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**LOCUS OF CONTROL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL
ADAPTATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

511.03 – SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

ABSTRACT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE SUMMARY

AGIL	– Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, Latency (key functions of social systems in Parsons’ theory)
AMSSA	– Academic and Social Adaptation Assessment Questionnaire
CG	– Control Group
EG	– Experimental Group
ICEF	– Innovation for Cool Earth Forum
LC	– Locus of Control
SCD	– Social Contact Distance(s)
SD	– Social Distance
ULIM	– Free International University of Moldova

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

The relevance and importance of the topic derive from the increasing number of international students enrolled in higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova and the specific challenges they encounter in the process of academic and sociocultural integration. In the context of globalization and the internationalization of education—intensified by the dynamics of the Bologna Process and the transformations triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic—the issue of psychosocial adaptation has become increasingly significant. For example, during the period 2020–2023, a total of 2,445 young people from the Republic of Moldova chose to study in Italy, according to ICEF Monitor data [70]. In Romania, during the 2018–2019 academic year, approximately 10,700 students came from Moldova, representing about one-third of the total international student population [4]. At the same time, Moldovan universities have attracted an increasing number of students from Romania (51.7%), India (21.1%), Israel (10.3%), and Ukraine (7.5%) [1]. These students often face academic stress, language barriers, social discomfort, and challenges in adapting to local living conditions. As such, applied research and the development of psychological support services become essential for their effective integration into academic and social communities [81].

Framing the research topic within international, national, regional, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary concerns; overview of previous research findings. The analysis of the topic's positioning within the international and interdisciplinary context reveals that adaptation has become a central theme in global research, closely linked to rapid transformations such as migration, digitalization, climate change, and health crises [50]. The concept is approached from biological, psychological, sociological, and educational perspectives, evolving into an object of inter- and transdisciplinary research. In psychology, foundational works by Berry [18] on the acculturation model, Lazarus [41] on stress and coping, Taylor [69], and Luhmann [45] have established key theoretical benchmarks. In the Republic of Moldova, studies conducted by Cerlat [2], Paladi [6], Puzur [8], and Rusnac [9, 10] have significantly advanced the understanding of this issue in educational and intercultural contexts.

Psychosocial adaptation of international students is currently analyzed as a dual process, involving both integration into a new culture and adjustment to academic demands. This transition generates cognitive, affective, and behavioral challenges, influenced by cultural barriers, institutional differences, and identity crises. International students become carriers of "active cultural mobility," and misunderstanding the host country's cultural specificities can significantly impact their educational trajectory [15, 29, 43, 63].

Another key factor in psychosocial adaptation is the locus of control, which influences how individuals perceive control over their own lives. The concept introduced by Rotter [62] was later developed by Phares [58], Ducette & Wolk [30], Ray [59], and Paladi [6], and has been correlated with academic performance in the research of Black [21], Elliott [31], Findley & Cooper [34], Seipel [65], and Wheelless, Erickson & Segars Behrens [73]. In the context of international students, studies by Anderson & Hamilton [16], Krampen & Wieberg [40], Park & Kim [55], Sheldon [66], and Wolfgang & Weiss [74] have emphasized the relationship between locus of control, social integration, and academic success. Consequently, the specialized

literature provides a solid theoretical foundation for the present research, underlining the need for tailored and effective psychosocial interventions to support the complex adaptation process of international students.

Description of the Research Context and Identification of the Scientific Problem. In recent decades, the internationalization of higher education has led to a significant increase in academic mobility, shaping a dynamic educational environment in which an increasing number of young people choose to study in cultural and social contexts different from their country of origin. This trend is also evident in the Republic of Moldova, where the number of international students is continuously growing, drawing attention to the need for an in-depth analysis of their psychosocial adaptation process. Integration into a new academic setting entails multiple challenges that go beyond educational requirements, involving the management of cultural differences, the establishment of new social relationships, adjustment to unfamiliar norms and values, as well as the confrontation with stress arising from change and potential forms of social isolation.

The specialized literature reveals that the adaptation of international students is influenced by a series of psychosocial factors, among which the **locus of control** stands out as an individual variable reflecting the perceived source of responsibility for life events, and **social distance** as an indicator of the degree of accepted proximity to individuals and groups from the host society. Although these dimensions have been investigated in international studies, in the context of the Republic of Moldova, research addressing the interrelation between psychosocial adaptation, locus of control, and social contact distances remains scarce. This gap justifies the scientific approach of the present dissertation, which aims to identify the conditions, resources, and challenges that shape the adaptation process of international students, in order to design and validate an effective psychosocial intervention program.

Research Problem. Based on the analysis of the situation of international students in the Republic of Moldova and the findings of previous research, the scientific problem was formulated around two central questions: *In a new sociocultural and academic environment that poses significant challenges for international students, what is the relationship between psychosocial adaptation, locus of control, and social contact distances? How can effective strategies be identified and implemented to support international students in their adaptation process, considering the resources and difficulties they may encounter in their new learning and life experience?*

Aim of the Research. The aim of the research is to investigate and evaluate the level of psychosocial adaptation of international students studying in the Republic of Moldova, in relation to their locus of control and social contact distances. The study further aims to develop and implement a psychosocial intervention program designed to enhance the quality of students' adaptation to the new sociocultural environment and academic demands.

Research Objectives: 1) to analyze and synthesize relevant theories and paradigms from the scientific literature in order to identify and understand the complex relationships between psychosocial adaptation and locus of control among international students, considering the key factors involved in the adaptation process; 2) to conduct an empirical investigation into the psychosocial adaptation of international students studying in the Republic of Moldova, with a focus on assessing

the influence of locus of control and social contact distances on their adaptation; 3) to develop, implement, and evaluate a psychosocial intervention program tailored to the needs and demands of international students, with the aim of improving the quality of adaptation to academic requirements and to the new sociocultural environment in the Republic of Moldova; 4) to formulate recommendations for the development and implementation of specialized support services to facilitate the psychosocial adaptation of international students in the Republic of Moldova, based on research findings and a deep understanding of the role of locus of control in the adaptation process.

Research Hypothesis. It is hypothesized that, in the process of psychosocial adaptation, international students pursuing studies in the Republic of Moldova experience difficulties in navigating the new sociocultural environment and responding to academic demands. These challenges, influenced by the students' locus of control and reflected in their social contact distances, may be overcome through support offered by university structures and through participation in dedicated psychosocial intervention programs.

Research Methodology. The scientific methodology of this research was grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, integrating concepts from social psychology, ethnopsychology, intercultural psychology, personality psychology, and educational psychology. Both theoretical methods (bibliographic analysis) and applied methods (questionnaires, scales, semi-structured interviews) were used to examine the relationship between locus of control, social contact distances, and the psychosocial adaptation of international students.

The applied instruments included the AMSSA Questionnaire (Measuring Adaptation to Social and Academic Environment), Rotter's Locus of Control Scale, the Bogardus Social Distance Scale, and the interview "What helps and what hinders my adaptation?". Data analysis was performed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods (Student's t-test, Pearson's correlation, Mann-Whitney U test, Wilcoxon test), supplemented by qualitative and comparative interpretations. This integrated approach enabled the identification of key determinants of adaptation and the formulation of applicable recommendations to support international students.

The Obtained Results, Contributing to the Resolution of an Important Scientific Problem. The research results that contribute to addressing the identified scientific problem include the identification of specific features of the psychosocial adaptation of international students, highlighting the role of locus of control and social contact distances. The study also revealed the personal resources and adaptation difficulties experienced by students, based on which a psychosocial intervention program was designed, implemented, and evaluated. The program's effectiveness was demonstrated through group application and its alignment with the specific characteristics of student adaptation to the new sociocultural environment and academic demands.

Scientific Novelty and Originality of the Results. The scientific novelty and originality of the results lie in the development and validation of a conceptual model of the psychosocial adaptation of international students, encompassing both definition and experimental verification. The research substantiates the importance of implementing a psychosocial intervention program tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of this population.

Theoretical Significance of the Research. The research proposes an original model of psychosocial adaptation in international students, focused on their ability to meet sociocultural needs and adjust to academic demands within the university environment. This model integrates two critical variables—locus of control and social contact distances—and emphasizes their role in the adaptation process.

Practical Value of the Research. The practical significance of the study consists in identifying the specific characteristics of psychosocial adaptation among international students in the Republic of Moldova, and in designing a structured psychosocial intervention program focused on professional, cultural, personal development and sociocultural adaptation. The program is based on the mobilization of personal resources and the management of adaptation-related challenges and can serve as a methodological foundation for university support services aimed at facilitating the academic and social integration of international students.

Approval and Implementation of Scientific Results. The obtained results were presented and discussed at several national and international scientific events. Both the theoretical and applied outcomes of this research have been disseminated through 12 scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings.

Publications Related to the Thesis. The findings have been presented at the meetings of the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences at ULIM and at 7 national and international scientific events, and are reflected in 14 academic publications.

Thesis Volume and Structure. The thesis consists of an abstract (in Romanian, Russian, and English), an introduction, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, a bibliography comprising 284 references, 4 appendices, 36 figures, and 19 tables. The main text of the thesis covers 140 pages.

Keywords: psychosocial adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, academic adaptation, adaptation resources, adaptation difficulties, locus of control, social contact distance, psychosocial intervention program.

THESIS CONTENT

The thesis is structured in accordance with the standards of contemporary scientific research, integrating a solid theoretical foundation, a rigorous empirical component, and relevant practical recommendations.

