (n=324) examined motivations for choosing a university, barriers to adaptation, and factors connected to well-being and academic success. The findings show that the leading motivations for choosing a Russian university were the price-to-quality ratio, opportunities related to language and work, perceived quality of education, and the influence of the social environment, including recommendations from friends and relatives. Among the barriers, students identified several social and institutional factors, such as tuition fees (44.7%), language proficiency challenges, dormitory availability (55.8%), limited opportunities to study Russian (25.6%), and concerns about safety at the university (10.1%). Respondents noted that their desire to continue studying at their chosen institution would increase if universities and city authorities paid more systematic attention to the needs of international students and applied social work approaches tailored to their experiences. Overall, the study indicates that subjective well-being acts as a lever for strengthening the sustainable competitiveness of regional universities. Policies aimed at attracting and retaining international students should integrate social work measures that create a comfortable environment for communication and living, support linguistic and cultural development, expand employment opportunities, and provide clear legal guarantees.

**Key words:** social work, social support, university, socio-cultural adaptation, legal support.

### INTRODUCTION

The field of education is a space of scientific exchange, a mechanism for training specialists to bring the technological standards and certification systems of different states closer together, and, of course, a powerful instrument to disseminate Russian culture.

Under these conditions, the relevance of research into the problems of exporting education is determined both by epistemology and politics. The export of education is on the agenda of

researchers from various fields of scientific knowledge, from pedagogy to political science. The focus often lies on issues related to the economics of exporting education (Akhmetshin et al., 2024; Mirzoyan, 2023) and the peculiarities of migration laws in varfactors], the features of methodological approaches to the development of linguistic culture among foreign students, as well as particular factors affecting the attractiveness of a particular university (Beloglazova et al., 2025) or, for example, a region of the Russian Federation, to foreign applicants (Borodina et al., 2023). However, researchers often overlook the so-called subjective indicators of foreign students' satisfaction both with the process of studying at the university and with the overall living conditions in Russia as a host country.

The issues of the attractiveness of a particular region to foreign applicants are often covered by scientific papers, but the authors most often focus on objective factors behind the choice of university by foreigners. In contrast, our study targets the level of subjective well-being of international students. The hypothesis at the core of this study is that the factor for foreign students' life satisfaction influences not only the attractiveness of their studies in Russia but also the development of linguistic culture. The present paper presents the results of an empirical study of the level of life satisfaction, or, in other words, the level of subjective well-being, of foreign students studying at universities in Nizhny Novgorod (Russia).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of research devoted to the export of education, including the problems of the choice of university by foreign applicants, is steadily growing. A significant part of these studies analyzes the evolution of the global market for educational services and the practice of its regulation in the international arena.

Digitalization is often named as one of the leading trends in the development of global educational policy (Kanakova, 2024; Mukhasheva, 2023), entailing the need to develop digital academic mobility (Antjuhova & Kasatkin, 2020; Kanunnikova, 2023; Danilova, 2024; Gumerova & Shaimieva, 2024). In the face of sanctions imposed on Russia, the expansion of the e-learning market, including in terms of "the turn from West to East," is highlighted as a promising direction by Suslov (2023). Researcher T.K. Rostovskaya describes the main scenarios of academic mobility in Russia, in which moderately optimistic forecasts are closely tied to the development of high-quality digital education (Rostovskaya & Zolotareva, 2021).

Works analyzing the political context of the problem stand apart. Researchers such as Talanov (2024), Antonova (2020), Kamyshanskaya (2022), and Petrov (2023) view the export of education as a diplomatic tool, a factor of soft power. The role of the educational segment in socio-economic and political-legal practices is often described through the concepts of "education diplomacy" (Shagojan, 2020; Vassilchenko, 2024) and "educational migration" (Toshpulotov et al., 2024; Bobkov & Shichkin, 2024). Notably, works covering this issue are mainly comparative, describing the Russian situation through comparison with other countries.

Russia ranks sixth in the world in terms of the number of foreign students, while the leaders in the export of education are the USA, Great Britain, Canada, France, and Australia. However, the researchers note that our state should analyze successful cases from different countries and use

foreign experience, considering Russian specifics instead of focusing exclusively on the experience of the leaders. In this context, of note here are the successful practices of China in providing safe living conditions for foreign students (Chzhou & Zhou, 2023; Wang, 2024); the simplified procedure of obtaining a residence permit for talented graduates practiced in Germany (Moser et al., 2014); and the flexibility of campus transfer policies, attractive scholarships, and simplified visa procedures practiced in the UAE (Jaku & Ivanova, 2018).

A substantial number of studies focus on the problem of the effectiveness of making Russian universities attractive to foreign applicants. The attractiveness of universities is examined through various groups of factors: the quality of education and research activities at the educational institution (Pimonova & Fomina, 2018; Akhmetshin et al., 2024); the city's media background and the region's friendliness towards student migrants (Bulatova & Gluhov, 2019; Krasnikova et al., 2024); the university's academic reputation (Antonova et al., 2020), etc.

In addition to analyzing the all-Russian situation with the academic mobility of foreign students, it is worth noting publications on the state of affairs in specific regions of the Russian Federation. Apart from universities in the two capitals, research attention most often falls on the universities of the Siberian Federal District.

