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## **Academic Mobility as a Prerequisite of Cross-Cultural Communication and Professional Competency Development**

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*The article is concerned with the problem of academic mobility as an integral personal quality facilitative in the development of cross-cultural communication skills and enhancement of professional competency. Targeted development of academic mobility occurs in the process of professionally oriented foreign language learning and acquisition. A component structure of the academic mobility is revealed, described, and substantiated. The rationale for a particular pedagogical environment instrumental in the development and enhancement of academic mobility in students is provided. The experimental data substantiating the hypothesis concerning special pedagogical environment contributing to the academic mobility development are provided.*

*Keywords: academic mobility, social phenomenon, integral character quality, foreign language competence, motivation of achievement, motivation of affiliation, pedagogical environment.*

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### **Introduction**

Higher professional education has become a part of the globalizing economy and consequently a subject of such aggressive processes of modern time as integration and internationalization. A Canadian scholar Jane Knight describes internationalization of higher education as a process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service function of the institutions. (Knight, 1993, p. 21)

One of the core features of internationalization in education is academic mobility of students and staff. In the frames of the Bologna process, which Russia joined in 2003, by this proclaiming its will to become a competitive agent in the area of higher

education, academic mobility is understood as a free and equitable access to educational institutions, equitable approach in assessment of skills, knowledge and competences, equal employment rights. (Baidenko, 2002, 2004) The countries-signatories of the Bologna Declaration view academic mobility as one of the most effective instruments in the development and enhancement of the European Higher Education Area. The aim of the EHEA is to create a competitive and attractive European educational system that can resist the challenges of globalization and meet the needs of the global market and the individuals receiving higher education. Some researchers of the modern Russian higher professional education broaden interpretation of the category *academic*

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*mobility* to the understanding of it as a personal character trait or integral personal quality. This personal characteristic is viewed both as a result of professional education and a prerequisite for cross-cultural communication and professional competency development. (Koropchenko, 2003)

The European community realizing the value and importance of academic mobility development has paid special attention to the elaboration of the academic mobility recognition mechanisms. At present the following steps have been approved as a recognition mechanism: easily readable and comparable degrees organized in a three-cycle structure (e.g. bachelor-master-doctorate); introduction of European Credit Transfer Unit (ECTU) to measure students' workload; Common European Framework of Reference to measure the level of mastery and depth of foreign language acquisition; recognition of foreign qualifications; Diploma Supplement; effective use of knowledge and experience of the European Student Association of Academic Mobility.

All these measures are taken in order to educate individuals in accordance with their personal needs and demands of the market; to provide contemporary society with specialists able to adjust quickly and easily to a dynamic variety of the changing environment (educational, cultural and professional); to educate people capable of interaction with representatives of other cultures and different worldviews; to promote enhancement of such individual qualities as tolerance to alien or adverse opinions; to encourage ability to think independently, and assess results of the accomplished work critically.

It seems reasonable to contemplate about particular skills and abilities intrinsic to an academically mobile individual, which he needs to be able to cross borders of different countries, to study in foreign universities, to interact with

colleagues and professors, to self-educate, to work in teams, to approach matters both critically and creatively. In light of the recent demands of the postindustrial society, responsibility to educate specialist capable of intellectual and behavioral mobility is laid on the universities: centers of knowledge, research, and new technologies.

### **The essence and structure of academic mobility**

Academic mobility as a new category of the higher educational system has become a subject of interest and research. As a result of our analysis of scientific, methodological, and pedagogical literature we came to a conclusion that the understanding of the category *academic mobility* depends on the approaches used in the process of definition and fields of study. It has also become evident that there is no firm consensus on what the essence (abilities, skills and competencies) of the *academic mobility* is, and what learning environment is most facilitative in the enhancement of this personal quality attained in the process of language learning and acquisition.

The dual nature of the term *mobility* is reflected in its contemporary interpretation:

1) ability of moving freely across borders and through different social strata; 2) essential attribute of someone who can think creatively, learn independently, adopt quickly, and assess results of personal work critically.

Therefore, mobility can be viewed both as a social phenomenon instrumental in social promotion (social lift) and as a personal integral character trait (quality). Such approach to the understanding of the category *academic mobility* is shared by a number of researchers (O.A. Gladkaya, 2002; L.V. Gorjunova, 2005; P.A. Sorokin, 1999). We understand academic mobility as an integral personal quality characterized by its dynamic nature and represented by the ability and

readiness to adapt quickly and easily to a variety of the changing learning, cultural and business environment, to enhance personal development, and to make intellectual investments into the life of the society for the purpose of the progress and prosperity.

