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Mediation in Education for Harmonization of International Relations in a Multicultural Environment of Krasnoyarsk Region

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Abstract

Development of mediation practices for resolving interethnic conflicts in a multicultural educational environment is actual due to the globalization and expansion of migration flows. The paper is aimed at the analysis of challenges of interethnic relations in a multicultural environment of the Krasnoyarsk Region and the empirical research of mediation practices development in the field of education to resolve conflicts between the actors of the education process, including intercultural conflicts.

Based on the content analysis of the Krasnoyarsk schools reporting documents on mediation procedures, the problematic aspects of the introduction of mediation in the multicultural educational environment of the region were characterized. The deficiencies of teacher education in terms of development of migration processes in Russia were identified, among which the most acute is shortage of mediation techniques use for prevention and resolution of intercultural conflicts at all levels of education due to the lack of mediation specialists and practitioners. The survey on the didactic components of the mediation competence was carried out. The article presents the analysis on the key professional competencies, obtained from the expert survey of practicing mediators of Krasnoyarsk, in a comparative retrospective with similar international studies. The practical use of the study is in fostering the mediation practices implementation in the educational environment to resolve conflicts between the culturally diverse actors of educational process.

Key words: mediation, multicultural environment, conflict resolution, interethnic relations, intercultural mediator, competency.

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Introduction

Relevance of the study. Krasnoyarsk region is one of the largest multinational and multi-confessional regions of Russia. According to the all-Russian population census in 2010 there are 159 nationalities in the region. In the North, eight indigenous peoples live with a total population of 16.5 thousand people, half of them (Dolgans, Chukchi, Nganasans and Ents) are of purely autochthonous origin. The non-Russian citizens in the Krasnoyarsk region are 320 thousand people or 10.5 % of the total population.

Socio-cultural processes associated with the integration actualize the development of mediation competencies of teachers who work with migrant children and young people from minority national groups. Due to the total Internet and social networks access, there has been an increase in xenophobia and related extremist ideologies among young people.

Realization of the state national policy in the Krasnoyarsk Region is of great interest from a regional perspective due to using innovative approaches, forms and methods of work based on public-private partnership, institutions of civil society fundraising, use of learning technologies and development of support and adaptation of migrants (Barinov & Rafikov, 2016).

The migration space of a region is defined as a set of social ties in the region, which parts are foreign migrants on the one side and the host society on the other. The specificity of these relations emerges due to the three main factors: 1) cultural influence from the migrants, 2) their special legal status in the territory of arrival, and 3) formation of migrant communities as a new social actor in the region (Trufanov & Rafikov, 2018).

Interethnic relations in the educational environment are one of the most acute problems of pedagogy in the context of expanding migration processes. Especially complex issue of modern Russian education is training the teachers who are able to work effectively with migrant children.

To develop the interpersonal interaction skills, including interethnic interaction, the culture of dialogue development and conflict competence building of the actors of education is required. Within the recent years, development of interethnic relations in the Krasnoyarsk region, as well as in Russia in general, is influenced by the increasing risks associated with the use of the Internet to promote extremist ideas, provoke interethnic conflicts, manipulate the people's minds, especially the youth's. The insufficient level of the intercultural and conflict competencies (being a part of the mediation competence) of teachers and administrative staff has been demonstrated. There is a lack of using best practices of intercultural education for prevention and resolution of disputes and conflicts at all the levels of education.

It is essential to understand difficulties, problems of national, interpersonal and interethnic identity building; ways to overcome the negative phenomena in the relations between the actors of education.

The appeal to mediation in the field of education is consolidation of knowledge from the fields of pedagogy, psychology and sociology for harmonization of interpersonal and interethnic relations and interpersonal and interethnic conflicts resolution.

The problem development

Despite the number of studies devoted to training mediators on the basis of the professional standards both in Russia and abroad, there is no clear understanding of the key competencies of a mediator. Current empirical studies mostly do not assess the effectiveness of training, understanding skills for the

mediation practice, none deal with the process of educating mediators, that developmental experience of moving from novice to mastery. (Lang & Taylor, 2000). Currently, both in Russia and in Europe there is a limited number of professional mediators working with multicultural conflicts (Plotnikov, 2016). Additionally, as a rule, their experience might not be enough to guarantee effective resolution of intercultural conflicts, especially in the educational sphere. According to the mediator's community, since minimum training hours are required, there are a number of unskilled mediators whose attractive, nicely framed certificates are not enough to make them professionals (Honeyman, 1999). Despite the fact that 20 years have passed since this problem had been disclosed, a similar situation is observed in training mediators for the education system in Russia.