Another group of studies that determined our research strategy addresses the immersion of foreign students in the natural language, social, and educational environments. The basic linguocultural function in the formation of inophones is their socialization and inculturation into the value-semantic space of the receiving culture. The end goal of these processes is the foreign student entering the world of Russian socio-cultural norms and values (Abdullayev et al., 2024; Letova, 2024). The success of socio-cultural adaptation directly determines how effectively the educational program is mastered (Pulido-Capurro et al., 2025). We cannot but agree with the researcher Ju.A. Komarova that the challenges of developing the language culture of an inphone "negatively affect the entire educational process, and learning difficulties, in turn, lead to stiffness, self-doubt, depression, and reluctance to communicate with teachers and Russian peers" (Komarova, 2013, p. 68). The opposite is also true here: the negative experience of entering a new sociocultural space, i.e., "culture shock" (Kulikova, 2017), frustrates foreign students and sometimes becomes an insurmountable barrier to the development of linguistic and cultural competence.

Thus, the friendliness, openness, and attractiveness of the sensory and visual characteristics of social and educational environments to foreign students turn out to be an effective mechanism for the development of linguistic culture (Dzyuba et al., 2021; Tuset et al., 2025).

## METHODS

### Study design

The present study was conducted at Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University in 2024-2025. The research was devoted to the subjective well-being of foreign students in Russia, with a focus on the life of student migrants in the capital of the Volga Federal District – Nizhny Novgorod. According to the data reported by the plenipotentiary of the President of

the Russian Federation in the Volga Federal District, I. Komarov, as of the beginning of 2025, 82 thousand foreign students studied in the Volga Federal District, making up 21% of the total number of foreign students in Russia. This means that every fifth student migrant is studying at a university in the Volga Federal District: “The Volga Federal District is one of the most attractive for immigrants who come to us to earn money, study, and build their lives”. About 31 thousand foreigners study in Nizhny Novgorod, which makes the capital of the Volga Federal District second in the region after Tatarstan by the number of accepted foreign students. The attractiveness of Nizhny Novgorod is largely due to the convenient geographical location of the region, proximity to Moscow, a temperate climate, and a well-developed economic sector and transport and logistics infrastructure.

Scientific literature uses the terms “foreign student,” “inophone,” and “student migrant”. The first term has the meaning of “a student with citizenship of another country.” The second refers to “a native speaker of a foreign language with a different picture of the world compared to the dominant culture.” The third term means “a person who moves to receive education in conditions optimal for them.” In our study, all three terms are viewed as contextual synonyms, although the first is treated as a generic term in relation to the other two. The term “inophone” draws attention to the linguocultural aspect of adaptation of a foreigner, and “student migrant” pertains to the socio-economic aspect of the study and points to the logic of a foreign student in choosing optimal conditions for obtaining education that best suit their life needs.

### **Stages and tools**

Theoretical stage: the research strategy relied on the theoretical developments of foreign and Russian authors and the results of primary sociological studies (Aref’ev & Sheregi, 2014; Lutova & Shhanina, 2024; Polihina & Trostjanskaja, 2020) posted on open Internet resources.

Empirical stage: a questionnaire survey of foreign university students in Nizhny Novgorod (total sample size – 324 people). The questionnaire included six thematic blocks of questions covering the respondent’s personal data, orientation in everyday social situations, the psychological aspects of adaptation, communication, and mastering the Russian language, familiarity with culture and traditions, and the organization of the educational process. Most of the questions were closed-ended and multiple-choice. In addition, the questionnaire included questions with scales to rate the degree of agreement or difficulty with graduated answer options (e.g., from “not difficult” to “very difficult”), taking the form of a consent scale (Likert-like) in several items. This design of the questionnaire made it possible to obtain quantitative data on the motives for choosing a country and a university, the difficulties of adaptation, and attitudes towards various aspects of living in Russia and the educational process.

### **Sample**

The sampling procedure consisted of two stages. At the first stage, we selected universities that held about 50% of the total number of foreign students in Nizhny Novgorod in the 2024-2025 academic year (Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University – 103 respondents, Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod – 167 respondents, Nizhny Novgorod State Conservatory named after M.I. Glinka – 54 respondents). At the second stage, respondents were recruited according to the specified quotas. Out of 324 people, 280 studied in bachelor’s, spe-

cialist, and master's programs, and 44 were students at pre-university departments. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 30. The obtained empirical data were processed in SPSS-21, and the results were interpreted using the induction method.

When filling out their personal data, all the interviewed foreign students indicated their place of origin. The distribution of respondents by countries was as follows: Turkmenistan – 141, Congo – 7, Colombia – 7, Iraq – 4, Egypt – 14, Lebanon – 7, Ecuador – 9, Yemen – 7, Algeria – 10, Syria – 7, Peru – 6, Morocco – 5, Uzbekistan – 24, Armenia – 10, Azerbaijan – 7, China – 59. As can be seen, the sample did not include any representatives of European states or North American countries. The geographical coverage of the study was not wide, including only 16 countries, which can be conditionally grouped into five blocks: CIS countries, which are home to the overwhelming majority of student migrants in the Russian Federation, China in second place, the countries of the Middle East in third place, about the same number of students from Latin America, and finally the block of African countries. Thus, the distribution of student migrants in Nizhny Novgorod universities by citizenship is generally consistent with the all-Russian distribution, which is dominated by CIS countries (54.9% of the total number of respondents in our sample) and China in second place (18.2%).

### Data analysis

The collected data were processed using the IBM SPSS Statistics software package (version 21). At the analysis stage, methods of descriptive statistics were applied. A frequency analysis of the distribution of respondents' answers was performed, calculating the shares (percentages) for each option. The distribution of answers between different groups of respondents was compared using contingency tables (e.g., comparing individual universities and countries of origin), and the options were ranked by the frequency of their choice to identify the most and least popular answers. The resulting quantitative data were interpreted by induction – generalizing conclusions were formulated based on the observed distribution of responses and the identified repeating patterns in the opinions of the study participants. This approach made it possible to find key trends (predominant motives for choosing an educational trajectory, the main difficulties and requests of foreign students, etc.) based on descriptive statistical indicators, without involving complex mathematical and statistical models or criteria.

