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# A New Model of Testing Migrants' Civic Competence in the Russian Federation

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## **Abstract**

**Objectives:** The aim of this article is to give a linguistic and methodological description and check the efficiency of a new integration testing model based on the concept of migrant civic competence. The authors develop and justify the definition of this concept and study its structure and content. **Methods:** The experiment was focused on verification of the comprehensibility of the new migrant civic competence testing model and quality of test materials developed within its frameworks. To achieve these goals, the authors used the methods of 1. Theoretical analysis in modern testology, sociology, general didactics, interdidactics, linguodidactics, cultural anthropology, and cognitive science in accordance with the research problem; 2. Statistical data processing and 3. Interviewing testers and RFL teachers. **Findings:** The results of the study have confirmed that the test materials meet all the necessary requirements and the test tasks are comprehensible to the majority of migrants who take the integration exam to receive a residence permit. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the proposed model can be used to develop test materials for other categories of migrants. The observations and key findings presented in this article may be useful for testers, testologists, and teachers involved in the migrants' training and testing system. **Application:** The mentioned problem requires a special attention to the testers, testologists and authorities that take part in creating the test materials.

**Keywords:** Civic Competence of Migrants, Fundamentals of the Russian Federation Legislation, Integration and Adaptation of Migrants, Integration Examination in Russian as a Foreign Language, Migration Policy of the Russian Federation, Permanent Residence

# 1. Introduction

The necessary and sufficient level of communicative competence, knowledge of the social structure, history, and culture of the host country is a prerequisite for successful integration of migrants into a new linguocultural community. As stipulated in the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union adopted in November 2004, "basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration. Efforts in education are essential in preparing migrant to be more successful and more active participants in society".

In the Russian science, 'integration' should be understood as a system of mutual activities of government authorities, local self-government bodies, civil society institutions and immigrants aimed at their inclusion in the social and cultural space of the new society through the development of knowledge of the Russian language, Russian history and fundamentals of the Russian Federation legislation, and rules of conduct adopted in Russian society, to the extent necessary for temporary or permanent residence in the Russian Federation. The main criterion for differentiating the integration activities of the state and society is the period of a foreigner's stay in Russia. This criterion defines the basic ideology of the approach: Those who come for a short period should

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be adapted whereas those who intend to stay for a longer period, obtain the legal status, and receive citizenship should be integrated.

The most important tool for socio-cultural adaptation and integration of foreign citizens into the Russian society is a comprehensive exam in Russian as a foreign language, the history of Russia and the fundamentals of the Russian Federation legislation. The Federal Law No. 74-FZ dated April 20, 2014<sup>2</sup>, from a legal perspective, identifies three categories of foreign nationals applying for: 1. A temporary residence permit (TRP); 2. A Permanent Residence Permit (PRP); 3. A work permit, or a patent (foreign worker - FW). In view of the differentiation of foreign nationals as well as their physical condition (orthopedic diseases, acoustic or visual organ disorders), the comprehensive examination concept<sup>3,4</sup> was developed which became the theoretical and methodological basis for the "Requirements (state standards) for the content of the comprehensive examination in Russian as a foreign language, the history of Russia and the fundamentals of the Russian Federation legislation" 5.6. Options of test tasks were also created for each module on the basis of modern didactic and methodological requirements: Validity, reliability, practical orientation, representation, etc. In the Russian Federation, the comprehensive examination has been conducted since 2014. According to the RIA Novosti, with reference to the RF Cabinet data, as on July 7, 2016, 2.174 million foreign nationals participated in the comprehensive exam, of which 2.058 million successfully passed it, including more than 1.521 million persons applying for a work permit, 286 000 persons applying for a temporary residence permit, and 251 000 persons applying for a permanent residence permit<sup>z</sup>.

The two-year practice of conducting the comprehensive examination in the Russian Federation confirms the correctness of the theoretical and methodological grounds developed by the authors, the validity of test materials and procedures. However, the analysis of the 2014-2015 examination results gives an opportunity to adjust and update the content and organizational aspects of the comprehensive exam in order to improve the testing objectivity, reliability and overall efficiency.