The Introduction outlines the relevance and importance of the selected topic, emphasizing its significance in the context of educational internationalization and the challenges of intercultural integration. The research problem, hypothesis, aim, and objectives are clearly defined, along with a synthesis of the methodology and a justification of the methods used. Additionally, the introduction provides a concise overview of the thesis structure, facilitating a better understanding of the internal logic of the study.

Chapter 1, titled Theoretical Approach to the Relationship between Psychosocial Adaptation, Locus of Control, and Social Contact Distances in International Students, conceptually anchors the research and provides a critical analysis of the literature on psychosocial adaptation in intercultural educational contexts. Adaptation is explored as the interplay of psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, with a focus on their interaction in the integration process of international

students into the host society. Special attention is paid to the role of locus of control—a stable cognitive structure that influences individuals’ perceptions of responsibility for life events—and social contact distances, as an expression of perceived closeness to members of other cultures. Both constructs are examined in relation to social integration, academic performance, and the well-being of international students.

The first subchapter, The Concept of Adaptation in Psychological Paradigms, presents an analytical reconstruction of the adaptation concept across key psychological schools of thought. Within the behaviorist paradigm, adaptation is conceptualized as the result of operant conditioning, reinforced through the selection of behaviorally advantageous outcomes [67]. The neobehaviorist approach, through Bandura’s model, emphasizes self-efficacy and self-regulation in the face of challenges [17].

The psychoanalytic perspective interprets adaptation as a balance between internal drives and external demands, with the classic distinction between autoplasic and alloplastic adaptation (Freud, Ferenczi), enriched by Hartmann’s concept of ego autonomy [54]. Erikson expands this framework by placing adaptation within the lifelong development of identity [32].

In cognitive psychology, adaptation is framed as an interplay between assimilation and accommodation [7], and as a response to stress, mediated by cognitive appraisals and coping mechanisms [42, 69]. These perspectives highlight the individual’s active role in processing stressful events and in mobilizing cognitive resources for adaptive regulation.

Humanistic approaches define adaptation in terms of self-actualization, congruence, and integration of the self [14, 48, 60], emphasizing personal values and psychological maturation. Adler’s theory [12] introduces the notion of social interest and the community-oriented meaning of adaptive behavior.

The chapter also explores symbolic interactionism, which conceptualizes adaptation as the result of reciprocal adjustments within social interactions and the dynamic relationship between individual and context [25, 69].

Through this critical synthesis, the chapter demonstrates the complex and multidimensional nature of adaptation, integrating complementary perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of how individuals respond to change, uncertainty, and social pressures—particularly in intercultural and academic settings.

Subchapter 1.2 – Theoretical Perspectives on Psychological, Social, and Psychosocial Adaptation aims to conceptually clarify and differentiate between psychological, social, and psychosocial adaptation, by integrating key theoretical contributions from the specialized literature. Psychological adaptation was examined as a dynamic equilibrium between internal demands and external pressures, highlighting the process’s complexity, lifelong continuity, and the role of cognitive and emotional flexibility in responding to change [51].

It was found that the psychological paradigm of adaptation encompasses both cognitive elements—such as information processing and decision-making [33]—and affective, spiritual, and relational dimensions, thus transcending biologically reductionist interpretations [36]. Adaptation was portrayed as an active process of internal reorganization and interaction, through which the individual both responds to and shapes the environment [39].

Social adaptation was defined as the process of integrating and being recognized as a member of a social group, evaluated through the degree of alignment between individual behavior and societal expectations. Emphasis was placed on social functions and socio-affective components in achieving adaptive success, as well as the influence of personality structure in managing challenges [24]. Parsons' AGIL model [57] was integrated to illustrate the adaptive functioning of social systems as an interdependent and cyclical process.

With regard to psychosocial adaptation, it was analyzed as a complex interaction between psychological and social factors. The contribution of explanatory models such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological model [23] was emphasized, demonstrating the bidirectional influences of the environment on the individual. Psychosocial adaptation was conceptualized as a process of balancing personal identity maintenance with openness to new cultural norms and values [26]. Core attributes of this form of adaptation—change, continuity, and interaction—were analyzed, alongside the distinction between adaptation and adjustment [28].

In conclusion, psychosocial adaptation is not merely a passive response to environmental pressures, but an active, holistic process with formative and transformative value, essential for the successful integration of individuals into a continuously evolving social environment. This theoretical framework provides a solid foundation for understanding the adaptation processes of international students.

Theoretical and Practical Approaches to the Psychosocial Adaptation of International Students. This subchapter provides a systematic analysis of the psychosocial adaptation process of international students by identifying the main challenges, resources, and explanatory variables relevant to their integration into new academic and sociocultural environments. Psychosocial adaptation is outlined as a critical stage in the academic trajectory, shaped by intercultural, educational, and personal factors, with direct consequences for students' well-being and academic performance [49].

The theoretical analysis integrates major explanatory models, particularly Berry's acculturation model [18], which distinguishes four acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization), and the process-oriented model developed by Ward and Geeraert [71], which emphasizes adaptation dynamics as influenced by stress levels, cultural distance, and social support resources. These conceptual frameworks support the interpretation of adaptation as an evolving process with multiple influences, operating across three levels of analysis: microsocial (interpersonal relationships and immediate support), mesosocial (institutional and cultural interactions), and macrosocial (integration into the host country's social systems and value structures).

The essential role of intercultural communication and language proficiency is highlighted in facilitating both academic and social relationships, reducing cultural distance, and promoting inclusion. At the same time, acculturative stress is examined as an emotional and cognitive response to the challenges of cultural transition, shaped by linguistic barriers, social difficulties, and academic demands [19].

The adaptation process is marked by a complex dynamic, often accompanied by the phenomenon of "culture shock" [35, 46, 52], describing initial negative reactions to unfamiliar norms and values, typically followed by a gradual adjustment phase. This understanding is further enriched by studies on "reverse culture shock" [37], which

address the often-overlooked difficulties experienced by students reintegrating into their home culture after studying abroad.

Moreover, social support has been identified as a critical resource in the adaptation process, acting as a buffer against stress and a mediator between contextual challenges and personal coping capacities [27, 75]. Several individual predictors of adaptation are also discussed, including age, gender, language competence, and degree of connectedness with the local community—each exerting a differential impact on the success of adaptation [13, 20].

The literature advocates for a holistic approach to supporting psychosocial adaptation, combining institutional support measures, the development of intercultural competence, and personalized interventions tailored to the unique needs of each student. In conclusion, *the psychosocial adaptation of international students is defined as a dynamic and multifactorial process that involves the internalization of the host community's norms and values (sociocultural adaptation) and functional integration into the academic structure (academic adaptation), ultimately contributing to the achievement of personal and educational goals and the maintenance of psychological and social equilibrium.*

Subchapter 1.4 – Locus of Control and Social Distance in the Psychosocial Adaptation of International Students. This subchapter explores the relationship between international students' individual characteristics and the social conditions of integration within a new academic and cultural context. The concept of locus of control, introduced by Rotter (1966) [61], refers to an individual's perception of the source of control over life events. Students with an internal locus of control tend to attribute outcomes to their own actions, demonstrating personal responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and a greater capacity to adapt to academic and cultural demands [34, 55, 58]. By contrast, those with an external locus of control perceive life outcomes as governed by external forces—such as luck, fate, or the actions of others—and are more likely to face challenges in navigating intercultural and educational transitions.

In parallel, social distance, initially conceptualized by Park [56] and operationalized through Bogardus' Social Distance Scale [22], reflects the degree of acceptance or rejection individuals express toward members of different social groups. In the context of international students' adaptation, social distance captures their perceived readiness for closeness or affiliation with members of the host community. Empirical studies have shown that greater social distance may intensify acculturative stress, contribute to feelings of isolation, and undermine motivation and academic engagement [53, 62, 64].

Both variables are sensitive to cultural influences. For example, in collectivist cultures (e.g., Southeast Asia), an external locus of control is more socially accepted and even valued [47], whereas individualist cultures (e.g., the United States or the United Kingdom) emphasize internal control and personal autonomy. These cultural orientations directly affect not only perceptions of control over life events but also the ability to form meaningful social relationships in a new cultural environment.

This chapter highlights that psychosocial adaptation among international students results from the complex interaction between individual traits—such as locus of control—and social variables, such as social distance. Students with an internal locus are generally more engaged, display higher tolerance for ambiguity, and adapt

more effectively on emotional and cognitive levels. In contrast, those with an external locus are more vulnerable to the stress of cultural transition and benefit from structured interventions and tailored psychosocial support.

Additionally, lower social distance is positively correlated with cultural inclusion, the development of intercultural competencies, and academic performance, while higher social distance reflects limited integration and greater acculturative challenges.

Therefore, analyzing these two dimensions—locus of control and social distance—through an integrative framework provides valuable insights for designing differentiated support strategies for international students. These strategies should aim to strengthen personal resources while reducing cultural and institutional barriers that may hinder the psychosocial adaptation process.

Chapter 2 – Dimensions of the Psychosocial Adaptation of International Students and the Influence of Locus of Control and Social Distance: Exploratory Research. The purpose of this chapter was to identify the specific characteristics of international students' psychosocial adaptation in relation to academic demands and the sociocultural environment of the host country, considering the interaction between two essential psychosocial variables: locus of control and social distance. Locus of control is approached in this research as a stable personality trait that shapes the individual's perception of responsibility over life events, thus influencing the level of engagement in the adaptation process. Social distance reflects openness or reluctance in interactions with members of other cultural groups, directly impacting the quality of social and intercultural integration.