The vast majority of reconciliation services staff at schools are teachers, psychologists, social workers who have completed short-term refresher courses at regional teacher training centers. This fact can explain the low professionalism, at times demonstrative and reporting character of some school mediation services performance, revealed by the monitoring outcomes published by Konovalov (2017).

There are different models of training mediators. The model designed by scientists Lieberman, Foux-Levy, & Segal (2005) emphasizes training through practical self-assessment to recognize the trainees' personal strengths and weaknesses and facilitate both professional and personal growth of mediators. They studied the effectiveness of the systematic model developed under the auspices of the Israel Ministry of Justice, and carried out monitoring of competencies before and after the training. We have adapted psychological and pedagogical methodology for our expert surveys conducting and analyzing the results, based on the professional standard of a mediator (2014) and the standard of a specialist in the field of interethnic and interfaith relations of the Russian Federation (2018).

The research problem is the search for technologies of productive interaction of the educational process actors in a multinational region. The social environment of the region faces contradictions caused by cultural differences between migrants and the host society. These contradictions (different identities, views, traditions, values and norms) lead to conflicts in the educational environment. It makes needful a new teacher's mediation competence to prevent and resolve conflicts using mediation technologies.

Methodological framework

The purpose of the research was to study types and causes of interethnic conflicts in educational institutions of Krasnoyarsk region, the potential of mediation technologies for their solution and to identify the deficits in teachers' competences and to specify the didactic components in the training of an intercultural mediator for education.

Research methods: Content-analysis of foreign scientific publications. Systemic analysis of migration processes in Krasnoyarsk region; sociological survey; comparative analysis of Russian and European mediators' competencies based on the expert survey adapted from Lieberman et al. (2005) were used.

The basic institutions for the experimental research were Siberian Federal University, Krasnoyarsk Pedagogical college No1 and other educational institutions: vocational schools, schools, implementing mediation in education. The target group was the University and college students and professors, school teachers, psychologists, social workers and staff involved in mediation activities.

Stages of the research. The study was carried out in four phases. The first stage was theoretical analysis of interethnic relations in the multinational Krasnoyarsk region. Empiric study of migration impact on education was carried out and deficits of teacher education were identified on the second stage. The

third stage included conflict-handling modes and empiric data analysis. The fourth stage was devoted to the expert survey determining relevance and formation of a number of didactic components in the training of an intercultural mediator.

Outcomes

In the first stage the theoretical analysis of interethnic relations of the Krasnoyarsk region was conducted. According to the Head of the Migration Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia in the Krasnoyarsk region in 2018, more than 200 000 foreign citizens were registered for migration, which is 7.6 % more than in the same period last year. The vast majority came to stay in the city of Krasnoyarsk. Most of the migrants come for labor purposes – 24,000 labor patents were issued in 2018. The number of residence permits and permanent residence permits is increasing among migrants. At the same time, the total number of criminal offenses committed by foreign citizens has decreased.

In 2018, the survey «Social well-being of foreign labor migrants from Central Asia in Krasnoyarsk» was carried out (the sample was 900 respondents from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan). The results revealed that three main reasons for the migration to Russia are: low income (42.2%), unemployment (41.3%) and ethnic conflicts (8.6%) in their homeland. Among the problematic aspects of migrants' stay in Krasnoyarsk that affect their social well-being there were employment process (34.7%), accommodation (26%) and poor knowledge of the Russian language (22%). 17.3% of respondents mentioned difficulties of adaptation to new living conditions and learning difficulties for their children.

Migration in the Krasnoyarsk region contributes to the increase in the number of children of refugees and immigrants in schools, who are experiencing not only significant material, social, psychological, but also educational difficulties. Thus, social issues are among the most acute problems of migrants, including children's integration to the education system.