Let us summarize the most significant findings obtained from the analysis of the comprehensive examination results and interviewing migrants and testers who were involved in organizing and conducting this exam:

- Firstly, as surveys have shown, migrants themselves have started to realize the need to study the Russian language, the Russian history and the basics of the Russian legislation to feel more comfortably in the country.
- Secondly, the introduced mandatory comprehensive examination has formed a 'multiplier effect'. The governments of the former Soviet republics are currently seriously concerned that part of the population cannot find jobs in the territory of Russia and this, in turn, will lead to an economic crisis in these countries and aggravation of the social situation due to the rise in unemployment. At the moment, in countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, a campaign has been launched for the resumption of the activities of Russian schools and organization of pre-migration training of citizens planning to go to work in Russia.
- Thirdly, the experience of comprehensive examination in 2014-2015 has shown the need to update the examination model, the content test materials and the system of test tasks taking into account the obtained results, based on modern requirements of didactics, inter-pedagogics, and testology. First of all, it is necessary to refine the test materials designed to check knowledge of the Russian history, culture and basic legislative principles of persons planning to receive a permanent residence permit in the Russian Federation due to the broader social and legal rights provided for them by this status.

Accordingly, in 2016, a new set of test materials was developed for migrants applying for a residence permit in the Russian Federation. Characteristic features of these materials are strict account of needs and requirements of this category of migrants, spheres and situations where their socio-cultural and socio-legal knowledge can be applied and, consequently, increased requirements for training this population. And this seems to be quite reasonable. Obtaining a residence permit is a step to receiving citizenship, which involves a large amount of socio-cultural knowledge, experiences and abilities to be possessed by an applicant for this status. A certified residence permit in the Russian Federation gives its owner the right of permanent residence in the country for five years with further repeated prolongation of the period of validity as well as employment opportunities. During this period, persons having a residence permit may freely enter or leave the territory of Russia. They

also have the right to issue official invitations for their relatives for entry into the Russian Federation (provided that there are visa agreements between Russia and their country). To obtain a residence permit in the Russian Federation, a foreign citizen should legally live for no less than a year in the country having a relevant temporary residence permit. Foreign citizens who have received a residence permit are provided with a wide range of rights which are clearly regulated by the relevant articles of the Russian migration laws. They can choose to stay in any country region and freely move through the territory of Russia, not limited to only one sub-federal region. The main condition is the availability of premises fit to live in. If within three years from the date of receipt of a residence permit migrants do not formalize any residential lease agreement, they will be obliged to leave the territory of the Russian Federation.

On equal terms with the RF citizens, the RP owners can apply for a job (without issuing any additional permits or acquiring a patent), open their own business in any area, and acquire ownership of housing of any comfort level and space standard in Russia. The RP owners are also free to choose a place where they intend to study: They may enter any university on par with the other applicants, citizens of the Russian Federation. The RP owners have voting rights: they may participate in elections or referendums of a municipal (but not national) level. A residence permit gives the right to social security on a par with the Russian citizens: free education, pensions, and medical services. However, the RP owners may remain citizens of their country and, at the same time, apply for the Russian citizenship<sup>8</sup>. Along with the rights, the RP applicants, of course, are charged with responsibilities. Each year they must confirm their whereabouts by sending a special notice to the appropriate body, i.e., the General Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation.

As can be seen, a residence permit in Russia provides ample social opportunities to foreigners: For stateless persons, it serves as an identity card; foreign citizens may legally live, work, and study in the country; and it is a stepping stone to obtaining the Russian citizenship. Pedagogical measuring of the directions and content of social activities of applicants for a residence permit in the Russian Federation served as a guiding line for developing a new testing model for this category of migrants. This article deals with the new model in the context of global testing practices, a description of its structure

and content as well as justification of its effectiveness, comprehensibility and quality of test materials.