Subchapter 2.1 – Organization of the Exploratory Research: Materials and Methods outlines the conceptual and methodological structure of the study. The research had the following main objectives: (1) To develop a theoretical model reflecting the interaction among locus of control, social distance, and the level of psychosocial adaptation (with its sociocultural and academic dimensions); (2) To select a balanced sample of international and domestic students, drawn from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, and equally distributed by gender, year of study, and academic faculty; (3) To identify the relationships between the investigated variables and the predictive factors of adaptation through the application of rigorous statistical procedures.

The research model was built using the following: 1) *dependent variables*: psychosocial adaptation, locus of control, and social distance; 2) *independent variables*: country of origin, gender, year of study, and faculty.

Based on this model, five hypotheses were formulated: (1) international students exhibit a lower level of psychosocial adaptation compared to domestic students; (2) they show a stronger tendency toward an external locus of control; (3) they express greater social distance from members of other cultural groups; (4) there is an inverse relationship between internal locus of control and social distance; (5) internal locus of control and reduced social distance are associated with higher levels of psychosocial adaptation.

To test these hypotheses, three validated instruments were used: (1) AMSSA Questionnaire, based on U. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which assesses adaptation at: macrosocial level (sociocommunicative interaction, ecosocial and economic integration), mezosocial level (relationships with colleagues, relatives, and faculty members), microsocial level (self-assessment, professional orientation, time

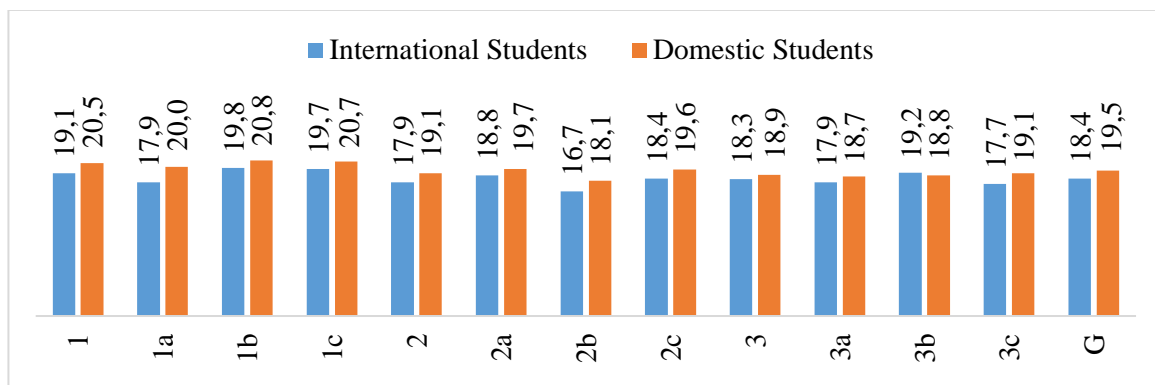
management); reliability: $\alpha = 0.812$; (2) Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966), consisting of 29 pairs of statements assessing perceived control over life events; reliability: $\alpha = 0.734$; (3) Bogardus Social Distance Scale, adapted for the Moldovan context, measuring degrees of acceptance or rejection in intercultural relations; reliability: $\alpha = 0.704$.

Data analysis employed appropriate statistical methods: t-Student test for comparing means between independent groups, Tukey test for multiple comparisons, Pearson correlation coefficient to analyze relationships among the core variables.

The research sample included 319 students from the Free International University of Moldova, of whom 159 were international students and 160 were domestic students, aged between 18 and 35 years (mean age: 21.5 years). International students came from Romania, Ukraine, Israel, Turkey, Congo, South Korea, and China. The distribution by year of study and academic faculty was balanced, ensuring a diverse and representative academic population. The study was conducted over a period of four years, allowing for the accumulation of a substantial dataset and rigorous hypothesis testing.

Subchapter 2.2 – Specific Features of the Psychosocial Adaptation of International Students examines the statistically significant differences between international and domestic students regarding their level of psychosocial adaptation, based on the scores obtained using the AMSSA Questionnaire. *The working hypothesis—that international students display lower levels of adaptation, particularly in the sociocultural dimension, compared to domestic students—was confirmed through statistical data analysis.*

Overall results show a lower global mean score for international students ($M=18.4$) compared to domestic students ($M=19.5$), a statistically significant difference ($p=0.001$), indicating a generally lower level of adaptation to academic and social environments (Fig. 1).



Explanatory Note. Macrosocial adaptation: 1a. Satisfaction of sociocommunicative needs; 1b. Satisfaction of ecosocial needs; 1c. Satisfaction of socioeconomic needs; Mezosocial adaptation: 2a. Communication with friends and relatives; 2b. Communication with university peers; 2c. Communication with faculty; Microsocial adaptation: 3a. Professional identity; 3b. Professional development; 3c. Personal time management; G – Total score for psychosocial adaptation

Figure 1. Mean AMSSA scores compared for international and domestic students

At the macrosocial level, the most pronounced discrepancies were observed. International students reported lower scores in sociocommunicative needs satisfaction ($M=17.9$ vs. $M=20.0$, $p<0.001$), ecosocial integration ($M=19.8$ vs. $M=20.8$, $p=0.001$), and socioeconomic adjustment ($M=19.7$ vs. $M=20.7$, $p=0.007$). These findings

highlight persistent difficulties in everyday life integration, access to services, and adjustment to the urban infrastructure.

The mezosocial dimension also revealed significant differences. Regarding communication with university peers, international students scored $M=16.7$ compared to $M=18.2$ for domestic students ($p<0.001$), indicating more difficulty in social integration. Communication with faculty ($M=18.1$ vs. $M=19.3$) and with friends/family ($M=18.8$ vs. $M=19.7$) was also weaker among international students, underscoring the impact of cultural and language barriers. The overall score for this dimension was $M=18.1$ for international students versus $M=19.3$ for domestic students ($p<0.001$).

At the microsocial level, differences were less pronounced. Interestingly, international students scored slightly higher on professional identity ($M=19.1$ vs. $M=18.8$, $p=0.050$), suggesting a clearer intrinsic motivation and more conscious career orientation. However, in terms of professional development ($M=18.7$ vs. $M=19.2$) and personal time management ($M=19.1$ vs. $M=19.5$), domestic students maintained a slight advantage.

Gender-based differences revealed better adaptation among female students compared to their male counterparts. Women achieved higher scores at all three levels—macrosocial ($M=19.3$ vs. $M=18.1$), mezosocial ($M=17.2$ vs. $M=17.5$), and microsocial—culminating in an overall score of $M=19.9$ compared to $M=18.8$ for men. Nonetheless, in direct academic interaction, male students recorded slightly higher scores, suggesting more active social engagement in specific interpersonal contexts.

The evolution of adaptation by year of study shows a generally positive but uneven trend. Scores increase progressively from year I to year II, indicating consolidation of adaptation; however, in year III, declines are observed—particularly in time management and personal balance. For example, sociocommunicative adaptation scores increased from $M=15.8$ in year I to $M=21.9$ in year III ($p<0.01$), while personal time management peaked in year II, followed by a significant decrease in year III ($p<0.01$), suggesting academic overload and accumulated stress.

In conclusion, this subchapter highlights that psychosocial adaptation among international students is a gradual and differentiated process, affected by cultural context, prior experience, and personal resources. The macrosocial and mezosocial dimensions prove to be the most vulnerable and call for sustained institutional interventions. At the microsocial level, personal engagement and clarity of career goals appear to act as protective factors. The results underscore the need for differentiated support strategies tailored not only to international student status, but also to gender, year of study, and academic discipline.

Subchapter 2.3 – Locus of Control and Social Distance: A Comparative Analysis of International and Domestic Students seeks to investigate how individuals' perceived control over life events (locus of control) and their level of social proximity toward other cultural groups (social distance) differ between international and domestic students, in relation to psychosocial adaptation processes.

The comparative analysis of locus of control, conceptualized as an individual's perception of the source of responsibility for life events—either internal (self-attributed) or external (attributed to circumstances or others)—revealed relevant variations between the two student categories. Of the total 319 respondents, 57.1% demonstrated an internal orientation, while 42.9% were externally oriented. A more

detailed breakdown showed that 41.4% of students were internally oriented (internalists), 46.1% exhibited a mixed profile, and 12.5% demonstrated a strongly external locus of control (externalists).

The differences between international and domestic students are notable. Domestic students showed a higher prevalence of internality (47.5%) compared to international students (32.7%). Conversely, the proportion of international students with an external orientation (22.6%) was significantly higher than that of domestic students (6.2%). This distribution confirms the general trend identified in the literature, where internality is more commonly associated with individualistic cultures, while external orientations are more prevalent in collectivist societies [47, 61].

Country-specific distributions partially support this trend. Students from South Korea (45.5% externalists) and China (25%) showed a marked preference for external control, whereas students from Turkey (7.1% externalists) and Romania displayed a stronger internal orientation. However, statistical analysis (ANOVA and Tukey HSD tests) revealed no significant differences between cultural groups ($p > 0.5$), suggesting that although cultural factors influence locus of control, their effects are neither uniform nor robust enough to produce statistically significant group-level differences.

Figure 2 (Average Indices of Locus of Control) illustrates these moderate variations, with relatively close mean scores across cultural groups: Republic of Moldova (M=12.5 internal / M=10.5 external), Romania (11.9 / 11.1), Ukraine (11.5 / 11.5), Israel (12 / 11), Turkey (12.1 / 10.9), Congo (12.3 / 10.7), South Korea (11.9 / 11.1), and China (13 / 10).