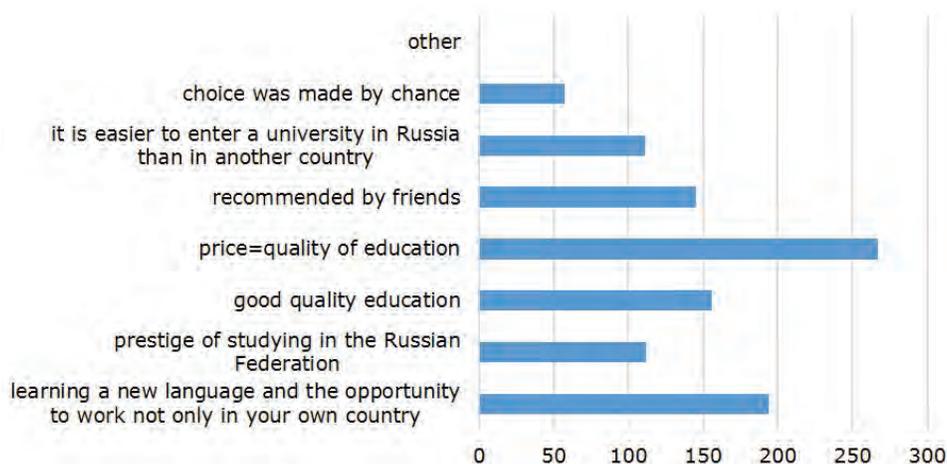
## RESULTS

The respondents were presented with questions (most of them being multiple choice) regarding the choice of university and country of study, as well as questions addressing the difficulties and problems associated with living in Russia. The most popular responses to the question “Why did you choose a Russian university?” (Figure 1) were “learning a new language and the opportunity to work not only in your own country,” chosen by 59% of respondents, and the good quality of education, which was noted by 47% of respondents. The “optimal ratio of price and quality of education” was highlighted by more than 82% of respondents, and more than a third explained their choice of Russia by “the prestige of studying in the Russian Federation.”

From this, we can conclude that the leading motive behind the choice of Russia by student migrants, based on the totality of answers, is the quality and prestige of Russian education. How-

ever, the data indicate that economic motives are also strong, including the affordable price of education and the ability to work and study. It is noteworthy that 44.7% of respondents opted for a Russian university on the advice of friends (the fourth most frequently mentioned motive in choosing the country of study). It was found that almost half of foreign applicants had “insider” information about the specifics of training and living in Russia before admission, which somewhat prepared them for the conditions of getting an education and the peculiarities of living in the country in advance. In fifth place by popularity is the answer related to the assessment of university admission mechanisms: 43.7% of respondents believe that Russian universities are easier to enter compared to other countries.

**FIGURE 1.** Why did you choose a Russian university?



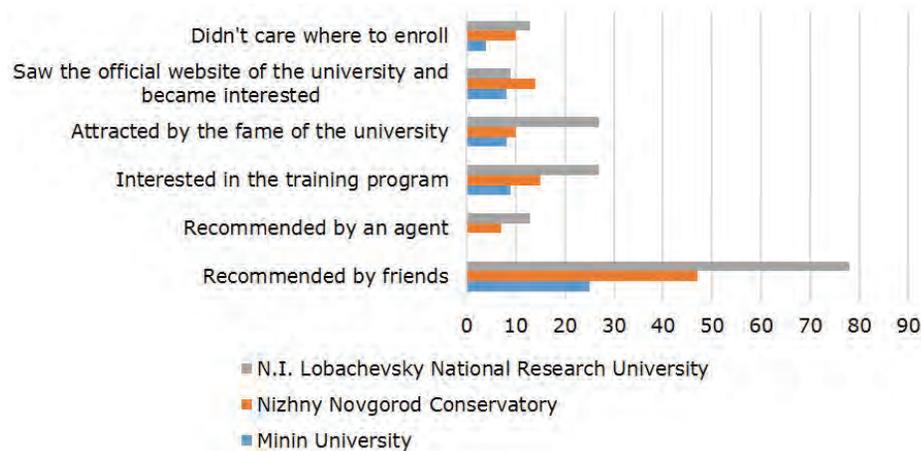
**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

The next question about the reasons for choosing a particular university was, in a sense, a control question in relation to the first, which was reflected by the answers. The option “recommended by friends” was chosen by 46% of respondents. This suggests that before admission, most foreign students already had some information not only about the country and the specific region of future residence but also about the university where they were going to study. To this, we can add another 16.1% of respondents who responded that their choice of university was determined by the desired specialty, and the 13.8% of respondents who explained their choice by the fame of the university. The last groups of respondents got information about universities from advertising materials, educational fairs, and university websites, as well as from discussions with agents, which ultimately helped them make an informed choice. However, some respondents did not really care where to go (8.3%).

Notably, the distribution of answers was virtually the same in different universities of Nizhny Novgorod, except for one – recommendations from an agent, which was not picked once with respect to Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University (Figure 2). Several individual comments left by respondents when answering this question are also interesting: “advised by my mother,” “I wanted to study in Russia because of my Russian paternal grandmother.” These remarks reflect the significant role played by the family when foreign applicants choose a univer-

sity. Summarizing the answers to this question, we should recognize that the leading factor in the choice of university is not the institution's rating, equipment, or ongoing research, but the factor of social ties, i.e., positive assessments of the university by the applicant's friends and family.

