

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS A SOURCE OF THE HUMAN CAPITAL REPLENISHMENT IN THE HOST COUNTRY

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Abstract

Educational migration is an important source of the human capital replenishment in the country, which hosts international students. Students from Central Asia account for a large proportion (57.5%) in the total number of international students in Russia (as of the beginning of the academic year 2018/2019). The authors chose Ekaterinburg (Russia), a large academic center, geographically located on the border between Europe and Asia, as a site for studying. In six largest public universities in Ekaterinburg in 2019, 63% of the total number of international students (3717) came from Central Asia (2334). The study was carried out in 2019 using the method of in-depth interview. The authors surveyed 32 respondents from Central Asia, who currently study in Ekaterinburg universities or graduated from them. The authors of the article come to a conclusion that students from this region are highly motivated to get quality education; their cultural and mental characteristics contribute to this fact. Commitment to the cultural integration with the host community helps them to form the strategy to stay in Russia. Thus, in this paper we define the principal life paths of educational migrants who plan to live and work in Russia after graduation.

Keywords: human capital, international students, Central Asia, Ekaterinburg, survey

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Introduction

In the current studies of migration, special attention is paid to the possibility of attracting “quality” migrants: well-educated, having a good command of a language of a host country, having a professional qualification being in-demand in the region. This group of migrants can, on the one hand, bring maximum benefit to the regional economy, and, on the other hand, be positively perceived by the host community. The inter-country educational migration develops actively, and has become an important source of the human capital replenishment. The country, which accepts international students, does not only get the economical and image benefits, but

as well receives an opportunity to replenish its human capital by young and qualified human resources, as the part of international students stay in the country where they study to live and work. The universities in many countries put out considerable efforts to attract international students: they create attractive study and accommodation opportunities for international students and carry out long-term programs, contributing to the integration of international students with the host community. In its turn, the successful integration with the host community may play the key role in the formation of further migration plans of foreign citizens, including the decision about the employment in the country where they studied after graduation. As of the beginning of the academic year 2018/2019, students from Central Asia accounted for a considerable share of the total number of international students in Russia (57.5%). In Ekaterinburg (Russia, the Ural region) in 2019, 2334 students from Central Asia studied in six largest universities (63% of the total number of international students). This explains the attention of the authors to the group of international students under consideration.

1 Literature review

Migration as one of the sources of the human capital replenishment is viewed from different perspectives in the scientific literature. Thus, one of the study aspects is the financial contribution of external migrants to the human capital formation in their home countries. For instance, the money that they send to their families in their home countries is spent to pay for education of their children, which leads to the increase in the education attainment level of the population (Brown & Poirine, 2005). Another direction of studies focuses on the other question of the human capital accumulation through the example of returned migrants. This people completed their studies or gained work experience in a foreign country, but returned back to their home country (Constant & Massey, 2002; Williams & Baláž, 2005). The third direction is related to the assessment of the possibilities of migrants' influence on the capital replenishment in the host country. In particular, researchers study the opportunities and prospects of the state to use the knowledge and experience of migrants as an important social resource, which can improve the economic situation in the region and guarantee the human capital accumulation in general (Mullings, 2011; Granovetter, 2005). Within the frames of the separate branch of this subject area, researchers analyze the role of educational migrants and the prospects of their participation in the human capital replenishment. In the context of the relevant scientific studies, there is a consistent pattern of parallelism in the development of two research directions: the prospects of educational migration for the host and the home country of migrants (Rodríguez-

Pose & Vilalta-Bufi, 2005; Krueger & Lindahl, 2001). Further human capital accumulation will depend on the final choice of a migrant after graduation in a foreign country: whether he or she would like to come back to the home country, stay in the host country, or consider the possibility of moving to another state to continue education or start a career. Thus, among the motives for the migrants to “settle down” there are: receiving a job offer with good prospects, continuation of education, personal motives (Verwiebe et al., 2010; Morrison & Clark, 2011). Other authors try to analyze the ways of the migrants’ integration with the host community (Zwysen, 2019; Wright & Constantin, 2020). The studies focus on the possibilities of government entities to create the necessary conditions to support foreign citizens. In particular, this involves the important role of social institutes, such as clubs, associations and other structures, which can unite people from different countries. Considerable attention is paid to the analysis of the activity of language schools.