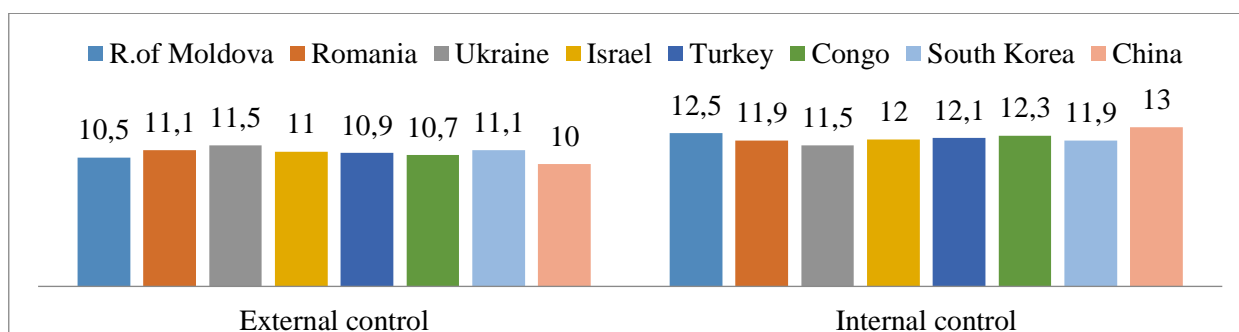


Figure 2. Average Locus of Control Indices by Country

The evolution of locus orientation by academic year indicates a gradual consolidation of internal control among international students, particularly in years II and III. This progression can be explained by the accumulation of successful academic and intercultural experiences. The differences between first-year students and those in higher years are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), indicating the progressive development of autonomy and personal responsibility. No significant differences were found based on gender or field of study.

The finding that nearly half of the students exhibit a mixed locus of control suggests a balanced profile, where perceptions of control are nuanced and shaped by the interaction between internal factors (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy) and external influences (e.g., social support, institutional structure).

The specialized literature offers a strong interpretative framework for these results. Internality correlates with values associated with Western cultures—autonomy, initiative,

and personal accountability—whereas externality is reinforced in cultural contexts that emphasize adherence to social norms, interdependence, and collective support [34, 47, 55, 58]. The identity crisis often associated with cultural transition can amplify perceptions of lost personal control, leading to a temporary shift toward an external locus.

Thus, locus of control emerges as a valuable psychological indicator for understanding how international students adapt to the academic and sociocultural demands of the host environment. While internal orientation prevails within the overall sample, cultural background, academic stage, and intercultural transition experiences shape students' perceptions of personal control. Understanding these trends provides the conceptual foundation for designing differentiated support interventions aimed at strengthening personal responsibility and reducing reliance on external factors during psychosocial adaptation.

In the continuation of this subchapter, the analysis focused on social distance (SD) among international and domestic students, measured using the Bogardus Social Distance Scale. This instrument assesses the degree of social acceptance by measuring the level of closeness or rejection in intercultural relations. The results revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups, supporting the hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) that international students exhibit a higher level of social distance compared to their domestic peers.

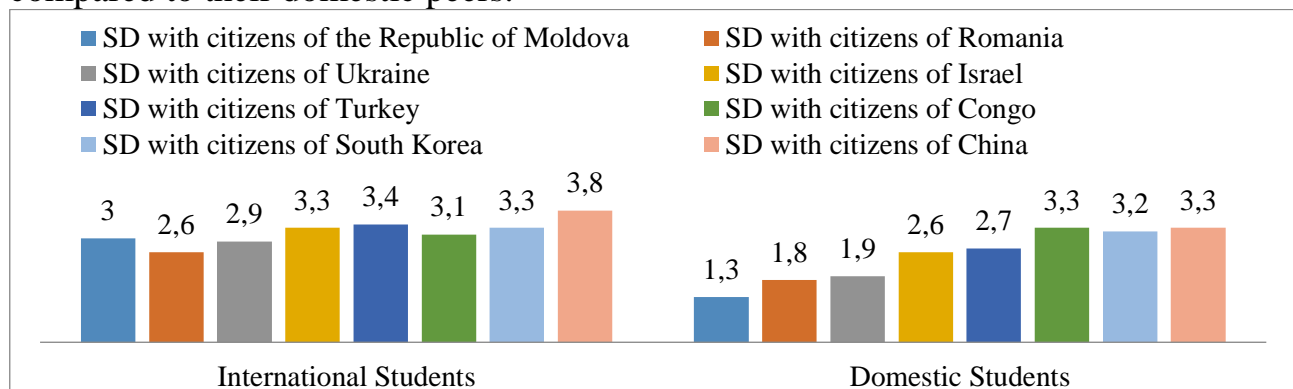


Figure 3. Average Social Distance Scores among International and Domestic Students

Figure 3 compares the mean social distance scores toward citizens of eight nationalities. Domestic students demonstrate significantly higher acceptance toward citizens of the Republic of Moldova ($M=1.3$), Romania ($M=1.8$), and Ukraine ($M=1.9$), while the scores for China, Israel, Congo, South Korea, and Turkey exceed the 3.0 threshold—indicating increased social distance. For international students, the distribution is more balanced, but overall scores remain higher, ranging from 2.6 to 3.8. The highest distance was registered toward Chinese citizens ($M=3.8$), while the lowest was toward Moldovan ($M=3.0$) and Ukrainian citizens ($M=2.6$).

The differences between the two groups are statistically significant for most nationalities ($p < 0.001$), with the exception of interactions with citizens from Korea, China, and Congo. These exceptions may reflect limited direct interaction or unfamiliarity with the respective cultures, leading to less differentiated responses. Gender was not found to significantly influence social distance, although female students showed a general tendency toward greater openness.

In contrast, the year of study had a substantial impact on social distance perception. Students in their second and third academic years reported significantly lower scores compared to first-year students ($p < 0.01$), particularly in relation to culturally distant groups such as Israel, China, Korea, Turkey, and Congo. This trend suggests a progressive adjustment to the intercultural environment, shaped by increased social exposure and accumulated experience.

The nationality-based analysis revealed meaningful variations. International students from Romania and Ukraine reported minimal social distance from their compatriots ($M=1.0$) and Moldovans, highlighting linguistic and cultural affinity. Conversely, students from Israel, China, Korea, and Congo indicated high closeness toward their own national groups but significant distance from others ($p < 0.001$). Reciprocal relationships between certain groups—such as China–Korea—were marked by low social distance, reflecting cultural familiarity and shared experiences.

These findings suggest that social distance is influenced by multiple factors, including degree of intercultural exposure, language proficiency, prior experiences, and cultural stereotypes. Personality traits such as extraversion and agreeableness facilitate interpersonal closeness, while cultural uncertainty and limited linguistic resources contribute to social distancing.

The exploration of the relationship between locus of control and social distance provided additional insights into adaptive mechanisms. Internal locus of control was significantly negatively correlated with social distance toward both host-country nationals ($r = -0.474$; $p < 0.05$) and compatriots ($r = -0.538$; $p < 0.01$), indicating that students who view themselves as responsible for their outcomes are also more open to forming intercultural relationships. In contrast, an external locus of control was negatively correlated only with social distance toward compatriots ($r = -0.413$; $p < 0.05$), suggesting a tendency to retreat and preserve a socially protected space in unfamiliar environments.

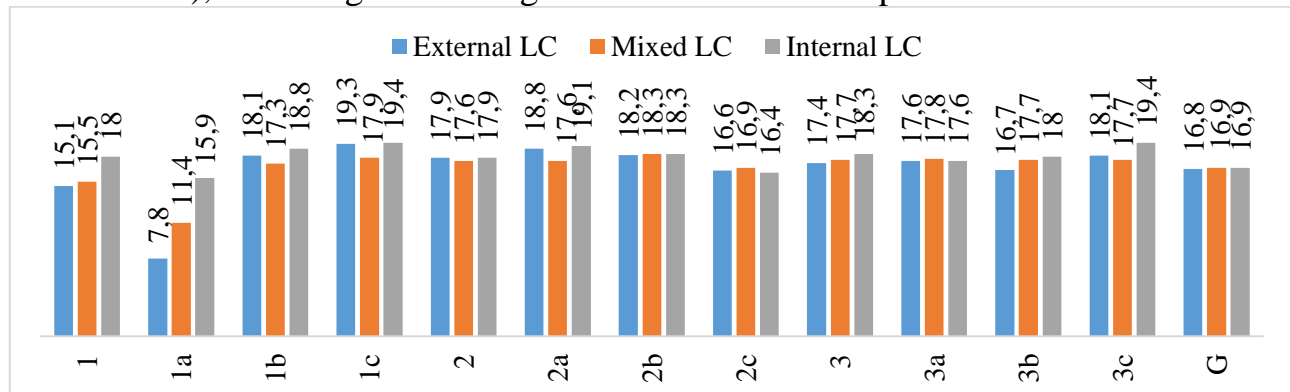
These findings refute Hypothesis 2, which anticipated a predominance of external locus of control among international students—the distribution was relatively balanced. Conversely, Hypothesis 4 is confirmed: an inverse correlation exists between internality and social distance. This suggests that personal responsibility perception contributes to greater social integration and intercultural openness.

In conclusion, this subchapter highlights the deep interconnection between individual traits—particularly locus of control—and the social adaptation strategies of international students. It outlines meaningful psychosocial profiles that can inform educational and counseling interventions. In this context, the development of institutional programs focused on reducing social distance, fostering intercultural competence, and strengthening internal locus of control is essential for promoting successful integration and well-being among international students.

Subchapter 2.4 – The Relationship Between International Students' Psychosocial Adaptation, Locus of Control, and Social Distance examines the interaction among three essential variables in the integration process within intercultural educational settings: psychosocial adaptation, locus of control, and social distance. The aim of this section is to highlight how personality structures and perceptions of closeness to host-country or foreign social groups influence the adaptive success of international students.