**FIGURE 2.** Choosing a specific university.

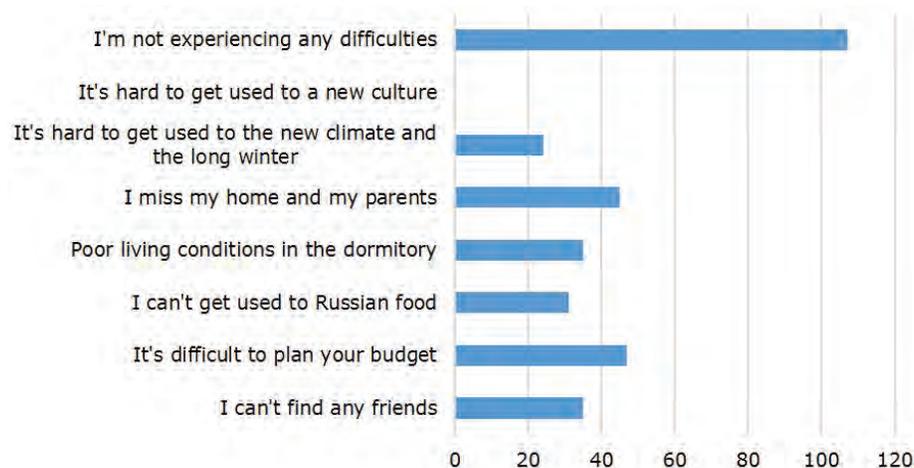


**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

Answering the question “Do you like living in Russia?”, inophone students divided between “Yes” and “Probably yes,” with the confident answer prevailing (66% vs 34%).

When asked about the difficulties experienced in Russia, most foreign students mention that they miss home, cannot get used to Russian cuisine, and have financial difficulties or problems with establishing social contacts. Nonetheless, the percentage of those who do not experience any difficulties in adaptation is rather high at about 30%.

**FIGURE 3.** Difficulties of foreign-speaking students living in Russia.



**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

The next survey item allowed us to flesh out the problems faced by the students in Russia. The results show that student migrants consider financial problems to be the most serious, as 44.7% of respondents reported difficulties paying for their studies. In second place are the difficulties of communication associated with linguistic adaptation: 17.9% of respondents are upset by not hearing their native speech often, 12.8% complain about not being able to combine work and study, and 12.2% note the lack of events held specifically for foreign students.

Most of the students who chose the “other” option in answering this question wrote that they did not encounter problems: “No,” “Over the four years of study, I have not encountered problems at all,” “There are none,” “There are no problems, I love Russia,” and so on. One response differs from others: “I do not have enough time to enjoy each day, since the day is too short. I don’t have any problems.”

The next questions in the questionnaire were focused on analyzing how foreign students themselves see the conditions of their adaptation in universities in Nizhny Novgorod. The question “What should be done to solve the problems of foreign students?” received the following answers: the need to improve living conditions in dormitorys was stressed by 55.8% of respondents; 25.6% suggested it was necessary to increase the number of hours to study the Russian language and get acquainted with Russian culture, 10.1% highlighted problems with the safety of foreign students, and 8.3% argued that the management of universities should pay more attention to them. Here we should note that the questionnaire had separate questions about living conditions in dormitorys, which the respondents overwhelmingly (almost two-thirds in aggregate) rated as “good” or “rather good.”

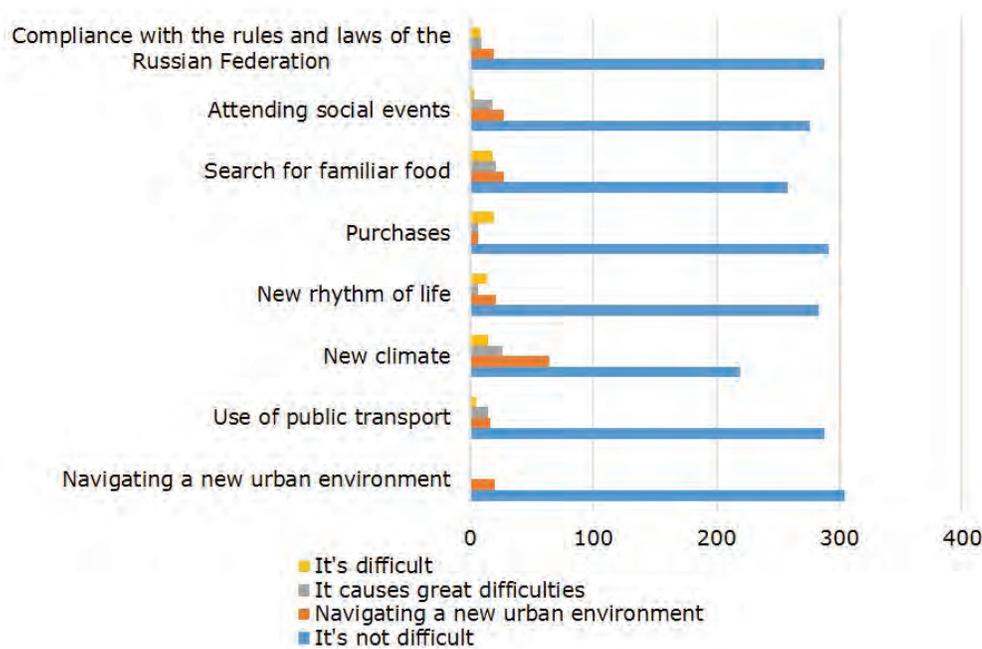
To the question “What would you propose for the successful adaptation of foreign students in the Russian Federation?”, the most popular answers were “organizing excursions around the city of study” (41.6% of respondents), “organizing events for the implementation of student initiatives” (26.8%), and “involving foreign students in the cultural life of the university” (18.2%). Thus, the obtained data indicate that foreign students want to get to learn more not only about the Russian language and culture but also about the region and city where their university is located. Such events could not only have educational potential but also help create conditions for informal communication, a free exchange of views, and opportunities to meet new people. Certainly, such non-routine, creative events will be able, firstly, to spruce up the daily lives of foreign students, and secondly, to alleviate their psychological stress and distract them from financial problems.