Thus, the scientific assessment of the role of migration in the country’s human capital replenishment differs depending on the subject of discussion: the reason and consequences of this phenomenon are studied both for the home and the host countries. For our research the studies of the conditions, contributing to the “settling” of educational migrants in the host community, are of utmost importance.

2 Methodology

The authors chose Ekaterinburg (Russia), a large academic center, geographically located on the border between Europe and Asia, as a site for studying. The city is attractive for educational migration from Central Asia in terms of its geographical location and economic development. In 2016, the authors of the article surveyed migrants from Central Asia, who came to Ekaterinburg, using the method of the structured interview (N = 231). As a result of this study, we have defined the questions, requiring deeper analysis. One of such questions was the contribution of the educational migration to the development of the human capital of the territory.

The survey of students and graduates of Ekaterinburg universities, coming from Central Asia, was carried out in 2019 using the method of in-depth interview (N = 32). The authors of the article surveyed 22 students and 10 graduates from Central Asia. The sampling was based on the principle of “typical cases”: different life situations of students and graduates were taken into account when selecting the participants.

3 Results

According to the authors, “settling down” of educational migrants in the host community includes the following stages. A foreign applicant chooses a study destination; he or she perceives this country as being attractive in terms of studying, and considers his or her future education as quality and contributing to career building. After that, the applicant should make sure that he or she can successfully integrate with the host community. At the last stage, the student makes a decision regarding further migration plans after graduation.

The fact that foreign students perceive the Russian education as quality stems from the number of characteristics. When analyzing the texts of the interviews, we have revealed internal and external characteristics of the Russian educational system, which influenced the students’ motivation to study in Russia. Among external characteristics, we can name the stature of the Russian education in the minds of the Central Asian community. The external motivation is, as well, formed on the basis of the financial accessibility of the Russian education and the geographical accessibility of Russian universities for applicants from Central Asia, due to the fact that the regular air and railway connections allow travelling between countries easily. It should be noted that above-mentioned external characteristics of the Russian educational system form the motivation before entering a Russian university. Internal characteristics, being the real advantages of the Russian educational system, become clear to international students only after some period of study in a Russian university.

Thus, the educational experience helps to form the motivation to continue it; in the first instance, as part of comparison of the level of education in the home country and in Russia.

“I plan to stay for three more years. I’d like to try to study further. It’s not good to study in Kyrgyzstan; the education is poor, not like in Russia. It’s better in Russia. After that, I’ll go to my country and will work there with the new knowledge” (a young man, Bachelor student, Kyrgyzstan).

The motivation based on the in-detail assessment of the quality of education during the studies is supported by the internal characteristics of the Russian educational system.

“I like the education in Russia. There is no corruption; if you want to study, there are all necessary conditions to do this: from a library to a computer. It’s really good. This was the first impression I shared with my friends” (a young man, Bachelor student, Kazakhstan).

Thus, the motivation to get quality education specifically in Russia is initially formed on the basis of the assessment of external characteristics of the attractiveness of Russia and its educational system. Further, in the course of gaining their study experience, foreign students become more and more convinced that they have made a right choice of the study destination.

It contributes to the formation of one of the typical life paths of educational migrants: acquiring education in a host country step by step (Bachelor's studies, Master's studies, Postgraduate studies).

Besides, we have studied the motivation of students from Central Asia to gain quality education in relation to their cultural peculiarities. We have proved that there are no cultural and ethnical differences between students from different countries of this region in this regard. Even the students from Russian-speaking families think that they have adopted the cultural norms of the Central Asian countries, which they continue to obey in Russia.