According to the official statistics of the Science and Innovation Department of the Krasnoyarsk region, educational migration in the region tends to grow and is associated with the quotas for the international students and the rating indicators of Universities showing in the increasing share of the overseas students. Siberian Federal University (SibFU) is located in the Center of Russia it is an economically successful region, which requires an increasing number of qualified workers. Therefore, SibFU becomes an attractive host for the overseas students. About nine hundred foreign students from CIS countries, China, Thailand, India, South Africa, Jamaica, Ghana, Nigeria, Iran, Iraq and other countries study at Siberian Federal University. They are trained at all levels: undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate.

According to the survey of overseas students of SibFU in 2018, adaptation issues are the following: 41 % of respondents pointed out the severe climate conditions, 22% had a lack of Russian language skills, 11% had problems with teaching and learning process organization. 47% of the international students conclude that there is no or almost no interethnic tension at the University, whereas 29% of respondents noted that they feel uncomfortable communicating with the students of other nationalities.

At the moment, the Krasnoyarsk region suffers a shortage of teaching staff who are ready to perform their professional functions and actions in a multicultural environment. This may be a cause for social conflicts, when educational opportunities are not equal for all students. Therefore it is important for teachers to apply intercultural mediation for ethnically diverse educational institutions.

In the second stage, the qualification requirements for the modern teacher-mediator are

determined, considering requirements of the professional standard of the teacher and the professional standard of the mediator and deficits of teacher education were identified.

According to the Department of Education of the Administration of Krasnoyarsk, in 2018 the number of school reconciliation (mediation) services reached 115. In 2016, 498 mediation services were working at secondary and vocational schools of the Krasnoyarsk region, which is 42% of their total number. The most popular issues were peer conflicts (336 appeals in 2015–2016, 266 appeals in 2016–2017 academic year); conflicts between students and parents (54 appeals in 2015–2016, 36 appeals in 2016–2017 academic year). In comparison with the national data of mediation procedures, Krasnoyarsk region statistics looks quite modest (Smolyaninova & Popova, 2019).

In addition, during interviews and discussions with the heads of school mediation services it was noted that many of the reconciliation services have zero statistics on mediation and reconciliation practices: schools prefer to resolve conflicts by traditional authoritarian methods. This actualizes the need to provide school mediation services with specialists and organize refresher courses for teachers regularly (Smolyaninova, 2018).

Two target groups were identified for content analysis of teacher education deficits: a group of students – future teachers and a group of practicing teachers. The following deficits were identified in the target group of students:

- 1) communication barriers in a multicultural environment;
- 2) psychological deficits for adaptation and socialization of migrant children;
- 3) unformed ethnic and civil identity of pupils;

Implementation of educational mediation practices will influence the development of the following educational outcomes:

- 1) multicultural outlook of the students;
- 2) multicultural competence of future teachers;
- 3) promoting mediation skills and mediation resources.

As a result of the empirical research in the teachers target group, the following deficiencies were identified:

- 1) insufficient level of the teachers' intercultural competence;
- 2) poor knowledge of intercultural education;
- 3) inability to respond professionally and timely to educational needs of specific students, groups or classes;
- 4) lack of effective mechanisms to include immigrant parents in the processes of children's adaptation, integration and socialization;
- 5) lack of educational and methodological resources focused on ethnic diversity of students including those performed by digital technologies.

In the third stage, the program of empirical research has been developed, which included socio-psychological and pedagogical techniques to identify, measure and analyze awareness of mediation practices in conflict resolution among the actors of the educational process.

In 2018, conflict competence was studied, strategies of behavior in conflict situations and the level of mediation awareness among schoolchildren, students, teachers, heads of educational organizations was identified.

In total, 450 respondents took part in the study carried out on the basis of validated and verified methods, taking into account the target groups affiliation. There were 134 school students, 145 university

students, 66 administrative officers, 105-school teachers, University and vocational education teachers. The research included the study and generalization of typical conflict situations in education and a variety of ways to resolve them, including the participation of representatives of different ethnic communities – immigrants from near and far abroad, temporarily or permanently residing in the Krasnoyarsk territory.

The heads of educational organizations, professors and school teachers, students and pupils were asked to respond to the questionnaire. 52 % of managers in the field of education admitted that mediation is an innovative practice for the Krasnoyarsk region. Therefore, it is important to consider the advantages of mediation as a pedagogical technology in intercultural conflicts resolution.