The next block of questions was devoted to the peculiarities of orientation in everyday social conditions and the problems of foreign students’ adaptation in the urban space of the Russian Federation. These included questions about the use of public transport and shops, particularly in terms of finding familiar foods, experience with new climatic conditions or the transition to a new rhythm of life, the analysis of impressions of visits to public events, and reflection on compliance with the rules and regulations of the Russian Federation. The set of questions and answer options was aimed at analyzing the level of inophones’ familiarity with urban space and their ability to cope with everyday difficulties. The answer options for these questions were “It’s not difficult”/“It causes minor difficulties”/“It causes great difficulties”/“It’s very difficult”.

The results indicate that most students do not experience difficulties in adapting to the new urban space of Nizhny Novgorod and to living in it. Answer options “It causes minor difficulties/ It causes great difficulties” were selected the most often in response to the question about new climatic conditions. All the surveyed students came from countries with warmer climates, so difficulties adapting to Russian weather conditions would be understandable.

Importantly, we found no specific dependence of the answers on the country of origin, as difficulties in adapting to weather conditions or lack thereof were reported by students from all countries: China, Turkmenistan, Africa, and South America (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4.** Orientation of foreign-speaking students in social situations.



**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

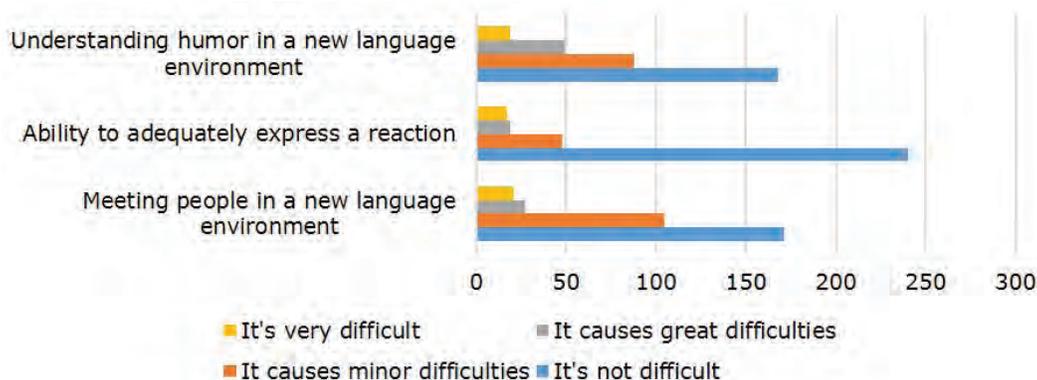
The next block contained questions regarding the psychological aspects of inophones' adaptation in a new city and a new country. These questions were aimed at identifying difficulties in socialization, conflict situations, etc. When asked whether it was necessary to assign experienced student volunteers to foreign students to help them adapt to everyday and learning conditions, most respondents (90.7%) answered “Yes” or “Probably yes.” Such answers should be interpreted as a plea for help, giving evidence that foreign students have serious difficulties in socialization at different stages of their stay in Russia: from studying at pre-university departments to the graduate year.

The question “Do you have conflict situations?” had three answer options: “Yes, with foreign students”/“Yes, with Russian students”/“No, I do not.” Most students answered that they had no conflicts, and only a small portion (7.7%) reported having conflicts with other foreign students. These responses show that student migrants communicate not only with Russian students but also within the groups of foreign-language students. It is noteworthy that none of the

respondents mentioned conflicts with Russians, although 4.6% of respondents admitted that they had witnessed bad attitudes towards the representatives of other nationalities in Russia.

An important question related to mastering Russian as a foreign language was the one about the “language barrier”: “Is it difficult for you to overcome the ‘language barrier?’” This question had four answer options: “Yes”/”Probably yes”/”Probably not”/ “No”. Respondents’ answers were distributed across the options in almost equal proportions. The “No” and “Probably not” answers were more common among the citizens of CIS countries, since most of them had received a school education in Russia and, therefore, had advanced proficiency in the Russian language. This was followed by questions about the peculiarities of communication and the level of proficiency in the Russian language. The greatest difficulties are associated with understanding humor in a new language environment, because it requires not only communicative but also metaphorical competence (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5.** Communication in the Russian language environment.



**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

This section also included questions regarding communication in the Russian language: “Do you communicate in Russian on social networks?”, “In what places do you speak Russian?” It was found that almost all foreign students (95.3%) communicated in Russian on social networks, but rated the effectiveness and frequency of this communication differently: only 50.9% used Russian on social networks actively, and 44.4% preferred communicating in their native language.