"...my parents are ethnic Russians, but under the influence of the Kazakh culture, the Muslim culture, <...> I often face some kind of rudeness towards adult people. In my opinion, it's unacceptable" (a young woman, Bachelor student, Kazakhstan).

According to the students, under the influence of these norms their attitude to the studies is more responsible than that of the part of Russian students, which is directly related to the motivation of gaining quality education.

"When I came to Russia, I saw that everything was different... In the dormitory I lived in one block with the neighbors from Russia. They were often drinking, having fun, missed their classes, I heard everything through the wall. I tried to study more. If we gathered with some friends, we did not drink, or we had parties in the weekends" (a young man, Bachelor student, Kyrgyzstan).

Such behavioral pattern of many international students from Central Asia can be explained by their commitment to the cultural traditions of obedience and respect to elder people, who gave their consent to the educational migration of their children.

"Yes, I wanted to study in Russia. We made this decision with my Mom" (a young woman, Bachelor student, Kyrgyzstan).

"I worked for one year, and then my father told: 'Well, son, you are 18 already, you either enter a university, or you move out and live on your own.' My grades allowed me to enter several programs, and my Dad told me: 'Choose hospitality management.'" (a young man, Bachelor student, Uzbekistan).

An important role in achieving the goal to get a quality education is played by the more respectful attitude to teachers, senior students from Russia, elder compatriots etc.

"I guess, it is partly related to my Oriental upbringing. I use the polite form of 'you' to address everyone who is older, even 2 years than me" (a young man, Bachelor student, Uzbekistan).

“...there are some people who disregard the teachers. In my opinion, it’s not acceptable” (a young woman, Bachelor student, Kazakhstan).

In spite of the fact that the Muslim religious canons are relatively strict, international students are ready to sacrifice them to get education.

“Well, I don’t know... Praying five times a day? <...> I’m at the university all day long and I can skip it. I simply don’t have enough time” (a young woman, Bachelor student, Tajikistan).

Thus, students from Central Asia form their motivation to gain quality education in a rather peculiar way, under the influence of the cultural norms of their home countries.

An important characteristics of the quality of the country’s human capital is the cultural tolerance of its population; the first stage of formation of this tolerance for foreign students is the orientation to cultural integration with the host community. It starts to form in the home country, when a person makes a decision about studying in Russia. Thus, prospective students start to learn more about the customs and traditions of the Russian culture and improve their knowledge of the Russian language.

“I’ve known right from the beginning that I’ll study in Russia. For three years I performed in the Russian folk-show group, represented the Russian center of science and culture, and took part in the meetings of the Russian Society” (a young woman, Bachelor student, Kazakhstan).

Orientation to the integration on the basis of improving the knowledge of the language and getting acquainted with the Russian culture is strengthened during the period of studies in order to overcome different barriers in the course of adaptation.

“At the beginning of the year it was difficult to communicate with Russian students, because I had that language barrier. At my second year... no, it was the second semester of the first year, I already started to communicate more or less” (a young man, Bachelor student, Kyrgyzstan).

“I think extracurricular activities showed the best results. I met a lot of people, who were already working, running their businesses, had their projects and ideas” (a young man, Bachelor student, Kazakhstan).

This orientation is supported by the necessity to carry out study tasks, aimed at exchanging cultural knowledge with Russian students.

“Sometimes I just tell about customs and traditions, about what is accepted in our country. When we had the course of Service Studies, I told how we made tea in my country” (a young man, Bachelor student, Uzbekistan).

“...here [during seminars] we start to exchange experience: how do you do it in your country, what’s accepted in your culture?” (a young woman, Bachelor student, Kazakhstan).

Thus, students from Central Asia demonstrate the strongly pronounced orientation to integrate with the Russian society, which presupposes that they maintain their cultural identity and, at the same time, join the dominating community. This fact is confirmed by the data of the quantitative survey of migrants. The majority of the migrants from Central Asia, who stated that they came to Russia to study, completely got used to the life in Ekaterinburg (58.1%).