All the respondents answered that they have encountered conflicts in education, whereas 26 % noted that it happened sometimes and 74 % had conflicts at University/school/workplace often. Among the most commonly mentioned conflicts there are those between a teacher and a student and/or a group of students – 7 %, conflicts between a teacher and university administration– 10%, conflicts between students– 45 %, conflicts between teaching staff – 22 %, conflicts between a teacher and a student's parents – 16 %. Thus, conflicts between students are more than twice prevalent over the other types of conflicts.

As for the conflict-handling modes, the respondents' answers to the question "What methods of conflict resolution do you find the most acceptable?" were as follows: 45 % of administrative staff use authoritarian methods to force the parties when resolving the conflict, 32 % note that they try to reach consensus based on the interests of both parties, 13 % seek the help of an intermediary and 7 % give in a compromise.

As for the strategies of behavior in the conflict resolution with students, 23 % of the administrative staff seek the advice of a specialist, 37 % – try to resolve the conflict on their own, 16 % resolve the conflict relying on their experience in conflict resolution; 9 % of the respondents noted that they use additional resources. 15 % of respondents chose their own answer, expressing their own opinions.

According to the survey outcomes, 41 % of respondents noted that conflicts have no effect on their professional activities, and 59 % of respondents noted that conflicts have a strong impact and it harms interpersonal relationships. These data implicitly indicate that the majority of the respondents lack conflict competence and need training in the field of conflict competence.

Participants of the educational process at all levels of education request for the use of mediation practices in the field of education as an alternative method of conflict resolution and an effective way to prevent socially dangerous actions among young people. This is evidenced by the results of the survey: 74 % of schoolchildren, 69 % of teachers, 47 % of students-future teachers pointed out the need to use mediation techniques for conflicts management in education. 37 % of respondents noted that mediation allows identifying the roots and the driving force of a conflict, it is a tool for peaceful conflict management in the educational environment. According to 45 % of respondents, the object of pedagogical influence in a conflict is mainly a student, while teachers and parents remain out of it.

In the fourth stage, we conducted an expert survey among the heads of school mediation services in the city of Krasnoyarsk. The questionnaire for experts was developed to study the attitude of practicing mediators to the importance of knowledge, skills, competences, activities (didactic components). Thirteen basic skills and components were worked out. The experts were asked to rate the relevance of the suggested didactic components of school mediators training programs using the Likert scale. The survey results are presented in the diagram (Figure 1).

