

*Tikhonova Sakh. A., Tikhonova Sv. A.*

## COMMUNICATING WITH NATIVE SPEAKERS AS A WAY TO LEARN ENGLISH

English is the language of international communication. This article presents the work of English club «We love English» for students from Yakutia. It includes arrangements for classes, opinions of club members and club guests from different countries. Our club has been managing for two years increasing the amount of auditors.

**Keywords:** *club, Yakutia, English, students, native speakers.*

Tikhonova Sakh. A., student  
**National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University**  
E-mail: tikhonova93@mail.ru

Tikhonova Sv. A., student  
**National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University**  
E-mail: tixonova.93@bk.ru

*Farfudinova S. R.*

## STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

The paper deals with overview of student exchange programs available for students of Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU). It studies the advantages of such way of intercultural communication and notes typical difficulties Russian students face abroad. The article covers nowadays challenges and prospects of student exchange programs development in the light of past events.

**Keywords:** *student exchange programs, intercultural communication, international student, short-term programs, double-degree programs.*

### Introduction

Student exchange has been regarded as beneficially for students both academically and socially. Participating in student exchange programs (SEP) international students can:

- globalize their studies by adding an international dimension to their course;
- enhance academic opportunities;
- establish professional and career opportunities by networking with other students, academics and professional organizations;
- improve language skills, cross-cultural understanding, and interpersonal communication;
- experience personal growth by developing self-confidence, independence, social skills, and practical skills [1].

Student exchange programs is chance for students to acquire experience of studying and living abroad, to develop skills of scientific research in laboratories, chance to learn how to use their skills in practice, enterprises, cooperating with foreign partners. It gives the opportunity to acquire a competitive advantage on employment market and to open the door to the world of endless possibilities of international and intercultural relations.

However, studying abroad is a great challenge. International students have to cope with cultural, social, language and academic difficulties. There are certainly different risks in traveling to a foreign country [2]. For this reason all exchange students should be aware of those risks and how to handle them should they occur. Thus there should be a special service in a University-partner to provide students with all related information and to ensure their safety abroad.

### Student exchange programs in TPU

For a long time Tomsk was a closed territory for foreigners, but after the brake-down of USSR in 1991, Tomsk Polytechnic University sets the internalization among its priorities. Now TPU receives over 100 international students each year on its exchange programs. Exchange students all over the world are welcomed and taken care of by the Centre of International Academic programs in TPU. It is believed that TPU takes the first place among other Siberian Universities in terms of international academic mobility programs. «Days of academic mobility» are organized in the university twice a year. They are conducted to provide students with all information about possible student exchange programs available in TPU.

Nowadays, the Center of International Educational Programs of TPU works with 72 universities of the 22 countries. If you look at a map of their cooperation, you get almost the whole Europe and a big part of Asia. The most popular and «classical» routs are Germany or the Czech Republic where it is possible to take a Master Degree course in a number of specialties. Brazilian or Australian universities for undergraduate and graduate students of Tomsk still are the most rare and exotic. Collaboration with Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro or the Queensland University of Technology Australian city of Brisbane is just starting to be implemented in the international exchange programs TPU.

TPU offers to international students from partner universities the following programs:

- Academic Exchange Programs (Semester-or year-long programs)

- Internships (Short term programs on the specific project)
- Double Degree Programs (Full 2-year Master degree program in cooperation with one of the partner universities with two Master Diplomas in the end)
- International Academic Summer School on Well-being UniverCiTerra – 2015 Russian for Mobility (Intensive course of the Russian language for double master and exchange students)

Russian students have a number of opportunities as well. They are the following:

- Short-term programs involving thematic schools, T.I.M.E. European Summer Schools
- Student exchange programs with partner Universities from Germany, the Czech Republic, France, China, the republic of Korea and other countries.
- Double-degree programs.

Nowadays, TPU can offer its students to take the following double-degree courses:

«Reservoir evaluation and management» «Pipeline Engineering», Great Britain, «Physics of High Technology in Mechanical Engineering», «Computer science», «High voltage engineering and physics», «Communication and embedded systems», Germany, «Electric power generation and transportation», «Production of systems management», Czech republic, «Environmental sciences», «Information system in management», France, «Standardization, metrology and certification», «Condensed matter physics», «Instrument engineering», «High voltage physics and engineering», «Computer networks and telecommunication», Kazakhstan.

### **Challenges and prospects**

Integration of TPU into the global education environment allowed the University to become an international one. It implies providing education for international students, developing student exchange programs, having its education program accredited by international accreditation centers, taking scientific and education activities according to international standards.

To maintain the required level it is necessary to cope with quite a number of challenges. In terms of student exchange programs there are some of them.

Firstly, the increasing internationalization of the University makes it necessary to provide bi-lingual education environment, which leads, in its turn, to a number of problems:

- Students taught in languages they do not know well enough for academic purposes may be seriously disadvantaged
- Teaching staff may not be adequately proficient in the languages in which they are expected to teach
- The inadequate language proficiency of staff and students may lead to a lowering of academic standards, which places the qualifications awarded by the affected university and their international recognition at risk
- Language may become an instrument of division and discrimination (e.g. through students and staff being hierarchised according to their competence in the dominant language) and thus become a focal point of conflict in universities [3].