The analysis of mean scores on the AMSSA Questionnaire (Fig. 4) indicates meaningful differences based on locus of control. International students with an internal locus of control reported the highest levels of psychosocial adaptation ($M=20.7$), compared to those with a mixed locus ($M=19.6$) and external locus ($M=18.5$). Differences were particularly pronounced at the macrosocial level, notably in meeting sociocommunicative needs ($p<0.01$), ecosocial needs ($p=0.03$), and socioeconomic needs. Additionally, students with internality demonstrated better personal time management ($M=21.0$ vs. $M=19.4$ for those with an external locus), reflecting stronger self-regulation and prioritization of academic and personal tasks.

The correlational analysis (Pearson coefficients) supports these findings. Internality was positively and significantly associated with all dimensions of psychosocial adaptation: $r=0.744$ for socioeconomic needs, $r=0.856$ for mesosocial adaptation, $r=0.914$ for professional identification, and $r=0.984$ for overall adaptation score ($p<0.01$). In contrast, students with an external locus displayed significantly lower correlations ($r \approx 0.456\text{--}0.497$), indicating a more fragmented and modest adaptation.



Explanatory Note. Macrosocial adaptation: 1a. Satisfaction of sociocommunicative needs; 1b. Satisfaction of ecosocial needs; 1c. Satisfaction of socioeconomic needs; Mezosocial adaptation: 2a. Communication with friends and relatives; 2b. Communication with university peers; 2c. Communication with faculty; Microsocial adaptation: 3a. Professional identity; 3b. Professional development; 3c. Personal time management; G – Total score for psychosocial adaptation

Figure 4. Average AMSSA Scores of International Students According to Locus of Control

On the other hand, social distance (SD) also emerged as a complementary predictor of adaptation. Figure 5 illustrates the range of relationship types accepted by international students.

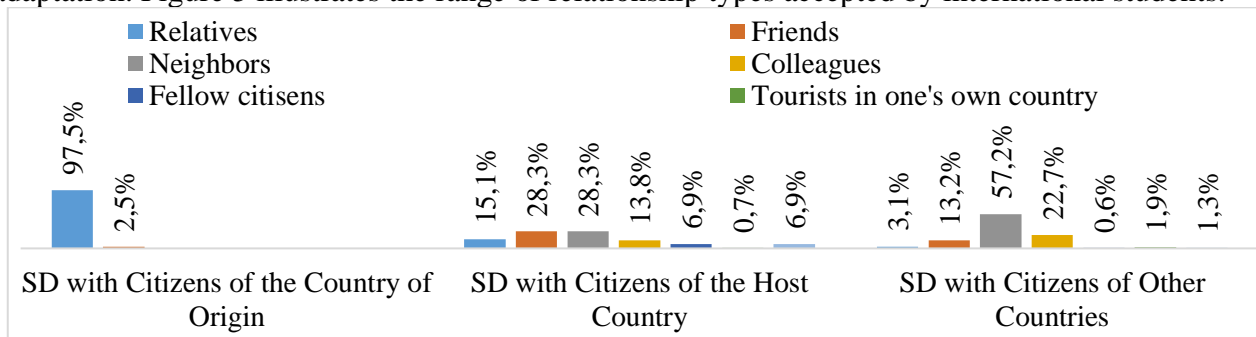


Figure 5. Diversity of Social Distances Expressed by International Students

Nearly 97.5% maintain close relationships with compatriots, whereas openness toward host-country citizens is more limited: only 15.1% accept marriage, 28.3% friendship, and 6.9% report distant interactions (e.g., as tourists). Relationships with

individuals from other countries are approached with caution—only 3.1% accept marriage, and 13.2% friendship.

Correlations between social distance and psychosocial adaptation confirm that relational openness significantly contributes to integration. Reduced social distances toward host-country citizens were positively associated with meeting sociocommunicative needs ($r=0.497$; $p=0.013$), ecosocial needs ($r=0.497$; $p=0.013$), socioeconomic needs ($r=0.488$; $p=0.018$), and macrosocial adaptation ($r=0.459$; $p=0.045$). Furthermore, closeness to university peers ($r=0.519$; $p=0.006$) and clarity in professional identification ($r=0.509$; $p=0.008$) were significantly correlated with improved adaptation.

In this context, *Hypothesis 5, which posited that an internal locus of control and reduced social distances positively correlate with effective psychosocial adaptation, is partially confirmed. International students exhibiting internality and intercultural openness scored higher across all adaptation dimensions, particularly in the microsocal and macrosocial spheres.* Social proximity to fellow internationals was not significantly correlated with adaptation ($p>0.05$), indicating that closeness to compatriots is not a strong predictor of successful academic integration in the host country.

In conclusion, the data from Chapter 2 indicate that international students' psychosocial adaptation is deeply influenced by their perceived control over life events and their openness to interaction with host-country social groups. Internality and social closeness function as key resources for maintaining personal balance and academic success. These findings support the development of educational and psychosocial interventions focused on strengthening autonomy, personal responsibility, and intercultural communication skills to facilitate the integration of international students into the Moldovan academic and social environment.

Chapter 3 – The Role of University Structures and the Impact of the Psychosocial Intervention Program on the Psychosocial Adaptation of International Students. This chapter focuses on evaluating the direct contribution of a structured psychosocial intervention program to the adaptation process of international students. It reflects the dynamics of adaptation in relation to academic demands and the new sociocultural context in the Republic of Moldova, based on both formative and control research conducted within a university setting. The analysis addresses the role of institutional support systems as well as the effects of a specific program designed to provide counseling and integration facilitation.

Subchapter 3.1 – Investigating the Dynamics of Adaptation to the New Sociocultural Environment and Academic Demands of International Students as a Basis for Designing the Psychosocial Intervention Program. This section provides the theoretical and practical foundation for developing the psychosocial intervention. The underlying premise of this initiative is that the psychosocial adaptation of international students encompasses two interdependent dimensions—**sociocultural** and **academic adaptation**—both of which are influenced by factors such as cultural distance from the host population, language barriers, lack of knowledge about the local education system, and challenges in establishing functional social networks.

The objective of the formative research was to design, implement, and validate a psychosocial intervention program aimed at improving the psychosocial adaptation of international students through the activation of personal resources and

the mitigation of integration barriers. The working hypothesis at this stage posited that such a program, structured around the sociocultural and academic components of adaptation, would generate a positive dynamic in adaptation levels, including a reduction in social contact distances with members of the host culture—an aspect deemed essential to successful integration.

The program was developed and implemented through four successive stages: (1) identifying the resources and challenges in the adaptation process; (2) designing the psychosocial intervention (based on initial findings); (3) implementing the intervention – consisting of 16 group counseling sessions and intercultural facilitation activities; (4) evaluating the program’s effectiveness through a control-group study and follow-up data analysis.

In the initial phase, a qualitative investigation was conducted using a semi-structured interview applied to a sample of 20 international students in their second year of residence in the Republic of Moldova. Inclusion criteria for the sample were: no prior international academic experience, lack of Romanian language proficiency upon arrival, status as undergraduate students, and participation in introductory Romanian language and culture courses.

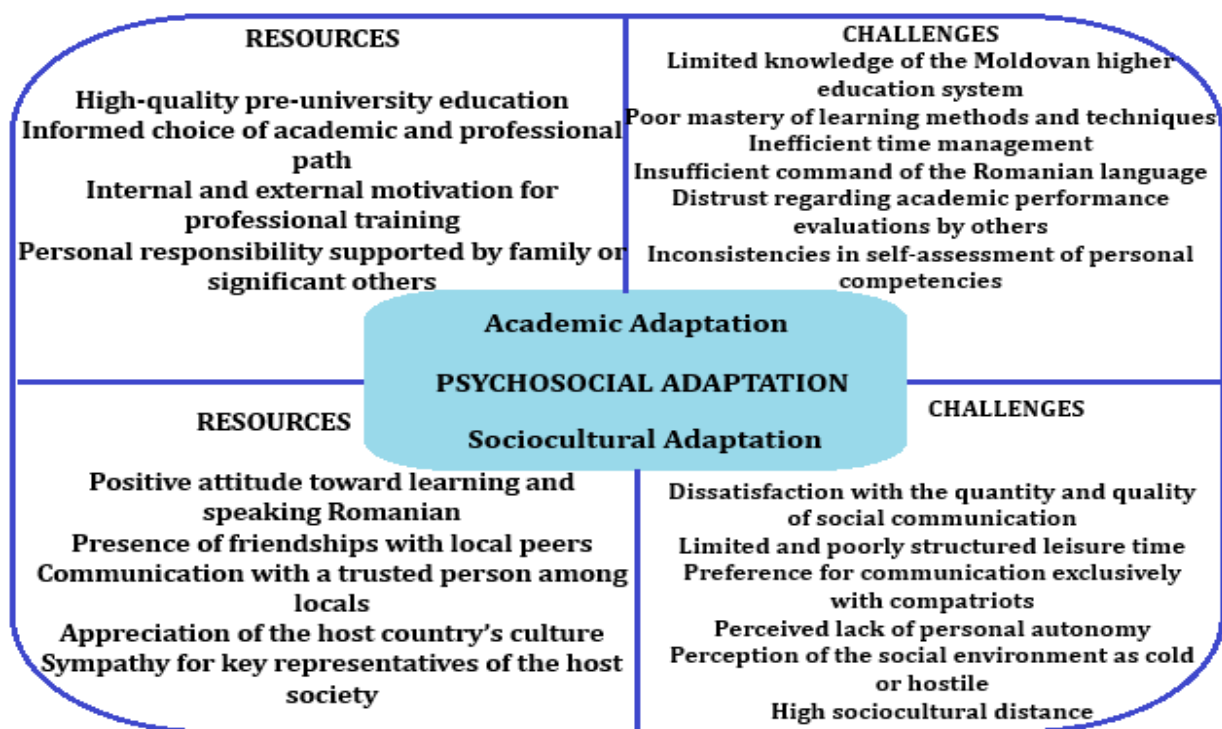


Figure 6. Resources and Challenges in the Psychosocial Adaptation of International Students

The interviews revealed a broad spectrum of adaptation difficulties: confusion regarding university system operations, persistent language barriers, poor time management for academic tasks, and social integration challenges such as feelings of exclusion, lack of emotional support, difficulty forming trust-based relationships, and accumulated exhaustion. At the same time, strong personal resources were identified, including intrinsic academic motivation, conscious commitment to educational choices, interest in personal development, and a sense of responsibility for one's own learning trajectory (see Figure 6).