Development of particular individual qualities is perceived as a development of the individual as whole, as a change in its dynamic structure and content under the influence of external and internal factors. All character traits and individual qualities develop in the process of active engagement or task oriented activities. Considering the fact that every mobile individual needs to have a good command of one or more foreign languages, development of the academic mobility as a personal integral quality can occur in the process of the active goal-oriented (oriented on the formation of academic mobility) foreign language teaching aimed at foreign language competency enhancement.

A language is a reflection of culture, and every language class is an intersection of cultures. The nature of the language, interactive methods of teaching employed in the process of language acquisition, the functions of the language (a tool of communication and understanding of foreign cultures) facilitate in the development of the

targeted personal character traits and qualities. Considering the above-mentioned arguments and characteristics inherent to the academically mobile individual, we elaborated a component structure of the *academic mobility* in students receiving higher professional education. The approach to view *academic mobility* as a structure consisting of a number of interdependent and interrelated components is based on the personality development theory of the Russian researcher and psychologists A.N. Leontiev. (Leontiev, 1983)

The component structure of academic mobility is reflected in Table 1.

All components of the academic mobility are interrelated and interdependent. Enhancement of one of them is correlated with the progress of the others and vice versa. It has already been stated that all character traits develop in the process of active engagement. A driving force of any activity is motivation, which is understood as needs, desires, or drives within individuals. It is a process of stimulating people to actions to accomplish the goals. People are social beings and a need for socialization, communication is inherent to them, because verbal and nonverbal interactions are learning styles helping individuals to realize who they are and understand their life goals.

Table 1

Academic mobility			
Motivation component	Task-oriented component	Cognitive-content component	Reflexive component
Criteria			
Motivation criteria	Task- based criteria	Cognitive-communicative criteria	Reflexive criteria
Motivation of affiliation Motivation of achievement	1. Capability and readiness to work independently and in teams	1. Developed foreign language communicative competence 2. Knowledge and understanding of cultural specifics and business environment	1. Ability and readiness to assess results of the personal work and performance critically 2. Ability to assess incoming information critically

To overcome language barriers an individual needs to be motivated to achieve positive outcomes. On the other hand, determination to become successful encourages communication aimed at getting new information and new experience. An academically mobile person is driven to promote himself socially and professionally. To gain valued outcomes he has to be motivated for both affiliation and achievement. Interaction (affiliation) is a process involving one or several people. Successful cooperation is based on the ability to work in teams and demonstrate respect, tolerance, and mutual support. On the other hand, personal growth and ability to make intellectual investments requires well-developed self-study skills and independent thinking skills. Assessment of the achieved outcome given by the educator or peers is very important for every studying individual, though true enhancement and progress of the individual character traits occurs in case of critical assessment of personal progress by the individual himself. Analysis of the performance, achievements, and failures helps students to learn better planning and avoid the same mistakes in the future, which in turn enhances their motivation for achievement and success, makes them more open for communication and learning.

In the process of foreign language acquisition students get introduced to new cultures. Introduction to new cultures broadens the students' horizons; unveils mysteries of foreign worlds and nations; acquaints them with the unknown world of sometimes alien values, traditions, different worldviews, and ways of thinking; equips learners with skills and knowledge necessary for cross-cultural communication and effective business cooperation and negotiations. Foreign language skills and knowledge of foreign culture, traditions and customs together with abilities to accept people with tolerance, to work productively and socialize effectively, to assess situations and personal behavior critically, to approach matters

with an open mind (which are characteristic features of academic mobility) facilitate in cross-cultural communication.

The term *cross-cultural* implies interaction with persons of different cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, and class backgrounds. Cross-cultural communication is a process of exchanging, negotiating, and mediating one's cultural differences through language, non-verbal gestures, and space relationships. Barna's "six stumbling blocks" unveil difficulties, which can hinder an efficient cross-cultural interaction. The "stumbling blocks" include assumption of similarities, language barriers, nonverbal misinterpretations, preconceptions and stereotypes, tendency to evaluate and high anxiety. (Barna, 1977)

"To ensure cross-cultural communication one should not only know the language but also be aware of the system of communicational culture, rules of etiquette, forms of nonverbal communication and have deep background knowledge of values and perceptions accepted in other cultures" (for example, knowledge of religious beliefs, taboos, public and historic facts, etc.) (Ter-Minasova, 2004, p. 34).

From that point of view the goal of the foreign language teaching is derived from the needs and demands of the multilingual society. Now a "perfect command" of one or two, or even three languages, taken separately from each other, is not the goal anymore. The purpose is a development of the linguistic repertoire where all linguistic skills are presented. In other words, the development of the foreign language communicative competence is now considered as one of the main categories of the foreign language teaching. (Nazarenko, et al., Sizykh, Fandei, 2011)

The foreign language teaching aimed at the foreign language communicative competency enhancement leads to subsequent development of personal qualities, (Borzova, 2009) which in term

helps to further improvement of competencies, inclusive of professional competencies that a course of foreign language teaching can secure. Professional competencies enhanced in the process of language learning and acquisition are defined as abilities to solve problems in different professional environment, to self-educate and to think creatively and independently, to cooperate and to be effective team players. These abilities are based on professional knowledge obtained and internalized in the process of professionally oriented language teaching.