The last stage of “settling down” in the host country is the formation of the migration plans of foreign students, related to their desire to stay to live and work in Russia after graduation. About one half of the respondents stated they already had such desire; one fifth of the respondents mentioned that they had had such thoughts.

“I think of staying in Russia. What’s the reason for that? Well, in Kazakhstan you need to know the Kazakh language, and I’ve already forgotten it. Secondly, in Russia there are more opportunities in terms of international partnerships. Kazakhstan is also a good country with many links, but international relations are mainly maintained with Asia, India” (a young man, Bachelor student, Kazakhstan).

“...firstly I’ll need to come back to my home country, but after that I plan to return. Unlikely to Ekaterinburg, but to Russia... I feel closer to Russian people than to people of my nationality in terms of character and the attitude to life” (a young man, Specialist student, Tajikistan).

When studying the life paths of the graduates of Ekaterinburg universities from Central Asia, we have defined the following typical situations: 1) a foreign student entered the university in Russia, planning to stay to live in Russia; 2) the plan to stay in Russia is formed during the studies under the influence of external factors.

In case a student planned to stay in Russia after graduation from the very beginning, he or she deals with the issue of gaining Russian citizenship. Such possibility exists due to the introduction of the simplified order for conferring the citizenship to international students.

“I came to Russia, already having a plan to stay here. I gained citizenship in six months after arrival. I started to pursue this issue right away” (a man, graduate with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, Uzbekistan).

According to our studies held in 2016, the majority of migrants from Central Asia, who stated that they came to study in Russia, would like to gain Russian citizenship (59.7%).

In the case where migration plans to stay in Russia are formed during the studies, one can distinguish two behavior types. In the frames of the first model, a foreign student relates his or her career plans to the university where he or she studies. A student reacts positively to the suggestions to continue the studies or to be employed in the university.

“I don’t think about coming back, because I see my own career path, and I think that while I’m young, and thanks to my education and intellect, I can make some discoveries. Russia helps me to achieve my goal. I have not achieved it yet — so, I can’t say that I’m coming back to my country forever” (a woman, graduate with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, Tajikistan).

“I’m now pursuing postgraduate studies and work at the Department of Continuing Education [at the university]. In the future I’d like to get back, my relatives are here. Now I need to gain skills and experience, and will think... Here the salaries are good, there are wide career prospects” (a man, graduate with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, Tajikistan).

Within the frame of the second model, a foreign student actively seeks employment outside the university, comparing different organizations in terms of job opportunities. He or she usually has the concept of the desired job after graduation. Such behavioral pattern is typical for those students from Central Asia, who appreciate highly the development of the economy in Russia. According to them, it is easier to find a well-paid job with good prospects in Russia, than in their home country.

“By the time I completed my Bachelor studies, I had started to work already. After that during my Master studies <...> I started to work in another, larger enterprise. I worked there <...> and turned to the sphere of management. In this sphere <...> I’m happy with everything” (a man, graduate with a Bachelor’s degree and an incomplete Master’s degree, Kyrgyzstan).

It is important to note that the life paths of the second type (formation of the migration plans during the studies) are based not only on personal motives (proactive attitude, commitment to career building, interest to a new experience, being mobile), but as well on the external conditions (postgraduate studies, getting job offers).

Conclusion

The authors of the article come to the conclusion that students from Central Asia are highly motivated to gain quality education. There are several factors influencing their decision to choose a university in Russia. In Central Asia, the Russian education is perceived as quality

and relatively inexpensive. An important role is played by the geographical accessibility, taking into account the convenient transport connection between Russia and these countries. Cultural and mental characteristics of the students from Central Asia contribute to the formation of motivation to gain quality education. The orientation to the cultural integration with the host community contributes to the fact that international students form a strategy to settle down in Russia. The authors have also defined the following typical life paths of educational migrants planning to stay in Russia after graduation: admission to a Russian university with an initial desire to stay in Russia, or formation of this desire during their studies under the influence of external factors.

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