The civic integration and inclusion of migrants into the host society is one of the most pressing problems studied both in theory and in practice<sup>1-3,8-18</sup>. In this connection, checking the level of preparedness for the integration of migrants applying for a residence permit in many countries is mandatory. According to the data of the Language Assessment for Migration and Integration (LAMI) Group, linguodidactic and Knowledge of Society (KoS) tests are conducted by migration services in Germany, Greece, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, and the Great Britain, which as a whole is about 50% of European countries 19. In many countries, test preparation courses are organized which have a different status. In Belgium, France, Italy, Malta, and Norway, the preparation course training is mandatory. In the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, and Russia, such training is conducted at the request of a candidate. At the same time, despite the fact that the preparatory training courses are optional rather than mandatory, an insufficient level of linguistic and country-specific knowledge may have rather serious consequences for a migrant, i.e., up to the revocation of a residence permit in the country<sup>20</sup> (see also a detailed comparative analysis of the integration exam global models3).

Let us consider the basic content of KoS tests developed in the world's leading testing systems. Applicants for permanent residence in the Great Britain (permanent residence is also known as Indefinite Leave to Remain or ILR) are supposed to pass the 'Knowledge of life in the UK' test which covers the values and principles, the history of the Great Britain, the UK government, the law and migrants' role, etc. A special manual was developed to help migrants to prepare themselves for successful<sup>20</sup> similar test which migrants pass in the Netherlands includes topics such as national social and political institutions, society, historical facts, constitution, democratic values, parliament, human rights, combating discrimination, etc21. In the Czech Republic, the 'Test on knowledge of Czech realities' includes: Customs and traditions of the Czech people, transportation, medical and rescue systems, education, political system, legislative and executive authorities, judicial system and protection of citizens, elections, basic legal concepts, administrative, criminal, family law, etc<sup>22</sup>. In a similar test, which is to be passed by applicants for a residence permit in the Federal Republic of Germany contains issues related to the history, culture and politics of Germany, the basics of law, provisions of the German constitution<sup>23</sup>.

As can be seen, in the world's testing systems, the content of KoS tests is diverse, covering the most important aspects of life and considering the main problems of migrants applying for a residence permit. However, even the titles of the tests ('Knowledge of Life', 'Knowledge of Society', etc.) reveal clearly enough a knowledge-oriented model of training and testing. From the modern science perspective, this approach cannot be accepted. Moreover, one and the same test considers quite disparate issues, e.g., the culture and the law of the host country. Such an approach is not reliable from a methodological viewpoint and is inconvenient in terms of testing methodology.

It should also be noted that in 2015-2016 the problem of civic integration of migrants became especially acute and urgent due to the growth of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional tensions, confirming the insufficient efficiency of existing models, strategies and procedures as stated by all the world's leading political analysts. These factors point to the need to find new ways to shape the foundations of inter-ethnic harmony in the multicultural societies which constitute the today's world majority and, as a consequence, the development of new technologies, strategies, models to form and control the ability and readiness of migrants to successfully integrate into the host community. As V.V. Putin rightly observed, "Civil peace and inter-ethnic concord is not a once created and forever established picture. On the contrary, it is a constant dynamics, a dialogue"24.

It seems that based on the principles and technologies of the competence-based approach which has been proven highly effective in modern pedagogy, it can be possible to remove the above mentioned methodological and methodical contradictions. The competence-based approach gives an opportunity to carry out a pedagogical measurement of civic competence of RP applicants as well as determine the structure and content of this phenomenon.

The first definition of civic competence was developed by the Council of Europe in 2006<sup>2</sup>. In this document, the concept has been considered in the context of studies of democratic citizenship issues. A 'competence' is treated as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values which determine a person's ability to solve real-life problems and challenges primarily related to active citizenship. Numerous national lists of civic competences have been developed; their structure and content were

studied in Germany, Italy, Spain, the USA, the UK and other countries. Thus, A. Baye and C. Mainguet include knowledge, values, attitudes and practices into the civic competence structure<sup>10</sup>. Author in<sup>8</sup> expands this list due to social and bureaucratic competences, civic skills (preparation of oral presentations and written texts on relevant topics, etc.) as well as cognitive abilities.