The most common definition of professional competency used today is Epstein and Hundert's which defines it as "the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served." (Epstein, and Hundert, 2002)

Achievement of the defined objectives is feasible in case necessary learning environment is provided. Having analyzed the essence and characteristic features of academic mobility it is reasonable to suggest that the following requirements should be observed in the process of language teaching aimed at the academic mobility development.

1. Language teaching should be conducted in the context-conditioned (based) environment, which implies modeling of social and professional content of the students' future professional occupation;
2. New educational technologies based on the interactive methods of teaching, including project teaching, should be employed in the process of language learning to enhance motivation of affiliation and strengthen motivation of achievement; to promote tolerance, ability to work independently and teams; to further creative thinking and critical

self-assessment of personal progress and achievement;

3. Competence developing and student-centered approaches should steer foreign language teaching to guide both educators and learners toward conscious development of communicative and professional competencies and responsible elaboration of personal educational trajectory;
4. Educational technology targeting at the academic mobility development should be elaborated and implemented in the process of professionally oriented language teaching.

To verify our hypothesis concerning a particular set of learning environment instrumental in the development of academic mobility as an integral personal quality we conducted an experiment consisting of surveys, questionnaires, discussions, essay and letter writing.

180 students from the Department of Civil Engineering of Petrozavodsk State University participated in the experiment consisting of three stages: diagnostic stage, advanced stage and final stage. During the diagnostic stage of the experiment, we studied students' attitude toward English learning and their understanding of what academic mobility as a personal character trait implies.

75 % of the surveyed students defined their interest toward learning English at high level, 23 % have some interest in studying English and 2 % have very little or no interest at all. When defining value of learning English they ranked it in the following way : 1) a tool of communication 2) instrument of personal development 3) one of the ways to promote professional growth and professional competency enhancement 4) a requirement of the time 5) a tool of entertainment 6) an instrument of adaptation to new

informational technologies 7) necessity when traveling abroad.

When questioned about academic mobility as personal integral quality, students attributed the following characteristics to this category: 1) well educated, 2) quick, 3) interested in learning, 4) full of new ideas and 5) capable of speaking a foreign language. Unfortunately, a command of the foreign language was listed as the last requirement. The ability to cooperate and work in teams as well as the capability to assess personal learning outcome critically were not mentioned.

Analyzing the data of the survey, we concluded that even though students realize the value and importance of a good command of English, they have little understanding of how they can apply it in their future personal and professional life. There is also a lack in full and deep understanding of what *academic mobility* is.

We defined three levels of academic mobility development: 1. High, 2 Medium and 3) Low. Levels of academic mobility development are estimated as high when all of the components of the category are assessed as high, if any of the components are at a medium level or one of them is at a high level we assess it as medium, if any of the components is at a low level we assess such level as low.

To conduct our experiment aimed at verifying our suggestion about a particular learning environment instrumental in the development of academic mobility, we set up a control group (CG) consisting of 11 second-year students from the Civil Engineering Department and an experimental group (EG) of 11 second-year students from the same department. At the initial stage of the experiment, we defined the level of the academic mobility development in accordance with elaborated criteria. Motivation of success or achievement (MS) and motivation of affiliation

(MA) in both groups was at approximately the same level.

In CG – MS (motivation for success) was at 1). high level 36.4 % – 4 students, 2) medium level 36.4 % – 4 students, 3) low level 27.2 % – 3 students, and in EG – MS was at 1) high level 45.4 % – 5 students, 2) medium level 36.4 % – 3 students, 3) low level 27.2 % – 3 students.

In CG – MA (motivation for affiliation) was at 1) high level 27.2 % – 3 students, 2) medium level 27.2 % – 3 students, 3) low level 45.45 % – 5 students, in EG – MA was at 1) high level 36.4 % – 4 students, 2) medium level 45.45 % – 5 students, 3) low level 27.2 % – 3 students.

Independent study skills (ISS) in CG was at 1) high level 18.2 % – 2 students, 2) medium level 45.45 % – 5 students, 3) low level 36.4 % – 4 students, and in EG (ISS) was at 1) high level 27.2 % – 3 students, 2) medium level 54.5 % – 6 students, 3) low level 18.2 % – 2 students.

Level of tolerance (LT) in CG was at 1) high level 18.2 % – 2 students, 2) medium level 36.4 % – 4 students, 3) low level 45.45 % – 5 students, and in EG (LT) was at 1) high level 27.2 % – 3 students, 2) medium level 36.4 % – 4 students, 3) low level 36.4 % – 4 students.