These findings served as the starting point for the methodological and content design of the psychosocial intervention program, which is further detailed in the subsequent subchapters. The program was conceived as a complementary form of psychological and educational support, aimed not only at providing information and guidance, but also at developing adaptive and interpersonal skills within an intercultural context.

Subchapter 3.2 – Methodology and Design of the Psychosocial Intervention Program for Supporting the Psychosocial Adaptation of International Students to Academic Demands and the New Sociocultural Environment. This subchapter presents the conceptual, organizational, and methodological framework of the intervention program developed to support the adaptive transition of international students within the academic and social environment of the Republic of Moldova. The program is built on the conviction that effective psychosocial adaptation involves not only the acquisition of academic and social knowledge, but also the development of emotional self-regulation, autonomy, and intercultural communication skills.

Based on the findings of the preliminary study and the difficulties expressed by international students during qualitative interviews—such as language barriers, challenges in understanding the educational system, cultural uncertainty, and a lack of support networks—the program was structured around four core methodological components: (1) design of the intervention program, integrating empirical results and identified needs; (2) selection of methods and techniques aligned with the objectives of psychosocial development; (3) definition of organizational and ethical principles, in accordance with the values of non-directivity, empathy, and active participation; (4) evaluation of effectiveness, applying a quasi-experimental design with a control group and an experimental group.

The overall goal of the program was to strengthen students' individual adaptive resources and reduce integration difficulties in both academic and sociocultural domains, thus enhancing their psychosocial adaptation. The activities took place over 16 weekly sessions, from November 2018 to April 2019, followed by a follow-up session in October 2019 to assess the sustainability of the outcomes.

The thematic model (Fig. 7) was developed around four interrelated areas: (1) professional development – focused on providing information about the Moldovan higher education system, fostering academic collaboration, and validating students' learning experiences; (2) cultural development – aimed at cultivating curiosity about the host culture, familiarizing students with local traditions, and supporting Romanian language acquisition; (3) sociocultural adaptation – centered on expanding communication networks, identifying and functionally integrating the values and behavioral models of the host culture; (4) personal development – supporting self-reflection, internal resource identification, practice in self-presentation, and time-management skills.

The applied methodology combined interactive and expressive techniques, such as group exercises (brainstorming, simulations, role plays); narrative and reflective methods (guided storytelling, the “empty chair” technique); case studies and self-assessment tasks, all conducted within a participatory learning framework that emphasized emotional support and peer connection.

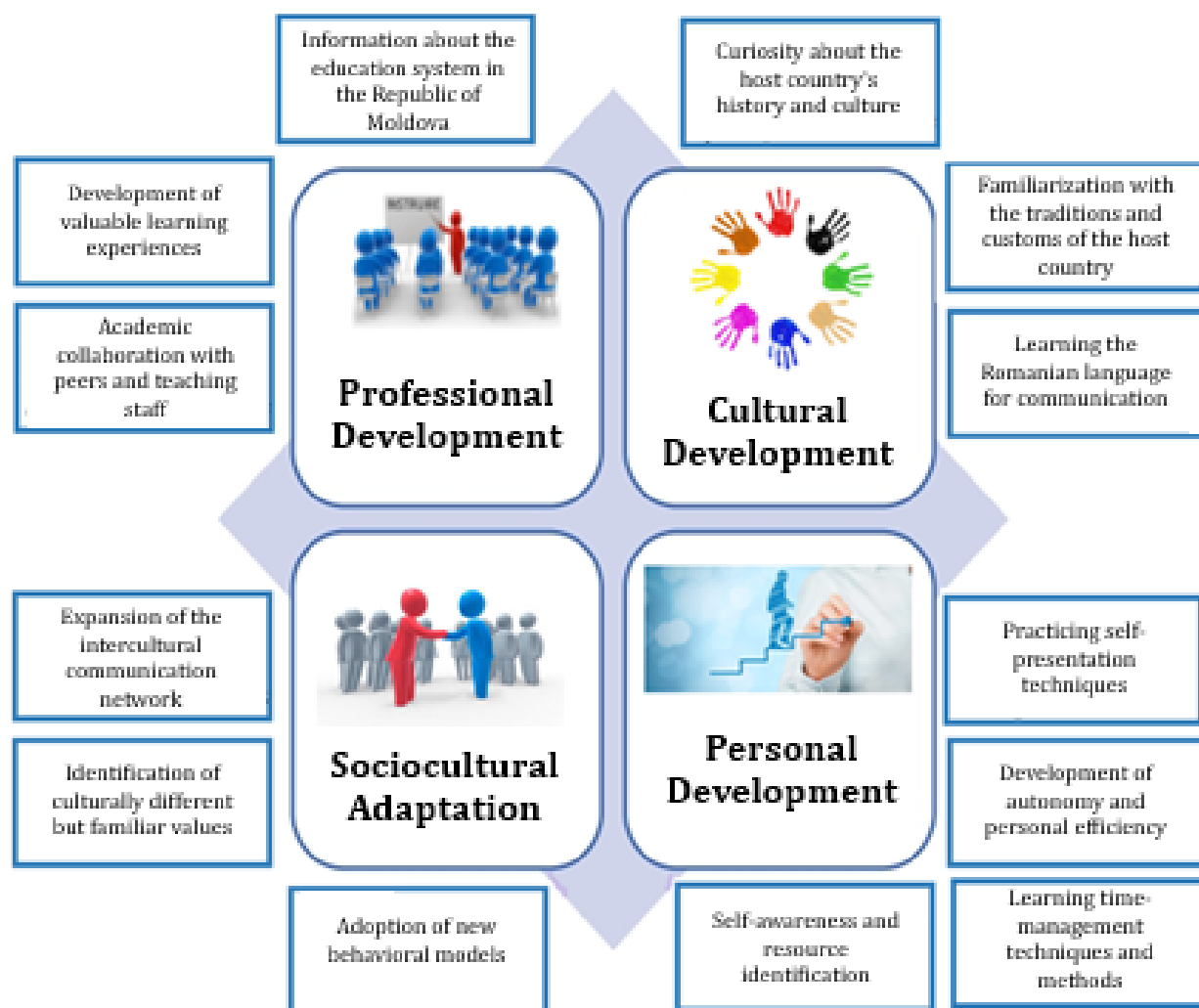


Figure 7. Thematic Model of the Psychosocial Intervention Program Based on Resources and Challenges Identified through Research

The evaluation instruments included: (1) The AMSSA Questionnaire – measuring adaptation across three socio-academic levels; (2) The Bogardus Social Distance Scale – assessing intercultural relationships; (3) The Rotter Locus of Control Scale – used both to ensure initial group homogeneity and to perform correlation analyses.

The two groups formed each included 10 international students from Israel, Congo, and Turkey, all enrolled in various faculties at ULIM. Initial evaluation results revealed low adaptation scores at the macrosocial level, with significant challenges in professional integration and time management. Furthermore, social distance scores reflected limited integration into the university community.

This stage laid the foundation for the subsequent evaluation of program effectiveness through a comparative analysis of score evolution between the groups and an assessment of the significance of observed changes. The results focused on the impact and sustainability of the psychosocial intervention program in supporting international students' adaptation in multicultural educational settings.

Subchapter 3.3 – Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Psychosocial Intervention Program. This section is dedicated to the comparative analysis of the impact of the implemented psychosocial intervention program on the experimental group (EG), compared to the dynamics observed in the control group (CG), using the

validated instruments from the initial assessment phase. The central objective was to examine the effectiveness of the intervention in optimizing the psychosocial adaptation of international students, with a focus on sociocultural and academic dimensions, as well as on reducing social distance toward members of the host society.

Evaluation of Social Distance. The data obtained through the administration of the Social Distance Scale (Bogardus) indicate a statistically significant reduction in perceived distance among international students in the experimental group. For instance, the scores regarding acceptance of Moldovan citizens decreased from an average of 3.4 (formal relationships) to 1.8 (close friendships), reflecting a substantial increase in intercultural openness. Similar statistically significant reductions ($p < 0.05$) were recorded for other nationalities, including Romania, Israel, China, and South Korea. In contrast, although slight improvements were observed in the control group, most did not reach the threshold of statistical significance.

Post-test comparisons between EG and CG revealed significant differences in perceived social distance toward citizens of Romania ($p = 0.022$), Israel ($p = 0.018$), and other countries ($p = 0.007$), suggesting that the intervention contributed to the reduction of intercultural barriers and facilitated social proximity. Detailed results are presented in Table 1, which summarizes the findings of the Wilcoxon and Mann-Whitney statistical tests.