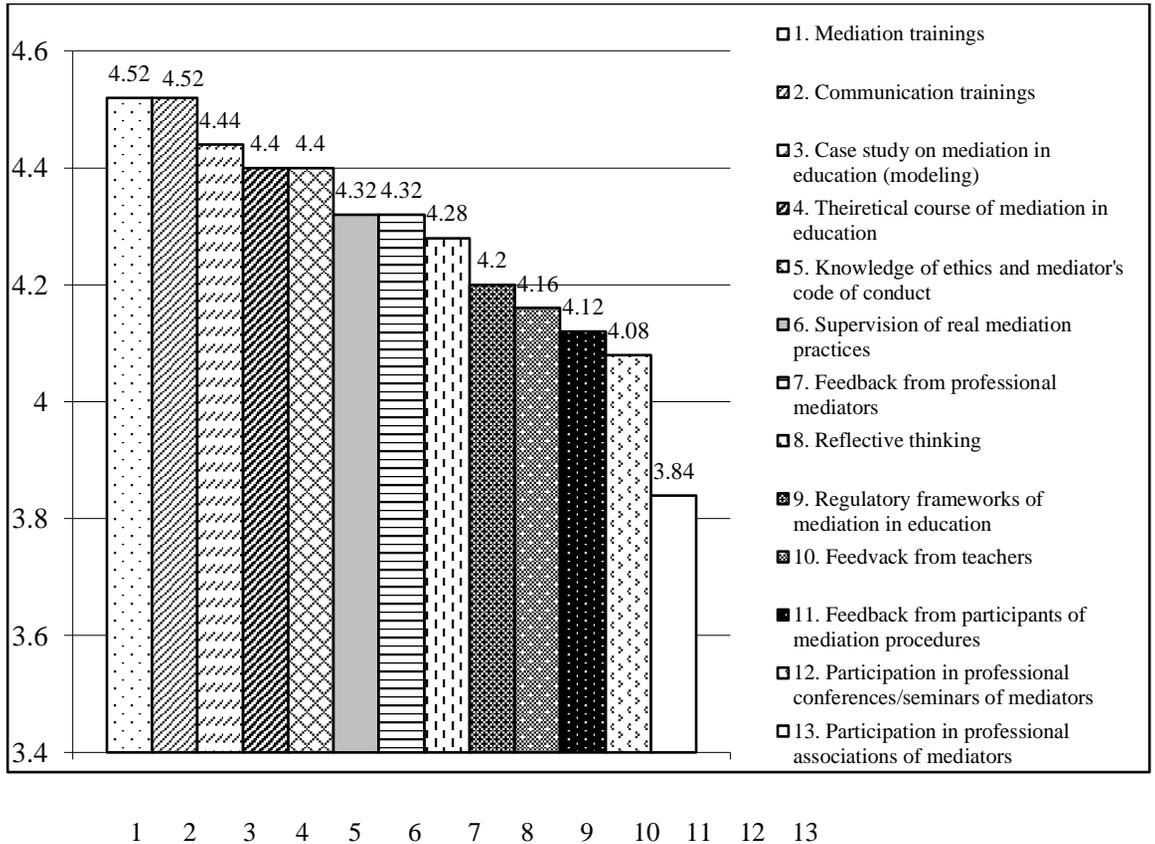


Figure 1. Expert opinion on importance of didactic components of training mediators in education

We obtained the following results: Experts pointed out the maximum relevance with an index of 4.52 in mediation and communication trainings. Also, they rated modeling and case-study on mediation in education high (Figure 1). The experts assigned the lowest significance to participation in professional mediators' communities. This fact requires additional research, as in Europe professional communities play a significant role in professional development of mediators.

Figure 2 presents the results of expert survey on the importance of mediators' individual competencies and self-assessment of their development. The experts were asked to self-assess and rate the skills such as managing interaction between parties, data gathering and data analysis skills, intercultural communication skills, ability to de-stress the parties during mediation, modeling options for resolving the conflict, empathy, active listening and maintaining neutrality.

The equal correlation is observed in the relevance and development of empathy skills for successful mediation procedures. For the other points we observe a significant gap between the importance of competencies in the mediator's profession, such as the ability to regulate stress and its development (Figure 2).

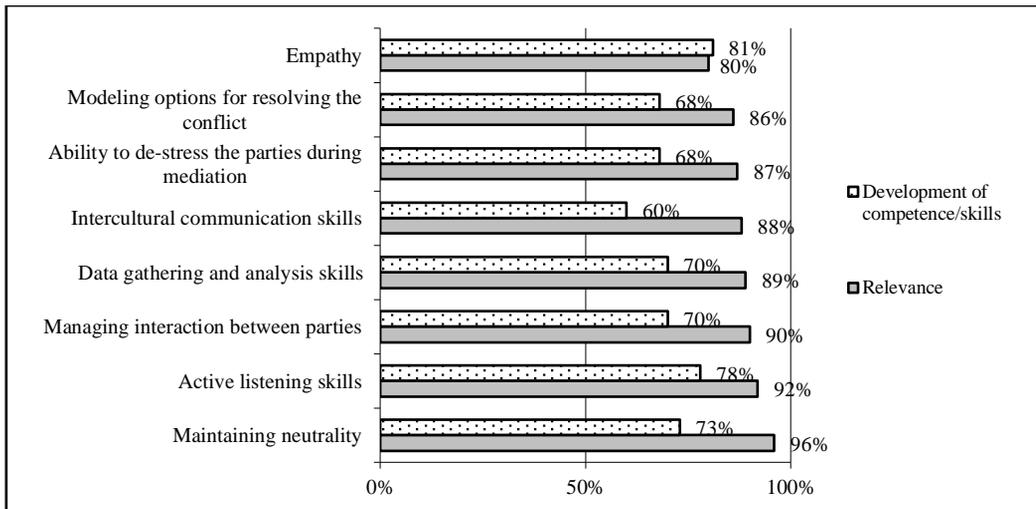
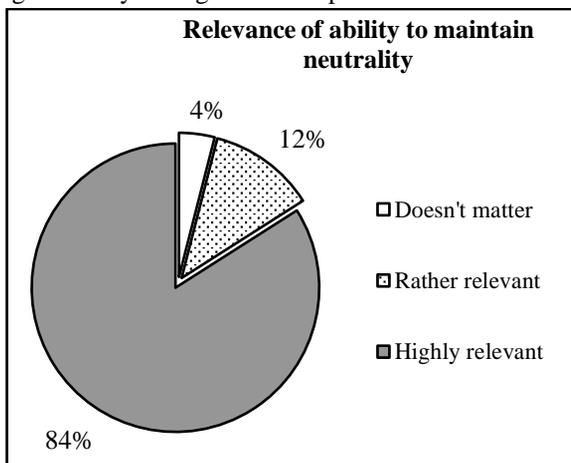


