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THE IMPACT OF STUDENT EXCHANGE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN BELARUS AND CHINA

Abstract. *The article examines the pivotal role of student exchange programs in enhancing intercultural relations between Belarus and China, a key focus of Belarusian foreign policy. The study highlights how these exchanges contribute*

to the strengthening of diplomatic, educational and cultural ties, while also addressing the challenges faced by participants, including cultural differences, language barriers, access to healthcare. Ultimately, the findings underscore that despite existing challenges, student exchanges serve as a vital instrument for promoting mutual understanding and cooperation, thereby enriching the bilateral relationship and enhancing global collaboration.

Keywords: intercultural relations, student exchange, cultural awareness, bilateral cooperation, language barriers.

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ВЛИЯНИЕ СТУДЕНЧЕСКИХ ОБМЕНОВ НА РАЗВИТИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ МЕЖДУ РЕСПУБЛИКОЙ БЕЛАРУСЬ И КИТАЙСКОЙ НАРОДНОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКОЙ

Аннотация. Статья рассматривает ключевую роль программ студенческого обмена в улучшении межкультурных отношений между Беларусью и Китаем, что является важным аспектом белорусской внешней политики. Исследование подчеркивает, как эти обмены способствуют укреплению дипломатических, образовательных и культурных связей, а также рассматривает проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются участники, включая культурные различия, языковые барьеры и доступ к медицинским услугам. В конечном итоге выводы подчеркивают, что, несмотря на существующие трудности, студенческие обмены служат важным инструментом для содействия взаимопониманию и сотрудничеству, тем самым обогащая двусторонние отношения и усиливая глобальное сотрудничество.

Ключевые слова: межкультурные отношения, студенческий обмен, культурная осведомленность, двустороннее сотрудничество, языковые барьеры.

The current development of strategic partnerships with China stands as a central pillar of the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus. This evolving geopolitical context necessitates the enhancement of intercultural awareness and understanding between the two nations. A key component of fostering the awareness is the dialogue between cultures, which serves as

a foundational requirement for successful international cooperation. In this regard, the implementation of various initiatives aimed at promoting mutual understanding, such as student exchange programs, has become increasingly significant. The relevance of this study, therefore, lies in examining the role that student exchanges play in the development of intercultural relations between Belarus and China. Specifically, it seeks to assess how these exchanges contribute to strengthening diplomatic, educational, and cultural ties, as well as fostering a deeper mutual understanding between the two nations.

Intercultural communication, as defined by A. P. Sadokhin, refers to “a set of diverse forms of relationships and communication between individuals and groups belonging to different cultural backgrounds” [5, p. 46]. The importance of intercultural communication in the establishment of cultural connections cannot be overstated. It is through such communication that meaningful intercultural ties are nurtured, and the foundation for collaborative relationships between countries is established. The exchange of cultural perspectives and the dialogue between distinct cultural identities serve as the cornerstone upon which successful partnerships, aimed at achieving shared objectives are built. In this context, intercultural dialogue is not merely a tool for understanding differences but a mechanism through which common ground can be cultivated for cooperation on a wide range of issues.

Student exchange programs represent a dynamic instrument for facilitating intercultural interaction, playing a pivotal role in strengthening international relations and fostering mutual understanding between nations. In the context of Belarusian-Chinese cooperation, student exchanges offer a multifaceted platform for deepening knowledge of each other's cultures, languages and traditions. These exchanges extend beyond academic knowledge to include the development of personal and professional relationships, contributing significantly to the broader diplomatic and educational engagement between the two countries.

Through participation in these programs, students not only gain an enriched academic experience but also become active cultural ambassadors. As they immerse themselves in the host country's culture, they contribute to the creation of a positive national image, while simultaneously developing an appreciation for the cultural diversity of others. This two-way interaction ensures that the cultural exchange is not one-sided but mutually enriching. Furthermore, student exchanges between Belarus and China offer an invaluable opportunity to share knowledge and experiences across various fields, including science, technology, economics and the arts. This facilitates the establishment of academic and scientific partnerships, as well as the fostering of long-term cultural ties. By collaborating on joint research initiatives, attending cultural and educational events, and engaging in other forms of academic cooperation,

students contribute to the creation of enduring academic networks that extend beyond the duration of their exchange. These interactions strengthen intercultural understanding and create a solid foundation for ongoing bilateral cooperation. The exchange programs also provide a crucial platform for joint educational and research endeavors, which may lead to the co-development of solutions to common global challenges.