The level of Foreign language Competency (LC) in CG was at 1) B1 level was 9.1 % – 1 student, 2) A2 level 36.4 % – 4 students, 3) A1 level 54.5 % – 6 students, and EG – LC 1) B1 level 27.2 % – 3 students, 2) A2 level 54.5 % – 6 students, 3) A1 level 18.1 % – 2 students. The level of critical thinking and ability to assess incoming information, including information in a foreign language was very low in both groups at the initial stage of the experiment.

Having analyzed the following data we concluded that because of a very low level of reflection ability in both groups we affirm that the students had a low level of academic mobility.

When tested at the final stage of the experiment, we have in the CG – 2 students

Table 2

Criteria	Level	Control group						Experimental group					
		MS %	MA %	ISS %	LT %	LC %	RF %	MS %	MA %	ISS %	LT %	LC %	RF %
Initial stage	high	36.4	27.2	18.2	18.2	9.1		45.4	36.4	27.2	27.2	27.2	
	med	36.4	27.2	45.45	36.4	36.4	18.2	36.4	45.4	54.55	36.4	54.5	27.2
	low	27.2	45.4	36.4	45.4	54.5	81.8	27.2	27.2	18.2	36.4	18.2	63.6
Final stage	high	27.2	27.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	36.4	72.7	45.4	54.5	54.5	45.4	45.5
	med	54.5	54.5	72.7	36.4	63.6	54.5	27.2	54.5	36.4	36.4	45.5	45.5
	low	18.2	18.2	9.1	9.1	18.2	18.2	0	0	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1

(18.1 %) with low language competency level (A1 level) and none with low level (A1 level) in EG. Assessment skills (RF) in both groups have improved and we have in CG – (36.4 %) 3 students – high level, (54.5 %) 6 students – medium level and (18.1 %) 2 students – low level, in EG – assessment skills (RF) – (45.5 %) 5 students – high level, (45.5 %) 5 students – medium level, and (9.1 %) 1 student – low level. Motivation level in CG – (18.2 %) 2 students with low level of MA and MS. EG has no students with low MS and MA, level of tolerance (LT) in CG – (9.1 %) 1 student – low level, (36.4 %) 4 students – medium level and (18.2 %) 2 students at high level, EG has one student (9.1 %) with low level tolerance, (36.4 %) 3 students – medium level, (54.5 %) – 6 students – high level.

Based on the results of the experiment we may ascertain that a certain progress in the development of academic mobility in students is observed in both groups, though a number of students with developed academic mobility as a personal character trait is higher in the experimental group. Correlation between the level of foreign language competency and growth of the rest of the components in the structure of academic mobility is also observed in both groups. The higher the level of foreign language competency, the higher the level of academic mobility. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that traditional teaching methods

remain effective in the enhancement of personal character qualities, but higher learning outcomes are obtained by the creation of the learning environment instrumental in the enhancement of personal qualities demanded by the society and by the studying individual himself. This learning environment includes: employment of pedagogical technologies based on interactive methods of teaching; creation of the context based environment; employment of the elaborated technology based on the principles of competence developing and student-centered approaches, and targeting academic mobility enhancement.

### Conclusion

Academic mobility is an integral personal quality with a complex structure, consisting of a number of interrelated and interdependent components. Their enhancement leads to the development of academic mobility as an integral entity, facilitative in the process of adaptation and integration into the changing academic, economic, cultural, and political world. To achieve a desired outcome in the process of foreign language learning and acquisition, a set of instrumental learning environment needs to be introduced. Results of the experiment revealed strong correlation between the level of Foreign Language Competency Development and improvement levels of the other components of academic mobility.

Academic mobility as a personal integral enhancement of professional competency. quality is a prerequisite for successful Its dynamic structure and intrinsic nature cross-cultural communication and effective substantiate its function.

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## **Академическая мобильность как необходимое условие межкультурной коммуникации и становления профессиональной компетентности**

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*В статье рассматривается проблема академической мобильности как интегративного личностного новообразования студентов, необходимого для формирования навыков межкультурной коммуникации и развития профессиональной компетентности. Целенаправленное становление академической мобильности происходит в процессе обучения профессионально-ориентированному иностранному языку. В статье выявлены, описан и обоснованы компонентный состав академической мобильности; педагогические условия,*

*содействующие становлению академической мобильности; приведены данные опытно-экспериментального исследования, подтверждающие гипотезу о необходимости создания определенных педагогических условий с целью формирования академической мобильности.*

*Ключевые слова: академическая мобильность, социальное явление, интегративное личностное качество, иноязычная коммуникативная компетенция, мотивация достижения и мотивация аффилиации, педагогические условия.*

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