A detailed civic competence model is presented in the book written in the book by<sup>2</sup>. These authors consider the younger generation civic competence, focusing on the areas of its formation. However, a number of provisions of this concept can be applied to our research objectives. The authors quite reasonably state that the civic competence structure is formed by knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behavior. Civic knowledge in this concept comprises the key elements of political and legal systems (human rights, social rights and duties, electoral system, etc), basic democratic institutions and political parties, cultural and historical heritage, norms and national values; principal events and trends of historical development; personalities, etc. Civic skills, in their opinion, include the skills to assess and justify a person's own position or decision; distinguish between facts and opinions; peacefully resolve conflicts; correctly interpret and critically analyse information transmitted by the mass media, etc. Civic attitudes involve responsibility for decisions and actions, in particular, relating to other members of society; a sense of belonging to the social and political life; faith in democratic principles and institutions; openness to the new or 'different', willingness to change one's own position and accept a compromise. Civic values are supposed to include: recognition of the force of law; belief in social justice, equality of all members of society; respect for all people regardless of their gender identity or religious beliefs, etc. Political, social and civic engagements form the 'behaviour' component. A similar structure of civic competence can be found in the works of other researchers, e.g., as in<sup>25</sup>.

# 2. Civic Competence Testing in a New Model of the Integration Exam for Migrants Applying for Permanent Residence in the Russian Federation

A new model of testing migrants applying for a residence permit in the Russian Federation has been developed taking into account the structure and content of the concept

of migrant civic competence which should be understood as a personal integrative quality, i.e., a system of knowledge, skills, abilities, moral norms and values which provide the ability and willingness to integrate into a new society and participate in its social, cultural and political life. The structure of migrants' civic competence is formed by two components: 1. Socio-cultural competence and 2. Socio-legal competence.

Socio-cultural competence is partially checked in the 'Russian as a foreign language' module but the main control of its formation level is carried out with the help of the 'History of Russia' module assignments. Training in the history of Russia enables foreign citizens to acquire knowledge, skills, and abilities which are necessary for adequate perception of socio-cultural processes and events taking place in the Russian Federation. Due to the multidimensionality and complexity of the subject 'History', it becomes possible to discover various aspects of social development, mentality and people's daily life, culture, history, religion, traditions, etc. As a result, the study of history allows foreign citizens to broaden their horizons, gain knowledge which, as V.V. Putin noted at a meeting of the Presidential Council for Interethnic Relations, can "insure people against the virus of nationalism and intolerance." The central position in the requirements for the amount of knowledge on the history of Russia belongs to socio-cultural materials designed to acquaint foreigners with the major achievements of Russian culture, especially in the fields of science, literature, music, theatre, etc.

Socio-legal competence of migrants is checked by means of the 'Fundamentals of the RF Legislation' module tests. The content of the module was developed with a focus on the solution of several problems. Persons prepared for the exam acquire and learn to put into practice concrete knowledge about their rights and duties in the territory of Russia, they also gain an impression of how the Russian state and its legal system are structured, which will help them to orientate in certain life circumstances and give them a foothold in search of qualified legal assistance<sup>3</sup>. The module content includes human rights and freedoms in Russia, civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights, the foundations of civil and family law, issues of interaction with the RF government bodies and consular institutions. Consideration is given to the status of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation (i.e., procedures for entry and exit as well as stay in the country), duties and responsibilities of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation, interaction with public authorities (police, STSI, tax authorities, etc.). To successfully integrate into the host society, migrants are supposed to know and respect its 'lifestyle'. This is important in order to avoid conflicts that may arise if a migrant disregards what embodies the society, i.e., the national coat of arms and colours, anthem and other national symbols. National symbols and signs are just the things that reflect the main ideas of people about their country and its history.

The performed study revealed spheres of life and activities where RP applicants can realize their socio-cultural and socio-legal competences. These include official-business, professional, domestic, socio-cultural, educational, and political (in a limited range of situations) spheres. The nomenclature of typical situations relevant to each of these spheres was also determined. Thus, situations typical of the official-business sphere are as follows:

- Residence permits registration/renewal.
- Providing copies of labour/civil contracts (for highly qualified specialists invited to work in the Russian Federation).
- Filing of return to the tax office, TIN registration, receiving a personal income tax declaration.
- Receiving a pensioner ID card at the pension department or social services office.
- Registration of ownership/transfer of ownership of residential property in the Russian Federation (purchase, sale, donation) at the notary office and organisations which register ownership of residential property; preparation of documents related to children's entry into pre-school and school educational institutions (kindergarten, school, college, grammar school), etc.