Table 1. Statistical Comparison of Social Contact Distances Among International Students – Test-Retest in EG and Differences Between EG and CG in the Retest Phase

Citizenship	Z Wilcoxon	p Wilcoxon	U Mann-Whitney	Z Mann-Whitney	Asymptotic p	Exact p ^b
Republic of Moldova	-2.388	.017	48.000	-0.170	.865	.912 ^b
Romania	-2.401	.016	21.500	-2.297	.022	.029 ^b
Ukraine	-1.620	.105	44.000	-0.598	.550	.684 ^b
Israel	-1.826	.068	20.500	-2.362	.018	.023 ^b
Turkey	-1.000	.317	49.500	-0.041	.967	.971 ^b
Congo	-2.214	.027	37.500	-1.000	.317	.353 ^b
South Korea	-2.694	.007	29.000	-1.664	.096	.123 ^b
China	-2.692	.007	36.500	-1.055	.292	.315 ^b
Other countries	—	—	15.000	-2.686	.007	.007 ^b

Notes:

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test (test-retest, Experimental Group); Mann–Whitney U Test (EG–CG comparison in retest)

b. Exact significance: [$2 \times (1\text{-tailed Sig.})$], uncorrected for ties

Evaluation of Psychosocial Adaptation. To assess the quality of students' psychosocial adaptation, the AMSSA questionnaire was employed. Within the experimental group (EG), significant improvements were observed across all three levels analyzed—macrosocial, mesosocial, and microsocial. For instance, macrosocial adaptation increased from 12.2 to 17.4, and microsocial adaptation from 14.7 to 20.9, changes that were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). In contrast, the control group (CG) exhibited only modest improvements, with some dimensions showing no significant variation.

Table 2. Statistical Comparison of Psychosocial Adaptation Dimensions – Test–Retest in EG and Differences Between EG and CG at Post-Test

Dimensions / Indicators	Z Wilcoxon	p Wilcoxon	U Mann-Whitney	Z Mann-Whitney	Asymptotic p	Exact p ^b
1a. Satisfaction of sociocommunicative needs	-2.313	0.021	24.000	-2.073	0.038	.050 ^b
1b. Satisfaction of ecosocial needs	-2.502	0.012	24.000	-2.064	0.039	.050 ^b
1c. Satisfaction of socioeconomic needs	-2.818	0.005	47.000	-0.232	0.816	.853 ^b
1. Macrosocial adaptation	-2.820	0.005	25.500	-1.873	0.061	.063 ^b
2a. Communication with friends and family	-1.841	0.066	48.500	-0.115	0.908	.912 ^b
2b. Communication with university peers	-2.805	0.005	25.000	-1.923	0.055	.063 ^b
2c. Communication with academic staff	-2.095	0.036	18.000	-2.435	0.015	.015 ^b
2. Mesosocial adaptation	-2.601	0.009	19.000	-2.362	0.018	.019 ^b
3a. Professional identity formation	-2.810	0.005	40.500	-0.726	0.468	.481 ^b
3b. Professional training	-2.803	0.005	31.500	-1.418	0.156	.165 ^b
3c. Personal time management	-2.812	0.005	24.500	-1.954	0.051	.049 ^b
3. Microsocial adaptation	-2.807	0.005	26.500	-1.789	0.074	.075 ^b
G – Total psychosocial adaptation score	-2.803	0.005	18.500	-2.387	0.017	.015 ^b

Notes: a. Wilcoxon test: comparison of pretest–posttest in the experimental group (EG); b. Mann–Whitney test: comparison of posttest scores between EG and CG; Exact p-value: [2(1-tailed Sig.)], not corrected for ties

The analysis of differences between EG and CG in the post-test phase highlighted significant effects of the program on the following dimensions: satisfaction of sociocommunicative and ecosocial needs, communication with academic staff, and the total score for psychosocial adaptation. These findings support the hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of the intervention and are summarized in Table 2.

Follow-up Assessment Results. To assess the sustainability of change, a follow-up evaluation was conducted five months after the intervention concluded, focusing on the experimental group. Results indicated the maintenance of achieved progress, with score stabilization and even additional improvements in certain dimensions of psychosocial adaptation—especially in areas related to social relationships and self-regulation. This outcome confirms the durability of the effects and the methodological robustness of the implemented intervention.

Integrated Analysis of Results. The integrated analysis of the results demonstrates that group-based psychosocial interventions are an effective method for supporting the adaptation process of international students in multicultural educational contexts. Structured programs that develop social skills, reduce anxiety, support self-regulation, and foster positive intercultural interaction significantly contribute to successful integration and well-being. These findings provide a solid rationale for recommending the expansion and institutionalization of such programs within universities hosting international students.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In alignment with the topic, hypothesis, aim, and objectives of the thesis, the following conclusions were formulated, reflecting *the most important scientific findings obtained*.

1. The clarification of the concept of psychosocial adaptation among international students enabled the identification of its multidimensional and dynamic nature, expressed through integration into the values, norms, and demands of the host community (sociocultural adaptation), concurrently with adjustment to the local educational system (academic adaptation). Adaptation is significantly influenced by social capital and the initial socialization process (Subchapters 1.1–1.3) [82, 88, 89], as well as by factors such as language proficiency, communication styles, economic conditions, and intrapsychic factors like isolation, low self-esteem, and perceived lack of acceptance. Furthermore, locus of control emerged as a key predictor of adaptation, affecting the management of uncertainty and the degree of social closeness to members of the host culture (Subchapter 1.4) [80, 84], including through its association with social contact distance [79, 81, 86].

2. The comparative analysis of psychosocial adaptation levels between international and domestic students, based on the AMSSA questionnaire, confirmed significant difficulties among international students, particularly at the macrosocial level—concerning sociocommunicative, ecosocial, and socioeconomic needs—and partially at the mesosocial level, especially in communication with academic staff and peers (Subchapter 2.3) [76, 82]. By contrast, no significant differences were observed at the microsocial level, likely due to the presence of a clearly defined professional motivation. Locus of control correlates with both sociocultural integration and social contact distances [80, 84], while the students' cultural background substantially shapes the adaptive process [79, 81, 83, 86, 88].

3. The psychosocial intervention program, developed based on the results of the exploratory and diagnostic research (Subchapter 3.1) [76, 77, 82], was structured around four thematic axes: professional, cultural, personal development, and sociocultural adaptation. Group counseling activities contributed to reducing adaptation difficulties, activating personal resources, and strengthening social networks. Statistical analysis (test–retest) and follow-up evaluations confirmed the program's effectiveness in improving psychosocial adaptation among participants, with significantly better results compared to the control group. The program proved to be more effective than generic university initiatives, particularly because it emphasized active student engagement and adaptation to individual needs (Subchapter 3.3).

4. The research findings underpinned practical recommendations for the development of institutional support services for international students in Moldovan universities. These recommendations include: designing personalized psychosocial intervention programs; training academic staff in intercultural communication; developing tools for continuous monitoring of psychosocial adaptation; and diversifying the support provided through university counseling and orientation centers.

The confirmation of the research hypothesis highlights the fact that international students' psychosocial adaptation can be effectively supported through specialized interventions, which reduce social distances, strengthen academic

relationships, and foster balanced integration into the host culture. In this process, locus of control proves to be a crucial individual trait that can either enhance or limit students' ability to adapt in multicultural educational contexts.

Research limitations. The present study has certain methodological limitations, primarily related to the relatively small sample size and its specificity—namely, that it included only international students from a single higher education institution in the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, the generalization of findings to broader populations should be approached with caution. Furthermore, external events (such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflicts in Ukraine and Israel) restricted additional data collection, limiting the inclusion of new categories of students (e.g., from India) who arrived in Moldova during the research period. These constraints underscore the relevance and necessity of continuing investigations in this field, involving larger and more diverse samples across various institutional and cultural contexts.

Based on the results obtained, **practical recommendations** have been formulated at two levels: institutional and governmental.

At the institutional level, universities are advised to: (1) implement cultural, linguistic, and academic orientation programs for international students starting in the first semester; (2) integrate intercultural communication themes into both academic curricula and extracurricular activities (e.g., with tutors, in dormitories); (3) organize mentoring groups involving local students and senior international peers; (4) provide living accommodations that are sensitive to the spiritual and cultural needs of international students; (5) offer informational guides, educational materials, and cultural calendars; (6) continue and expand Romanian language courses beyond the preparatory year; (7) develop institutional policies specifically tailored for the recruitment and integration of international students.

At the governmental level, the following measures are proposed: (1) develop education and social policies focused on integration, including access to language courses, financial support, and inclusive environments; (2) facilitate the legal framework for visa issuance, residence permits, and diploma recognition; (3) promote academic mobility through bilateral and multilateral international agreements; (4) allocate scholarships and subsidies to support the financial needs of international students; (5) encourage intercultural dialogue and international academic cooperation.

Future research directions should aim to: broaden the sample to reflect greater cultural diversity; conduct longitudinal studies to track the psychosocial adaptation process throughout the full duration of university education; undertake qualitative research, such as case studies, to explore in depth the personal and contextual factors influencing adaptation; strengthen interdisciplinary collaborations to integrate linguistic, cultural, and educational dimensions in a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon.

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ADNOTARE

Khory Johnny. Locul controlului și adaptarea psihosocială a studenților internaționali.

Teză de doctor în psihologie, Chișinău, 2024

Structura tezei: introducere, trei capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie din 284 de titluri, 4 anexe, 140 de pagini de text de bază, 36 de figuri, 19 tabele. Rezultatele obținute sunt publicate în 14 lucrări științifice.

Cuvinte-cheie: adaptare psihosocială, adaptare socioculturală, adaptare academică, resurse ale adaptării, dificultăți de adaptare, locul controlului, distanțe de contact social, program de intervenție psihosocială.

