

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING IN INTERNATIONAL CLASSROOM

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Every year there are more international students studying in Belarusian universities. Belarusian universities are becoming more international. Internationalization of higher education has come to Belarus as a requirement of the global world. This short discussion is based on the author's knowledge of international education and experience of teaching in US, Swedish and Norwegian universities. Added to this are over 10 year of interest and teaching of cross cultural management courses. The primary focus of the paper is on challenges of working in multicultural class environment.

Internationalization of education is "the process of integration an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" [1]. Internationalization and a multi-component phenomenon embracing recruitment of international students, development of international branch campuses, students, staff and scholars exchange, internationalization of curriculum; research and education partnerships between institutions [1]. Importance and benefits of internationalization are not to be questioned. It promotes country's image and competitiveness. It brings profit to the State and universities. Students and teachers exchanges enrich and broaden their academic experiences.

Belarus is becoming an attractive country for academic exchange and study trips. Benefits of coming to study in Belarus, as seen by international students, are as follows:

- good quality of education;
- a degree (diploma) awarded by a state (not a private) university;
- safe and comfortable living environment in the country;
- opportunity to learn Russian language.

However, both Belarusian education and Belarusian educators are yet in the beginning of internationalization process. Cross cultural knowledge and competence as well as international experience are lacking. There is a lot to learn about working internationally and teaching in a multicultural environment. Going international has moments of frustration, hard work and great learning experience both for students and teachers.

There are quite a few challenges to deal with.

Below are some of the challenges of teaching/studying in an international classroom in Belarus:

- Language proficiency. Language fluency is a big issue for students and teachers in case of courses taught in English. Many international students are not fluent in English. Participating in class discussions, doing written assignments, case reports in English, may be difficult because of inadequate language skills. Studying in Russian is yet a bigger challenge. After one year of preparatory Russian language classes international students do not have good command of Russian. They struggle with understanding and mastering courses content.

- Low intercultural competence of teachers. Few Belarusian teachers have experience of teaching abroad. Limited international experience of teachers and lack of knowledge of cultural specifics make an international class a big challenge for both teachers and international students.

- Challenge of managing class climate in an international group. National cultural norms as well as differences in language fluency may result in low class participation. International students are often not active in class discussions. It's difficult for them to participate in project work groups together with Belarusian students. "International student ghetto" is often the case, when international students work in isolated groups with little interaction with Belarusian students. This results in lower class satisfaction and lower learning outcomes.

- Little knowledge of academic specifics and assessment methods in other than native university. Students from China studying in MBA program of the School of Business of BSU are quite good in doing tests, quizzes and written exams but they are not well prepared to do case analysis and case write-ups. Regular class attendance and promptness may be an issue with students from African cultures. It's difficult for them to embrace the rule that missing classes, assignments, results in failing a course.

- Little use and limited access to international educational resources. Textbooks and course packs from international publishing houses are rare guests in international classrooms in Belarus. Courses taught in English usually do not use do not usually use international textbooks. Translation of a Russian textbook or lecture notes are offered to students. Quality of translation oftentimes leaves

much to be desired. Course packs are not as well equipped with assignments, cases, as in case of an English original textbook.

– Need of internationalization of curriculum. It's necessary to review contents of university courses and to add a more global perspective. It's also important to match course contents to needs and expectations of international students.

The complexity of the above challenges is different. Education, training trainers is a first step to work with the challenges. Teaching and administrative staff of Belarusian universities needs training in cultural knowledge to help them provide high quality instruction and a good learning experience to international students.

References

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