The question “In what places do you speak Russian?” had two answer options: “Everywhere: at the university, in the dormitory, at work”/”Only in classes at the university.” The first option was chosen by 62.8% of respondents, the second — by 37.2%. Interestingly, the frequency of communication in Russian does not align with self-reported proficiency in Russian (“beginner”/”intermediate”/”advanced”/”native or bilingual”). Certain respondents who communicated in Russian only at the university, nevertheless, rated their proficiency as advanced, and, vice versa, some students who spoke Russian “everywhere” characterized themselves as beginners. No correlations were found between self-assessed language proficiency and the year of study: 4th-year students massively report having beginner-level proficiency, while 1st- and 2nd-year students claim advanced knowledge of Russian.

Next in the questionnaire was a block of questions concerning Russian culture and traditions. Inophones had to assess the differences between Russian culture and the culture of their motherland and describe what helps them learn Russian culture and Russian traditions. To the question “How would you assess the cultural differences between your people and the Russian people?”, fundamental differences in cultural traditions were noted mainly by students from Peru, Colombia, Yemen, Egypt, Ecuador, and Algeria, as well as some students from China (only 13.3%). The diametrically opposite answer, “there are no differences,” was given by only five students: four from Turkmenistan and one from China. The rest of the respondents (86.2%) chose the option of “small differences.”

The question on attitudes towards Russian traditions offered three answer options: “I fully accept Russian values and traditions”/“I partially accept Russian values and traditions but preserve the traditions of my people”/“I do not accept Russian values and traditions.” The last option of non-acceptance was not chosen by any respondents, which shows the interest of study participants in learning Russian culture and the Russian language and their positive motivation for learning. When answering the question “Have you attended events related to the holidays of the Russian Federation?”, most students chose the answer “yes, I am interested in Russian culture,” and several people answered “I would like to, but have no time,” while the answer “no, I am not interested in Russian culture” was not chosen by anyone.

The question “What helps you the most in learning Russian traditions and culture?” was a multiple-choice item. The most effective channels for studying the culture of Russia, highlighted by the respondents, included literary works (58.3%) and works of cinema and television programs (54%). The options of excursions (38.8%) and communication with Russian students (41.3%) were also quite popular. Overall, the answers to these questions demonstrate that student migrants come to Russia not only for professional competencies but also for the rich culture that Russian megacities can offer, as 29.3% of respondents noted the importance of university events, and 21.2% said the same about city events.

The life of a foreign student, same as that of a Russian one, consists of educational, everyday life, and leisure components: training, culture, sports, hobbies, and much more. The student life of Russian youth has recently been very active outside the educational institution. The numerous projects organized by the state allow students to realize various aspects of their personalities and bring to life their diverse initiatives in all possible types of activities. Unfortunately, student migrants are often left out of many projects; hence, their requests for more attention from university administration, for more communication with Russian students, and for involvement in the cultural life of the university, city, and country.

The final block of questions dealt with learning itself. The first question in the block was “Are you experiencing difficulties in learning?” Like most questions in the survey, it was a multiple-choice question with the “other” option for the respondent’s own answer. Most of the respondents (39.8%) reported no difficulties in learning. Here, we should note that the provided answers are not always entirely true to reality; in this case, we are unable to determine whether they are false statements. Such “optimistic” results may be caused, for example, by foreign students overestimating their success in the educational program or not wanting to complain and admit their own weakness. In the social hierarchy, student migrants occupy lower positions;

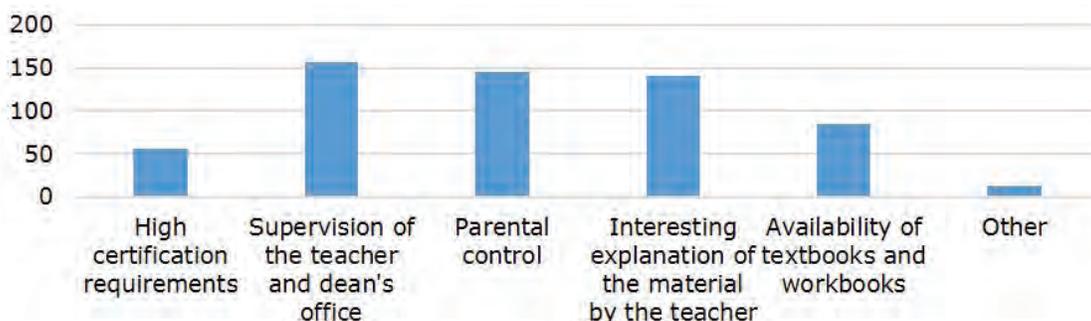
hence, their articulation of the absence of problems can be seen as an existential rejection of the status assigned to them. Likely, the answers given by respondents to some questions are not factual statements but instead a projection of the desired future. Thus, the answer that there are “no problems” means not an actual lack of problems, but rather that the problems either go unnoticed or are negligible compared to the benefits foreign students receive from studying in Russia.

In turn, student migrants who do recognize problems mainly focus on subjective factors: “I do not understand the teacher’s speech” (20%), “it is difficult to complete homework” (20.3%), “it is difficult to read texts in textbooks” (34.2%), “there are many subjects that I do not need” (37.9%), and so on. Notably, the respondents do not highlight objective factors, except for one — the unfamiliar grading system. This factor was noted by 15.7% of the respondents. Thus, setting the problem of reliability to the side, we can conclude that foreign students do not see any serious problems that could prevent them from successfully mastering the educational program.

