

*R.D. Khunagov*  
(*Adygeya State University*)

***Experience of Adygeya State University in improving multicultural education in the region***

Cultural identity and cultural diversity are inextricably intertwined. Multicultural education is a response by multicultural and multi-ethnic societies to the challenges of our times and one of the most important pedagogical issues facing world civilisation.

The process of democratisation in various spheres of social life has, in many ways, helped to shape the changes taking place in the way Russian universities are organised and in what they do. One of the main enabling factors in the education policy pursued by Russia's national republics has been the increased "ethnicisation" of the content of education, the growing role played by folk pedagogy, and the increasing influence of religion in the development of individual consciousness. Such processes naturally contribute to ethnic self-identification and the development of cultural self-awareness among the students. There is, however, a danger that this could lead to a rather ethnocultural-centric view of the world, and to a distancing from other territories, countries and peoples. That is why it is crucially important to achieve a harmonious blend of the various aspects of educational activity, and to produce, in a way that reflects their individual experiences, professionals with the appropriate intercultural communication skills and a sense of allegiance to a particular ethnic group, the state and the wider world.

Multicultural education needs to be seen in an international and interethnic context in terms of the interrelationship between various cultural environments in education, cross-fertilisation through dialogue with other cultures and effective resolution of possible intercultural conflicts, whose existence must be recognised and appreciated.

A key feature of Adygeya University's efforts in this regard has been the attempt to combine, in our educational programmes and in our organisational and moral development work, components related to **integration** as a major factor in the development of the modern world, and to **ethnic individualisation** as a means of national identification.

We proceed from the principle that teaching intercultural understanding is not just about providing information about the more exotic aspects of other cultures. At ASU, the efforts of the teaching staff are directed towards achieving a synthesis of specific cultural codes, social models of behaviour and the corresponding educational paradigms. In so doing, we draw on the following practical realities: integration in the global cultural and professional community, the need to teach students to respect other cultures as being of equal worth, and recognition of the fact that cultural differences can have a significant impact on students' emotional sphere, becoming a source of complex personal experiences and behaviour. It is no secret that in a context of globalisation, inter-group and interethnic

conflicts, various forms of discrimination and political and religious tensions become particularly apparent.

What we at ASU are trying to do is to turn the university setting into a multi-socio-cultural research and education facility, capable of supporting the social and cultural development of the multi-ethnic population of the Republic of Adygeya, and of drawing the representatives of each ethnocultural tradition into the fold of Russian and world culture.

As you know, the aims of multicultural education can be achieved in a variety of ways. I think it is no exaggeration to say that this century, virtual reality has been the primary force in creating conditions that allow everyone to feel they are a citizen of the world and become fully aware of the importance and uniqueness of their own culture. Indeed, access to global educational and cultural resources provides an ongoing opportunity to really embrace the scientific, aesthetic, spiritual and moral values of the wider world community. We at ASU are making full use of this opportunity: the biggest information resource centre in the Republic, we currently have one of the most up-to-date libraries in southern Russia, providing access to periodicals from 40 countries around the world and the largest central library databases in the country. We are working to ensure that even people living in remote areas of the Republic can find on our website the kind of content that will not only be of use to them in their work and in giving them control over their own destinies, but also lead to the realisation that multiculturalism is an important element in professionalism, and a major factor in development and professional growth.

Russia is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multilingual country, but the Russian people, Russian culture and the Russian language are its central component and take a lead role in mapping out the country's development routes. The preeminent role of the Russian language in the Russian education sector, and in the socio-political, economic and spiritual life of the federal state, mean that it is also of paramount importance as a language of instruction and study.

At Adygeya State University [ASU], due emphasis is given to the study of both Russian and Adyghe. Language students can choose from the following combinations: "Philology with Russian language and literature", "Philology with journalism", "Philology with document management", "Adyghe language and literature with Russian language and literature", "Adyghe language and literature with cultural studies", "Adyghe language and literature with journalism", "Primary teacher training with Adyghe language and literature", "Primary teacher training with Russian language", "Pre-school teacher training and psychology with language and literature".

As well as Russian and Adyghe, students study subjects that reflect the specific national and regional features of the Republic of Adygeya, Kuban and other areas in southern Russia. These include: history of Adygeya, culture of the Adyghe, issues relating to the Kuban, Don and Tver Cossacks, ecology of Kuban, Circassian etiquette, ethno-pedagogy, decorative and applied arts of the peoples of southern Russia.