Identifying typical spheres and situations where RP applicants realize their socio-cultural and socio-legal competences helped to clarify and adjust the content of test materials aimed at checking the level of their civic competence.

Adoption of the competence model also necessitated developing a new system of test tasks. As a result, the structure of the 'History of Russia' and 'Fundamentals of the RF Legislation' modules has been complicated. Each module in the new model consists of two subtests.

The first subtest is aimed at monitoring the level of required knowledge formation. The assignments in the first subtest are mostly multiple choice tests. For example, the 'Fundamentals of the RF Legislation' first module contains tests such as below3:

### The basic law in Russia is called ...

- Constitution.
- Code.
- Decree.

The aim of the second subtest is to check the skills and ability to apply the acquired knowledge in practice, the degree of formation of moral standards and values which determine a tolerant attitude to life in the new society. Migrants are offered a number of case studies, for example<sup>3</sup>:

You are standing at the bus stop waiting for your friend. A police officer approaches asking you to show your PPD. Does a police officer have a right to check civil documents?

- No.
- Yes.
- Yes, but only in the presence of my friends or relatives.

Summarizing the above, it should be noted that the developed new model for checking civic competence of migrants applying for permanent residence permits made it possible to solve the following problems: Implementation of the state migration and national policy; compliance with international obligations of Russia; predetermination of mutually respectful relations between migrants and members of the host society; protection of human rights of both migrants and the host country's citizens; creation of conditions for effective protection of migrants' legitimate interests to ensure their safe stay in the Russian Federation and, as a whole, to achieve interethnic harmony in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Russian society.

# 3. Methodology

# 3.1 Research Agenda and Data Collection Methods

The experiment was carried out in the "Adaptation practices and testing centre" of the Tyumen State University, one of the leading migrants' testing centres in the Russian Federation. The experiment was aimed at verifying the comprehensibility (feasibility) of the new model for checking the level of civic competence formation and quality of test materials. Due to this, the experiment proceeded in two stages, each of which was designed to achieve one of the stated goals.

To check the new test model comprehensibility (feasibility), at the first stage, an analysis and comparison were made of the results obtained by migrants before and during its implementation. To obtain more objective results, equal time intervals were taken as experimental comparison parameters: June 2016 (the period before the new test tasks were introduced) and July 2016 (the period of immediate introduction of the new testing materials). At the second stage, interviewing was conducted of testers and RFL teachers involved in integration examining and training of migrants applying for a residence permit in the territory of the Russian Federation.

# 3.2 Participants

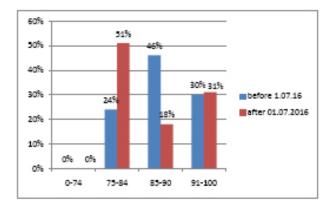
At the first stage of the experiment, two groups of migrants were involved, approximately equal in number: 133 persons in June and 145 persons in July. The groups were formed according to the following parameters: Approximate parity of years (21-25), uniform gender representation (65 males and 68 females in the first group, 73 males and 72 females in the second group), similar cultural background (participants were from the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Tajikistan, i.e., countries with similar ethnic and cultural traditions). In order to eliminate the influence of additional factors, for participation in the experiment at the first stage, candidates were selected who had not attended the preparatory courses. 16 certified testers and 16 RFL teachers (all females) with an experience in speciality of more than 10 years participated at the second stage of the experiment.

# 4. Results and Discussion

The results of the first stage are reflected in Figures 1 and 2. The values of 0-74 % indicate that the test was not passed: the testee received a negative evaluation. The values within 75-100 % indicate that the test was passed successfully. Within the positive evaluation, additional ranking was made graduated within 6-10 % (75-84 %, 85-90 %, 91-100 %).