The next question was aimed at analyzing student motivation: “What is your motivation to study?” Most of the answers boiled down to wanting to become a professional in one’s field, an option chosen by 201 respondents (62%). The desire to learn Russian was mentioned as a motive by 26.8% of respondents. The remaining answers concerned mainly psychological motives: to be successful in the university, to be a leader in the student group, etc. The obtained results demonstrate that the fundamental intention driving student migrants is to obtain a specific specialty that would enable them to compete with Russian graduates in the labor market and stay in Russia or return to their home country to take vacant positions there. In this context, foreign students tend to be invested in obtaining education because of their obligations to relatives, who often provide the funds required to pursue education abroad.

This was followed by two connected questions: “What helps you in your studies?” (Figure 6) and “What prevents you from studying?” (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 6.** What helps international students in their studies.

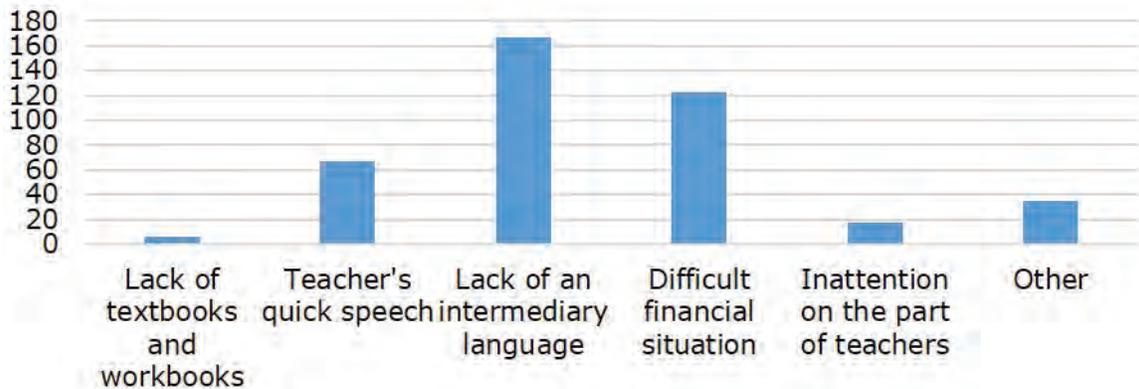


**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

Students noted factors belonging to both intrinsic cognitive motivation, such as an interesting explanation of the material, and external, like control by parents and university structures. The results indicate that control is perceived by inophones as the most effective tool to ensure their mastery of the educational program. Once again, student migrants articulate their demand for additional attention, since here control serves not so much a punitive purpose as a function

of care. Respondents who chose the “other” option detailed in parentheses that no factors were interfering with their learning (adding the options “No” or “Nothing”). The most popular answers on what interferes with learning were “the lack of an intermediary language” and “difficult financial situation,” which allows us to conclude that the leading barriers to mastering the program are linguocultural and financial.

**FIGURE 7.** What prevents international students from studying.



**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

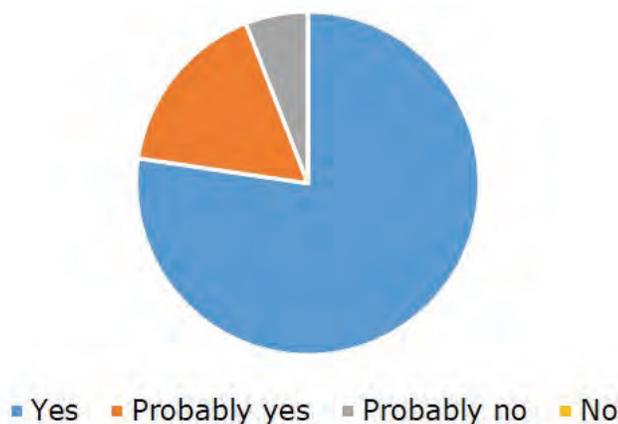
The questions “Do you think foreign students need special support from the university?” and “Do you like to study in Russia?” asked to choose one of the options: “Yes”/“Probably yes”/“Probably not”/“No”. Most students answered this question with the “Yes” and “Probably yes” options. Again, we can see the demand of foreign students for attention and care: 98% of respondents noted the need for support from the university to one degree or another.

It needs to be emphasized that the question “Do you like studying in Russia?” is perceived by student migrants somewhat differently from Russian students. For foreigners, studying in the Russian Federation is a multifaceted experience — most often it is an experience of overcoming cultural shock, the language barrier, financial difficulties, etc. As a result, this question is often read by student migrants as “Do you like living in Russia?” Thus, responding affirmatively to this question, foreign students give a positive assessment of the vital and cultural contexts in which they study, accepting the social practices, values, climate, and many other aspects. If they so desire, a foreign student can return to their homeland at any time and continue their studies there. Although this is most likely to be a downgrade, the option of returning is always there. In this respect, the positive answer, which was given by 94% of respondents (Figure 8), means that student migrants have a certain degree of loyalty to Russia, adopt its values, and are willing to continue their studies here.

The “Probably not” answer was given by 3rd-year students from Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador. These students generally reported more negative aspects in the questionnaire, such as poor living conditions in the dormitory, problems with classmates, difficulties in understanding Russian speech, and being homesick. Nevertheless, they still reported no problems with adaptation (acquaintances, communication, transport, etc.). The same respondents also noted difficulties

in mastering linguistic competence. Thus, students from Latin America were the focus group that confirmed the research hypothesis: low satisfaction with living in Russia and studying at a Russian university becomes a serious barrier to the development of linguistic culture for an inophone. Data on the same group of respondents also confirm the thesis that a negative assessment of the educational process directly correlates with negative impressions of life in Russia.