Secondly, the development of international education collaboration of Universities is highly influenced by economic and political factors. Western sanctions against Russia impede significantly Russian Universities' integration into the global education market in general, and student exchange, in particular. Some of international student exchange programs are not supported by the State organization any more.

Since it's impossible to cope with the second problem, there are some chances to solve the first one. In TPU there are a lot of opportunities to improve English both for students and for teaching staff. There are a lot of language courses of different levels with the possibility to take international language certificates (IELTS, City and Guilds, FCE etc.) So it makes it easier for students to become a member of the international exchange programs TPU.

Financial support is also very important. For example, some universities provide the international students with free accommodation, pay the competitive scholarships. Furthermore, TPU conducts the competition for scholarships' payment P.L.U.S. Applicants of scholarships should be students and post-graduates of full-time studies, studying on the budget basis. They must have the program's project of the academic mobility, an invitation of an inviting side. The minimum acceptable language skill level for any kind of programs is B1 according to the European scale. However, some universities provide financial support only at the moment of a student's arrival, so initially, it is advisable to estimate necessary travel and accommodation cost.

And then begins the most pleasant: teaching there in an unknown university with a full immersion in the country in its language and other pleasures of the international exchange programs. «It was unbelievable!» students say.

The most common words that are used on students returning are «helpful, friendly and travelling». «Helpful and friendly» are used to describe people and the way they communicate.

It is difficult not to go somewhere, when all borders are opened, when you have a visa. But there is always «but», sometime this 'but' transforms into 'butS». And that transformation generally implies a lot of works for us.

Many students tell a lot of positive memories about travelling, about communication experienced with people, about nature and eventually about education. And of course, perfect memories take a big part of all of the memories. But many students note that «nasty» and «ubiquitous» «BUT». It is necessary to know about all «dark» sides of student exchange programs. It is necessary to know how quickly students find a mutual language with local population. Of course, it is depends on student's personality first of all, but not all students and people generally have good

communicative skills. The communicative skills are not less important in the education than scientific work. This factor is very important not only for students, but for the university too, because these students are future specialists, who could communicate efficiently with different types of people. Therefore, this future specialist could make an invaluable contribution and may change the way of science development.

Arriving to a foreign country, an alien must contact with local people with respect. That means not only knowing of language but also knowing local traditions, customs, and way of life. To put it in a nutshell, political correctness must be followed by members of the student exchange programs.

Conducting a small survey, i have noted that many universities (particularly Russian) don't pay enough attention to this problem despite its importance.

A lot of Russian universities make an enormous contribution to the development of student exchange. But besides that, TPU programs should give students general ideas of a country they are going to visit. It is necessary to give students clear idea of the nation's culture, national mentality, skills in psychology, which facilitates development of communicative skills.

Unfortunately, i have not noticed that the exchange program includes a thorough studying of nation's culture, national mentality. It may seem to be waste of time, but it will definitely promote students up their career ladder in the future.

Student exchange can be regarded as intercultural communication: a member of such exchange program from abroad is like a part of some «country» that is embedded into another «country». For smooth infiltration and without dire consequences, an international student must know as much as possible about country where he/she is going to spend time the next 6–12 months.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion is the following:

- Student exchange programs contribute significantly to the integration of Russian Universities in the global education environment, providing opportunities both for students and teaching staff to participate in international academic and scientific environment.
- International education should work both directions. Thus, TPU offers educational service for international students, develops student exchange and double-degree programs with a number of partner-universities in different countries.
- The status of international university implies new challenges of different nature. Some of them can be solved by efficient management (like bi-lingual education environment), some are less influenced by a University (like political and economic situation).

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*Scientific adviser A. D. Baranova, PhD in Philology, senior lecturer of TPU*

Farfutdinova S. R., student  
**National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University**  
E-mail: [sabina.farfutdinova@mail.ru](mailto:sabina.farfutdinova@mail.ru)

*Фарфутдинова С. Р.*

## **ПРОГРАММЫ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОГО ОБМЕНА СТУДЕНТОВ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ**

Статья посвящена обзору программ студенческого обмена, работающих в Томском политехническом университете (ТПУ). Описываются как преимущества, открывающиеся для участников подобных программ с точки зрения межкультурной коммуникации, так и проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются русские студенты за границей. Затрагиваются проблемы и перспективы дальнейшего развития программ студенческого обмена в свете современных политических событий.

*Ключевые слова:* программы студенческого обмена, межкультурная коммуникация, иностранный студент, краткосрочные курсы, программы двойного диплома.

Фарфутдинова С. Р., студент  
**Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет**  
E-mail: [sabina.farfutdinova@mail.ru](mailto:sabina.farfutdinova@mail.ru)