Scopul lucrării constă în investigarea și evaluarea nivelului de adaptare psihosocială a studenților internaționali care studiază în Republica Moldova, în raport cu locul controlului și distanțele de contact social, cu elaborarea și implementarea ulterioară a unui program de intervenție psihosocială care să contribuie la îmbunătățirea calității adaptării la mediul sociocultural nou și la cerințele academice.

Obiectivele lucrării: analizarea și sintetizarea teoriilor și paradigmatelor relevante din literatura de specialitate pentru a identifica și a înțelege relațiile complexe dintre adaptarea psihosocială și locul controlului în rândul studenților internaționali, luând în considerare factorii implicați în procesul de adaptare; investigarea empirică a adaptării psihosociale a studenților internaționali care urmează studii în Republica Moldova, cu accent pe evaluarea influenței locului controlului și distanțelor de contact social asupra adaptării; dezvoltarea, implementarea și evaluarea unui program de intervenție psihosocială, în conformitate cu nevoile și cerințele studenților internaționali, cu scopul de a îmbunătăți calitatea adaptării la cerințele academice și la mediul sociocultural nou din Republica Moldova; elaborarea recomandărilor pentru dezvoltarea și implementarea unor servicii specializate destinate sprijinirii adaptării psihosociale a studenților internaționali în Republica Moldova, bazate pe rezultatele cercetării și pe înțelegerea profundă a impactului locului controlului asupra procesului de adaptare.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică constă în aprobarea unui model al adaptării psihosociale a studenților internaționali la nivel de conceptualizare – definire și verificare experimentală, argumentarea importanței programelor de intervenție în vederea adaptării fundamentate pe cunoașterea particularităților acestora.

Rezultatele obținute care contribuie la soluționarea problemei științifice importante constau în identificarea particularităților adaptării psihosociale a studenților internaționali cu identificarea rolului locului controlului și distanțelor de contact social, stabilirea resurselor și dificultăților de adaptare, în baza cărora a fost elaborat, aplicat și evaluat un program de intervenție psihosocială, eficiența căruia a fost determinată de aplicarea în grup și evidența specificului adaptării tinerilor la mediul sociocultural nou și solicitările academice.

Semnificația teoretică. Cercetarea propune un model al adaptării psihosociale a studenților internaționali, raportat la capacitatea de satisfacere a necesităților socioculturale și de adaptare la solicitările academice ale mediului universitar, corelat cu locul controlului și distanțele de contact social.

Valoarea aplicativă a cercetării constă în identificarea particularităților adaptării psihosociale a studenților internaționali din Republica Moldova, elaborarea și implementarea unui program de intervenție psihosocială orientat spre dezvoltarea profesională, culturală, personală și integrare socială, cu utilizarea resurselor și depășirea dificultăților de adaptare, care poate constitui drept bază metodologică pentru serviciile universitare implicate în integrarea socioculturală și academică a tinerilor veniți la studii de peste hotare.

Aprobarea și implementarea rezultatelor: rezultatele obținute au fost prezentate în cadrul ședințelor Catedrei Psihologie și Științe ale Educației, ULIM, la 7 manifestații științifice naționale și internaționale, reflectate în 14 publicații.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Khory Johnny. Локус контроля и психосоциальная адаптация международных студентов. Диссертация на соискание степени доктора психологии, Кишинэу, 2024

Структура диссертации: введение, три главы, общие выводы и рекомендации, библиография из 284 наименований, 4 приложения, 140 страниц основного текста, 36 рисунков, 19 таблиц. Полученные результаты опубликованы в 14 научных работах.

Ключевые слова: психосоциальная адаптация, социокультурная адаптация, академическая адаптация, ресурсы адаптации, трудности адаптации, локус контроля, социальные контактные дистанции, программа психосоциального вмешательства.

Цель научной работы заключается в исследовании и оценке уровня психосоциальной адаптации иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Республике Молдова, в зависимости от локуса контроля и социальных контактных дистанций, с последующей разработкой и реализацией программы психосоциального вмешательства, способствующей улучшению качества адаптации к новой социокультурной среде и академическим требованиям.

Задачи исследования: анализ и синтез актуальных теорий и парадигм в литературе по специальности для выявления и понимания сложных взаимосвязей между психосоциальной адаптацией и локусом контроля среди иностранных студентов, учитывая факторы, участвующие в процессе адаптации; эмпирическое исследование психосоциальной адаптации иностранных студентов, обучающихся в Республике Молдова, с акцентом на оценке влияния локуса контроля и социальных контактных дистанций; разработка, реализация и оценка программы психосоциального вмешательства в соответствии с потребностями и нуждами иностранных студентов с целью улучшения качества адаптации к академическим требованиям и новой социокультурной среде Республики Молдова; разработка рекомендаций для развития и реализации специализированных услуг, направленных на поддержку психосоциальной адаптации иностранных студентов в Республике Молдова, на основе результатов исследования и глубокого понимания влияния локуса контроля на процесс адаптации.

Новизна и научная оригинальность: заключаются в утверждении модели психосоциальной адаптации международных студентов на концептуальном уровне - определение и экспериментальная проверка, обоснование важности программ вмешательства для адаптации на основе знания ее особенностей.

Полученные результаты, способствующие решению важной научной проблемы состоят в выявлении особенностей психосоциальной адаптации международных студентов с учетом роли локуса контроля и социальных дистанций, определении персональных ресурсов и неэффективностей, на основе которых была разработана, применена и оценена программа вмешательства, эффективность которой была определена групповым применением и доказательством специфики адаптации молодежи к новой социокультурной среде и академическим требованиям.

Теоретическая значимость. Исследование предлагает модель психосоциальной адаптации международных студентов, связанную с удовлетворением социокультурных потребностей и адаптацией к академическим требованиям университетской среды, коррелированную с локусом контроля и социальными дистанциями.

Практическая значимость заключается в выявлении особенностей психосоциальной адаптации международных студентов в Республике Молдова и разработке программы психосоциального вмешательства, направленной на их профессиональное, культурное и личностное развитие, а также адаптацию к социокультурной среде, с использованием личных ресурсов и учетом недостатков адаптации, которая может служить методической основой для университетских служб, занимающихся социальной и академической интеграцией молодежи из других стран.

Внедрение научных результатов: полученные результаты были представлены на заседаниях Кафедры психологии и наук об образовании УЛИМ, на 7 национальных и международных научных конференциях, отражены в 14 публикациях.

ANNOTATION

Khory Johnny. Locus of control and psychosocial adaptation of international students. PhD Thesis in Psychology, Chisinau, 2024

The structure of the thesis: introduction, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography of 384 titles, 4 annexes, 140 pages of basic text, 36 figures, 19 tables. The obtained results are published in 14 scientific papers.

Keywords: psychosocial adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, academic adaptation, adaptation resources, adaptation difficulties, locus of control, social contact distances, psychosocial intervention program.

The purpose of the work is to investigate and assess the level of psychosocial adaptation among international students studying in the Republic of Moldova, in relation to locus of control and social contact distances, with the subsequent development and implementation of a psychosocial intervention program aimed at improving the quality of adaptation to the new sociocultural environment and academic requirements.

The objectives of the work: analyzing and synthesizing relevant theories and paradigms from the literature to identify and understand the complex relationships between psychosocial adaptation and locus of control among international students, taking into account the factors involved in the adaptation process; empirically investigating the psychosocial adaptation of international students studying in the Republic of Moldova, with an emphasis on assessing the influence of locus of control and social contact distances on adaptation; developing, implementing, and evaluating a psychosocial intervention program, in accordance with the needs and requirements of international students, with the aim of improving the quality of adaptation to academic requirements and the new sociocultural environment in the Republic of Moldova; developing recommendations for the development and implementation of specialized services to support the psychosocial adaptation of international students in the Republic of Moldova, based on the research results and a deep understanding of the impact of locus of control on the adaptation process.

Scientific novelty and originality lie in the approval of a model of psychosocial adaptation of international students at the conceptual level - definition and experimental verification, along with the argumentation of the importance of intervention programs for adaptation based on understanding its particularities.

The obtained results that contribute to solve an important scientific problem consist of identifying the peculiarities of psychosocial adaptation of international students, with a focus on the role of locus of control and social distances; establishment of personal resources and inefficiencies, based on which an intervention program was developed, implemented, and evaluated; determination of the effectiveness of the program through group application and evidence of the specificity of adaptation to the new sociocultural environment and academic demands.

Theoretical significance lies in the proposition of a model delineating the psychosocial adaptation of international students, which is intricately linked with the fulfillment of sociocultural needs and adjustment to academic requirements. This model considers the influential factors of locus of control and social distances, thereby offering valuable insights into the complex dynamics of adaptation processes among international student populations.

The applied value of the research: lies in identifying the peculiarities of psychosocial adaptation among international students in the Republic of Moldova and developing a psychosocial intervention program aimed at professional, cultural, and personal development, as well as sociocultural adaptation. This program utilizes personal resources and takes into account the inefficiencies of adaptation, serving as a methodological basis for university services involved in the social and academic integration of young people studying abroad.

Approval and implementation of the results: the obtained results were presented during meetings at the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova, at 7 national and international scientific events, reflected in 9 publications.

KHORY JOHNNY

**LOCUL CONTROLULUI ȘI ADAPTAREA PSIHOSOCIALĂ A
STUDENȚILOR INTERNAȚIONALI**

511.03 – PSIHOLOGIE SOCIALĂ

Rezumatul tezei de doctor în psihologie

Chișinău, 2025

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**LOCUS OF CONTROL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ADAPTATION OF
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ABSTRACT

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