**FIGURE 8.** Do you like studying in Russia?



**Source:** Compiled by the authors.

The final item in the questionnaire concerned difficulties faced by foreign students while studying in Russia: “What difficulties do you face in the process of learning?” The results show that only a third of respondents experienced problems associated with mastering the language and the educational program. Reflecting on the barriers that make it difficult to study, respondents most often pointed to sociocultural difficulties, which are understood as difficulties in establishing communication with Russian students, teachers, and university staff. In second place were psychological difficulties, understood as emotional stress that arises from facing a new environment and experiencing personal transformation in the space of a new culture. It is noteworthy that in the question addressing the challenges experienced living in Russia, none of the respondents noted difficulties in getting used to the new culture.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results obtained leads us to the following conclusions:

- 1) The characteristics of the ethnic and national identity of student migrants in universities in Nizhny Novgorod generally conform to the all-Russian trend: representatives of the CIS countries are predominant. Although the obtained data on the ethno-national composition of foreign students in Nizhny Novgorod is consistent with the all-Russian situation (Education of foreign citizens in Russian institutions of higher education, 2020), this geographical range is much smaller compared to the capital regions. Most often, these students come to Russia already having a somewhat developed Russian linguistic culture. The results demonstrate that student migrants generally take a conscious approach to choosing the

country and region of study, as well as the educational organization. The basic motives for pursuing education in Russia were found to be the desire to learn Russian and become a good professional, i.e., get a quality education.

- 2) The fundamental factor in choosing the region of residence and the educational organization is social ties (family, friends). This factor, which can hardly be attributed to objective ones, is usually overlooked by researchers who focus more on such aspects of the attractiveness of the university as its academic reputation (Mikhaylova, 2024), presence in international ratings (Antonova et al., 2020), or research equipment (Pimonova & Fomina, 2018; Bulatova & Gluhov, 2019). The demand for Russian education among foreign applicants should be examined in the framework of multifactorial analysis, but a focus on social ties can reveal additional aspects in international students' positive assessment of their time in regional Russian universities.
- 3) Student migrants prepare for the psychological difficulties associated with studying in Russia in advance. Thus, it becomes more understandable why student migrants tend to conceal their adaptation problems, except for economic ones (e.g., paying tuition fees). The Russian education system has an optimal price-to-quality ratio, and the Russian state is already doing a lot in this direction, including the program to support compatriots living abroad and the program of quotas for international students. Nevertheless, the fixation of student migrants on economic difficulties in the conducted survey suggests that to enhance the export potential of Russian education, it would be productive to consider the experience of, for example, Germany in employing talented foreign students in Russian enterprises in the format of internships. Another experience worth considering is the success of the UAE with scholarships for gifted and successful students.
- 4) Although international students give positive assessments of their lives and studies in Nizhny Novgorod universities, the survey revealed a steady demand for additional attention from the educational organization to foreign students. This refers to additional educational events and support from volunteers, as well as closer control by the faculty and the dean's office. The need for additional support was emphasized by as many as 98% of respondents.
- 5) Overall, the study confirmed the proposed hypothesis. Empirical results have identified a group of students whose difficulties in developing the linguocultural competence directly correlated with low subjective well-being when studying at a Russian university. It is noteworthy that this group was made up exclusively of citizens of Latin American countries. Representatives of other countries did not show such a clear and consistent correlation in this parameter.
- 6) Despite the consistent denial of problems and the desire to show psychological strength, student migrants at regional universities need help and support throughout the entire learning process. In this respect, it would probably be beneficial to consider the experience of France in organizing a "single window" for student migrants. This kind of structure acts as a tool to provide both legal and social and psychological support.

In general, the conditions of study in Nizhny Novgorod universities are described by student migrants as comfortable, which forms in them a stable motivation to develop Russian linguistic culture and contributes to the successful completion of the educational program. The

comfort of the inophone becomes a prerequisite for the formation of a sense of belonging in Russia. The research data further suggests that this feeling, in turn, can be the best advertisement for the university, the region, and the country.

## CONCLUSION

The subjective well-being of student migrants is a key condition for the successful adaptation and the development of linguistic and cultural competence, with a generally positive attitude towards training and a high need for institutional support. Systemic barriers, primarily financial and linguistic, are still in place. The choice of the university is significantly determined by social ties and is reinforced by demand for practices providing inclusion in the social environment of the city. A positive assessment of daily life is accompanied by a noticeable proportion of students reporting no serious difficulties in adaptation, but targeted support measures are still needed.

The representativeness of the findings is limited by the geography and composition of the sample. The survey was conducted in Nizhny Novgorod universities and included students from 16 countries, with none belonging to Europe or North America, while students from the CIS countries and China were predominant. This sample composition limits the ability to extrapolate the conclusions onto other cohorts and regions. In addition, the interpretation of results could have been influenced by the self-report format of the data and the effect of “optimistic” answers (unwillingness to fix problems, overestimated self-assessment), as highlighted in the discussion. These factors warrant caution in generalizations and require the results to be confirmed by subsequent assessments.

Promising areas for the development of the covered research topic would include qualitative research with semi-standardized interviews and focus groups to analyze the existential problems of socio-cultural and linguistic adaptation of student migrants in the Volga Federal District. To paint a more objective picture, this research will require the opinions of both student migrants themselves and representatives of the academic community working with this category of students. It is promising to conduct a pedagogical experiment with a control group of foreign students actively involved in cultural and educational events over the academic year and receive competent psychological and pedagogical support. This experiment should also be accompanied by regular monitoring to address deficits (communicative, linguistic, psychological) and meet the needs of inophones in additional attention and care.

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