The university students and staff, and the people of Adygeya as a whole, have high hopes of the faculty of Adyghe philology and culture, which is the only university facility in the world tasked with exploring and finding ways of preserving and developing the ethnic, cultural and historical values of the Adyghe. The faculty staff have authored numerous textbooks for “national schools”, maintain close links with the Adyghe diaspora abroad, travel on ethnographic expeditions to Turkey and Jordan and teach the Adyghe language to Europeans studying the Caucasus.

This brings me to my second point: the efforts of the university’s top specialists in the humanities are squarely focused on improving the teaching of Russian language and literature. Through no fault of their own, students who attend mountain village schools tend to be less proficient in Russian and so require special professional attention. A proper grounding in the Russian language being essential if they are to go on to become successful specialists in Adyghe language, literature, culture studies, journalism, etc. Alongside the development of Adyghe language and literature, therefore, much attention is given at ASU to Russian language issues, which have particular relevance for socio-cultural integration in a context of bilingualism. The university regularly hosts conferences on the Russian language and its role in the socio-cultural and educational life of the Republic of Adygeya. In September 2004, the university hosted a session of the board of Moscow State University’s Teaching Methods Association on teaching Russian language and literature in a national region. The Association has granted accreditation to the Integrated Russian Language Programme, a textbook on the morphology of the Russian language (Parts 1 and 2), a dictionary of linguistic terms and other publications produced by members of the university’s teaching staff.

In recent years, ASU has become much more international in its outlook, developing strategic partnerships with William Paterson University (USA), Reinhardt College (USA), Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Université du Maine (France), Université Paris-Nanterre (Paris, France), Scuola IaD (Rome, Italy), Goldsmiths College (London, UK), Beijing University of Technology (China) and BRNO University (Czech Republic), among others.

Involving foreign teachers and specialists in the teaching process is an important part of our plans for the strategic development and modernisation of ASU’s research and

educational activities. This academic year, we have 5 teachers from the USA, France, German, Turkey and Jordan working alongside us. A co-operation agreement between the natural sciences faculty of ASU and the State Museum of Natural Sciences in Goerlitz (Germany) is operating successfully: a joint project “On the relationship between biodiversity and land use in the North Caucasus” is already under way and there are plans to set up a joint laboratory to study lichen and moss in Adygeya.

A key factor in the university’s efforts to expand its ties with research and educational institutions around the world and to utilise international experience to modernise its activities is co-operation with international and regional organisations (UNESCO, the European Commission), foreign foundations and programmes: Tempus, DAAD, the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundations Network), IREX, the British Council, etc. Every year the university hosts a presentation by foreign foundations and organisations (DAAD, IREX, the Goethe-Institut (Berlin)), where teachers and students can obtain detailed information and expert advice about educational and cultural programmes and how to apply.

In 2009 the university won TEMPUS funding for a major networking project entitled “Bachelor’s curriculum in Social Work” as part of a consortium of higher education institutions made up of Moscow Oblast State University, Kazan Academy of Social Education, ASU, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Université Paris-Nanterre (Paris, France), Scuola IaD (Rome, Italy), Goldsmiths College (London, UK). The funding for the project totalled over 1 million euros.

International co-operation has had a positive impact when it comes to updating the university’s educational programmes, adapting our teaching models and improving quality control. The “social work” courses developed as part of the TEMPUS project have helped to modernise the teaching process in the light of global developments in the social services sector, and facilitated the development of online courses for distance learning.

Active efforts are being made to encourage greater academic mobility among teachers and students. In the past 5 years, some 200 teachers and students from ASU have travelled abroad to take part in various types of training, placements and research work (USA, China, Germany, France, Portugal, Mexico, Thailand, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Lithuania, CIS). In 2008-2009 alone, 32 teachers and students received grants under international education and research programmes. The university arranges for students to attend international summer youth programmes. In 5 years, some 300 students have travelled abroad for this purpose. There has recently been an increase in the number of foreign students entering the university and we now have 70 or so students from Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Syria, Sudan,

Nigeria, Chad and the CIS. In 2008, a Russian language testing centre was set up in the university's Department of International Relations. The number of admissions to preparatory courses for foreigners rose to 63, enabling the university to open an international faculty. The faculty staff have been given in-service training in teaching Russian as a foreign language by the People's Friendship University of Russia, have attended an international seminar on the recognition of foreign qualifications and have taken part in a number of exhibitions and presentations on Russian education abroad.

**About the author:** Rashid Dumalichevich Khunagov, Vice-Chancellor of Adygeya State University, Doctor of Sociology, professor, Vice-President of the Union of Vice-Chancellors of Krasnodar Krai and the Republic of Adygeya, Vice-President of the Union of Vice-Chancellors of the Southern Federal District.