At the moment, some Belarusian universities are organizing student exchange programs with higher education institutions in China. Thus, within the framework of the existing agreements of Belarusian State University, the following programs are being implemented: Training at East China Normal University in the autumn semester, studies at the Beijing Institute of Technology in the fall semester, Studies at the East China Pedagogical University in the fall semester, the Summer School of Chinese from Heilongjiang University (Harbin, China) and the Summer School of Chinese from Harbin Polytechnic University (China) [3]. Belarusian State Economic University successfully provides student exchange programs with Northwestern Polytechnic University and Chang'an University [2]. Students from Belarusian State Academy of Music can study at China University of Petroleum (East China), China University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing Jiaotong University etc. [1]. Minsk State Linguistic University and Chinese universities are also actively cooperating. Their cooperation is multifaceted and successful, contributing not only to academic and cultural exchange, but also to the deepening of bilateral relations between the countries [4].

Despite the numerous advantages associated with student exchange programs, these initiatives are not without their challenges, which may limit their effectiveness and the extent to which they contribute to the development of intercultural relations. The Belarusian-Chinese student exchange program, despite its potential to strengthen bilateral ties, faces several recurring issues that hinder its full success. These challenges can be categorized into four primary areas. We consider ***cultural differences and adaptation issues*** as one of the most significant obstacles faced by students participating in exchange programs. In the case of Belarusian students in China, this is particularly evident in the stark differences in social norms, traditions and behavioral expectations. For instance, Chinese educational institutions place a strong emphasis on discipline and maintain a strict hierarchy between students and professors; consequently, this may present a challenge for Belarusian students who are accustomed to more egalitarian and less formal academic relationships. Furthermore, the gap between students' preconceived notions of life in China and the reality they encounter upon arrival can lead to feelings of isolation, stress and alienation. These emotional and psychological difficulties can complicate the socialization process and hinder the students' ability to integrate into

their new academic and social environments. Therefore, if this cultural adjustment is not properly addressed, it can impede the effectiveness of the exchange program and negatively affect the overall student experience.

Moreover, **language barriers are essential** even when students possess a sufficient level of proficiency in the host country's language they often encounter significant linguistic challenges. The use of regional accents, colloquial expressions, slang, and specialized academic terminology can create considerable difficulties in understanding and engaging with local culture and educational practices. This language barrier may also exacerbate feelings of isolation and stress, thereby further hindering the student's ability to adapt to their new environment and fully participate in the exchange program.

In addition, despite the advanced healthcare systems in both Belarus and China, significant **differences in the structure and delivery of healthcare services** can pose challenges for foreign students. For Belarusian students in China, navigating the healthcare system, understanding insurance policies and overcoming language barriers in medical settings can result in unnecessary stress and delays in receiving appropriate care.

Furthermore, the complexity of visa applications, housing arrangements, financial support and other logistical concerns can create confusion for students who are unfamiliar with the procedural requirements of studying abroad. This lack of clarity and coordination can discourage potential participants and hinder the overall success of the program.

To address the above-mentioned challenges, several measures can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of the Belarusian-Chinese student exchange program. Among them at first we can mention **the development of cross-cultural training programs**. To mitigate the challenges posed by cultural differences, it is crucial to implement comprehensive pre-departure cross-cultural training programs. These programs should not only provide theoretical knowledge about Chinese culture, traditions and social norms but also include practical exercises aimed at enhancing students' intercultural competence. By engaging in activities that simulate real-life cultural interactions, students will be better prepared to understand, respect, and navigate the complexities of Chinese society, reducing the likelihood of cultural shock and facilitating smoother integration into their new academic and social environments.

Language preparation and support of students could also play a crucial role in overcoming the language barrier. Offering language immersion programs and creating speaking clubs with native speakers can significantly improve students' speaking and listening skills, helping them gain confidence in real-world communication. Additionally, providing access to language support during their time abroad, such as on-campus language assistants or peer

mentors, could further alleviate language difficulties and enhance the overall exchange experience.

Establishing partnerships with healthcare institutions ensure students medical care in a foreign country. It would be beneficial for universities in both countries to establish formal agreements with local healthcare providers. Such partnerships would help clarify the process for students, reduce confusion and help them have access to quality care when needed. Furthermore, universities could organize more information sessions, workshops and seminars for prospective exchange participants to inform them better about the program's requirements and opportunities.

The analysis of the role of student exchange programs in fostering intercultural relations between Belarus and China reveals that, despite the challenges identified, such programs play an integral role in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. The existing programs highlight the need for ongoing improvements in addressing cultural, linguistic, medical, and organizational challenges. In conclusion, student exchange represents one of the most effective tools for enhancing intercultural awareness and strengthening ties between nations. The continued success and expansion of Belarusian-Chinese student exchange programs will not only deepen the bilateral relationship between the two nations but also foster greater global cooperation and mutual respect.

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