Figure 2. Expert Survey: Importance of mediator’s individual competencies and self-assessment of their development

The experts were asked to assess the mediators skills level by selecting one of the five responses, ranging from 1 – irrelevant or very poor to 5 – the most important and well-developed (Likert scale).

The Figure 3 illustrates mediators’ attitude to and self-assessment to the competence of maintaining neutrality during mediation procedures which is a very important psychological competence.



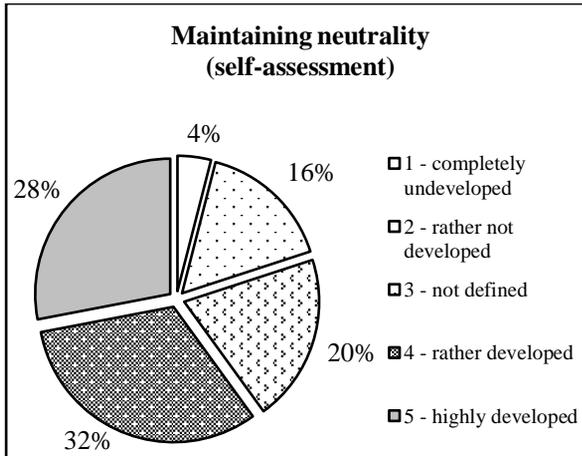
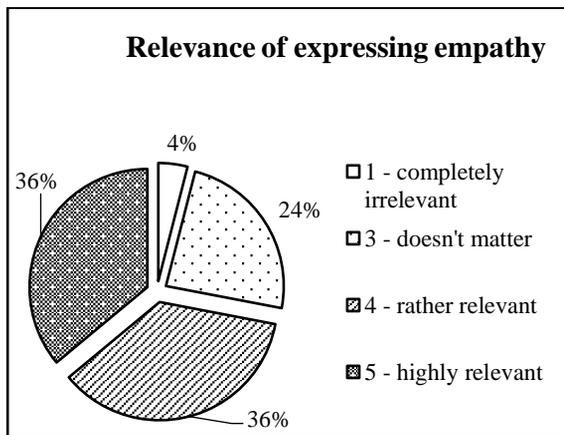


Figure 3. Expert’s position to the maintaining neutrality competence

It was revealed that mediators self-assessment of maintaining neutrality differed a lot from the relevance of this didactic component of professional competency.

According to the self-assessment of experts, empathy is developed in 80 % of mediators, and its high relevance was chosen by 70 % of respondents (Figure 4).



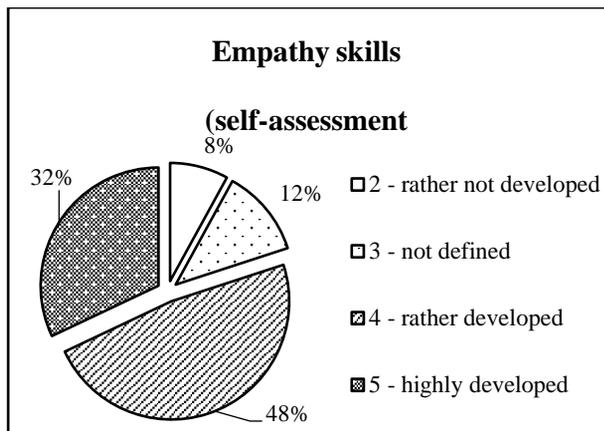


Figure 4. The expert evaluation of expressing empathy competence

Discussion

The empiric research outcomes show the gap between the competencies relevance and their development level according to the experts self-assessment results.