The chart in Figure 1 shows the results of checking the level of socio-cultural competence formation, i.e., evaluations obtained by migrants who passed the 'History of Russia' module.

The results of this module indicate that the introduction of new test tasks almost did not influence the number of migrants who passed this part of the comprehensive



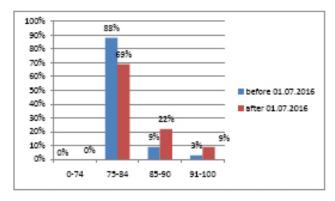
**Figure 1.** Comparative characteristics of the test results of migrants' socio-cultural competence.

exam with high positive evaluations (as compared to the results of the subtest based on former materials): Fluctuations within 91-100 % amounted to 1%. This implies that a qualitative change in the test tasks had no negative effect on persons whose level of knowledge was sufficiently high. Significant differences are observed in the ranges of 75-84 % and 85-90 % and account for 27% and 28%, respectively. In the first case, there is a positive trend (the number of foreign nationals who overcame the threshold level); in the second case, the trend is negative. However, this does not affect the overall positive result of the exam.

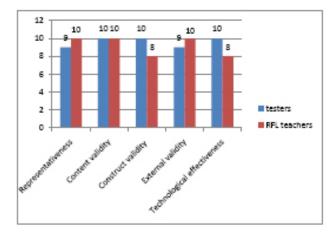
Figure 2 shows the results of testing the level of formation of socio-legal competence, i.e., evaluations obtained by migrants who passed the "Fundamentals of Legislation" module:

The results of testing the socio-legal competence, similar to the previous case, show a stable positive trend. Changing the test tasks had virtually no impact on the examination results. The number of persons who passed this test module with a positive evaluation (91-100 %) increased by 6%, the number of foreign nationals who have passed the examination with 85-90 % increased by 13%. A negative trend can be traced only in the number of testees who received the result within 75-84 % (19% less than before the introduction of new materials). However, the overall test module results are positive.

Thus, the results of the first stage of the experiment confirm that the level of complexity of test materials in the new test model has not increased; these materials are comprehensible to the vast majority of migrants applying for a residence permit in the Russian Federation.



**Figure 2.** Comparative characteristics of the test results of migrants' socio-legal competence.



**Figure 3.** Estimates of quality of test materials.

The purpose of interviewing testers and RFL teachers was to assess the quality of new testing materials by the parameters accepted in testology. The responses were analysed; average estimates (0-10 points) are shown in Figure 3:

The quality of test materials developed under the new model for testing civic competence of migrants applying for permanent residence permits was estimated highly enough both by testers and RFL teachers.

# 5. Conclusions

Recent advances in testology, didactics, inter-pedagogics and other areas of humanities knowledge, on the one hand, as well as new social and political realities and challenges of the modern world have necessitated updating the models of testing migrants' readiness

- for civic integration into the host society. First of all, this applies to those categories of migrants who are planning to obtain a permanent residence permit or citizenship in the host country.
- It seems reasonable to reject the knowledge-oriented models and introduction of competence-based approaches into the pedagogical measurements of needs and requirements, areas and situations of social activity of PRP applicants, or into the development of models for testing the degree of their readiness for civic integration into the social and political life of the host community.
- Based on the principles of modern science, it is possible to determine the structure and content of the concept of migrants' civic competence which should be understood as a personal integrative quality, i.e., a system of knowledge, skills, moral standards and values providing the ability and willingness to integrate into a new society and participate in its social, cultural and political life. Civic competence of migrants is formed by two components: socio-cultural and socio-legal competences; for measuring the degree of their formation, it is advisable to use separate test modules.
- The model of testing migrants developed taking into account the structure and content of their civic competence makes it possible to measure not only the volume of acquired knowledge about the culture, history, social and legal life of the host community but also verify the ability and willingness to use this knowledge in practice.
- The model proposed in this article underwent an experimental verification which confirmed its availability and high quality of test materials. This model can be used to develop test materials for other categories of migrants. The observations and key findings presented in this article may be useful for testers, testologists, and teachers working in the system of educational training and testing of migrants.

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