Modern research shows that neutrality is a skill which is difficult to develop for mediators (Hoffman & Bowling, 2000; Garcia, Vise, & Whitaker, 2002). In mediation procedures, the neutral position of the mediator, as opposed to bias and partiality, is very important. The problem with neutrality in meditative practices is that it depends on character traits that are quite difficult to change during the training course.

Empathy is a key skill for a professional mediator, despite the fact that emotional sensations are inherent in all conflicts (Barker, 2003). Mediators must have emotional literacy to recognize the emotions of the parties involved. Ignoring the emotional aspects of the conflict core may result in a failed mediation (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2001; Kuteynikova, 2018). When training mediators, it is important to develop emotional intelligence as a component of the "basic position of a mediator". Emotional intelligence includes four competencies: the ability to be aware of one's own emotions; the ability to be aware of the emotions of others and the ability to manage both your emotions and the emotions of other people (Shabanov & Aleshina, 2014). Self-reflection of the emotional state allows mediators to avoid professional burnout and perform their work effectively.

In the work of our European colleagues (Lieberman et al., 2005) there were significant differences in the level of expert evaluation and self-evaluation of mediators' empathy skill. They claim that "there is special interaction between mediators' conceptions, their behavioral patterns, and the perceptions of the instructors when dealing with empathy and neutrality skill... the inability to demonstrate the necessary expression of empathy and neutrality, ... this may also lead to cognitive dissonance in assessment procedures" (Lieberman et al., 2005).

It should be noted that despite the pilot nature of our research, some qualitative results of personally significant qualities and gaps in their evaluation correlate with foreign and small Russian studies. The most famous Russian scientist in mediation Shamlikashvili (2011) confirms that "the personality of mediators, their personal characteristics and ability to follow the professional ethical principles are very important. It is very difficult to accept people, to ignore one's likes and dislikes".

Due to the small number of studies of the key competences of a mediator in both Russian and international practice, additional research is needed to study the pedagogical possibilities and training methods, with which the skills of empathy and neutrality can be developed.

Conclusions

The theoretical analysis of interethnic relations in a multicultural environment of the Krasnoyarsk region showed the deformation of social relations in education under the influence of migration flows, represented mainly by the inhabitants of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. There is increasing tension and the risks of interethnic conflicts with the host population due to the differences in social norms, traditions, values and worldview. The government, business and education system of the Krasnoyarsk territory jointly ensure the processes of integration and cultural adaptation of migrants in the regional community.

Sociological research of the actors of education in the Krasnoyarsk region allowed identifying deficiencies and opportunities for implementation and development of mediation practices to resolve interethnic conflicts in schools and universities with participation of representatives of various ethnic communities (national autonomies, diasporas).

The results of empirical studies and theoretical analysis allowed to identify and systematize the deficiencies of teaching staff of the Krasnoyarsk region in solving the problem of harmonization of interethnic relations in the region: the lack of productive technologies for the prevention and resolution of conflict situations at all levels of education; the lack of specialists who possess mediation technologies, the lack of scientific and methodological support for the implementing educational programs in a multicultural environment. These issues require further research and systematic work of civil institutions aimed at developing intercultural dialogue.

The study clarified the types of conflicts in educational institutions of Krasnoyarsk and suggested the productive ways to solve them, pointed out the deficits of mediation practices in schools, colleges and universities in the region. It is caused by the insufficient qualifications of practicing mediators and their low number for the regional education system. In addition, the lack of the necessary scientific and methodological support for implementation of educational programs in the multicultural environment was revealed.

The comparative analysis of the experts' estimates of significant personal qualities and skills for mediators allowed identifying the invariant components of professional competency (empathy, neutrality, reflexivity).

The use of mediation in education contributes to the society harmonization in creating conditions for positive social well-being of the educational process actors through the preservation and development of positive experience in interethnic interaction.

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