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UNIVERSITY MERGERS FROM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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Romanenko K. R. Universitetskie ob"edineniya: chto menyaetsya dlya studentov [University Mergers: The Implications for Students] // Voprosy obrazovaniya [Educational Studies Moscow]. – 2018. – № 1. – P. 154-173.

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Additional publications:

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Romanenko K. R. Ot kul'tury souchastiya k politike souchastiya. Retsenziya na knigu: Jenkins H., Shresthova S., Gamber-Thompson L., Kligler-Vilenchik N., Zimmerman A. (2016) By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism, New York: New York University Press [From Participatory Culture to Participatory Politics. Book review: Jenkins H., Shresthova S., Gamber-Thompson L., Kligler-Vilenchik N., Zimmerman A. (2016) By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism, New York: New York University Press] // Sotsiologiya vlasti [Sociology of Power]. – 2018. – № 3. – P. 210-217.

Romanenko K. What Matters in University Mergers: Students' Feedback on Organizational Change // Higher Education in Russia and Beyond. – 2018. – T. 15. – № 1. – P. 16-17.

Conferences:

The 31st conference of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) (Moscow). Presentation: "To become an alumnus of unknown something": Students in University Mergers.

VIII Moscow International Conference of Higher Education Researchers (Moscow). Presentation: What Matters in University Mergers for Students.

The 29th conference of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) (Cambridge). Presentation: Student Identity Transformation and University Mergers

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Intermediary research results were also presented at the seminars in the Institute of Education, at the Summer School EERSS 2017 "Methods and Methodology in Educational Research" (Linz, Austria), at the 4th International Summer School on Higher Education Research (St. Petersburg), and during international internships at the Department of Education, University of Oslo (Oslo, Norway), and at the University of Jyväskylä (Jyväskylä, Finland).

Introduction

Student success, student well-being, and analysis of student experience become important topics for higher education research and practice [Ashwin, McVitty, 2015; Klemenčič, 2014, 2017; Lipka, 2019; Pascarella, Terenzini, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, Pusser, 2006; Tinto, 2017]. At the same time, universities and higher education as a system are going through a lot of changes: from global changes [Maassen, Cloete, 2006; Kyvik, 2004; Altbach et al., 2010] to specific reforms in educational policy, higher education systems, or individual universities [Gioia et al., 1994; Gumport, 2000; Stensaker et al., 2012].

The establishment of united universities through consolidation is the most extreme, radical and striking example of organizational changes [Greenwood, Hinings, 1996; Pavlyutkin, 2014], but it is also one of the most frequent strategies in educational policy to solve the problems of financial and academic non-viability of universities; improve the effectiveness of universities, the quality of their education and research; and increase the level of state control over the overall direction of the higher education system. This practice of educational policy is implemented and analyzed in many countries – in Australia, Spain, China, as well as in the Scandinavian countries. There have also been several waves of university mergers and acquisitions in Russia since the 1990s. In addition, during the period from 2013 to 2018, about a third of higher education institutions (94 out of a list of 302), subordinate only to the Ministry of education and science, experienced structural reorganizations related to mergers (calculated according to the information system of the Ministry of education and science of the AC CSUF).

University reorganizations are often discussed in the context of describing and analyzing national cases. The works by K. V. Zinkovsky and P. V. Derkachev, E. V. Chuprunov and A. O. Grudzinsky, A. K. Klyuyev, A.V. Melikyan, I. V. Pavlyutkin, and I. S. Chirikov are relevant for Russia.

In addition to studying university mergers as an educational policy, they are analyzed to examine university management practices in transition [Ursin et al., 2010], reduced competition for university resources in a particular area [Kyvik, Stensaker, 2013], opportunities for creating interdisciplinary educational programs [Harman, Harman, 2003], consolidated educational communities with a new academic culture [Harman, 2002; Norgerd, Skodvin, 2002] and a new organizational identity [Stensaker 2007].

Consolidation can be a big challenge for every university, so it requires a serious analysis of all potential opportunities and pitfalls. Such aspects of university mergers as transformation of organizational and administrative structures, distribution of internal funding mechanisms, or changes in academic strategies and profiles are usually well described.

One of the most frequent problems during and after university mergers is the so-called "human factor" or "human side of mergers" [Mirc, 2007; Weber, Drori, 2011; Seo, Hill, 2015]. Resistance to change, clash of organizational cultures, difficulties in forming a new organizational identity, protests before mergers and conflicts after them from university employees and especially from students [Delgado, León, 2015; Harman, 1993; Harman, 2002] can be so influential that mergers will not lead to the intended results, such as cost savings or cross-disciplinary collaboration [Weerts et al., 2014]. Reorganizations through mergers and acquisitions in Russia continue, and according to both academic and analytical literature, they are accompanied by protests, mutual conflicts, and resistance to change. Mergers of higher education institutions are regularly accompanied by student protests, and in one of the Russian cases, the protest of students became one of the factors for canceling the reorganization [Chirikov, 2016].

The "human factor" in Russian university mergers in combination with university mission to help student success, independence, agency, and involvement can be indicated as a **practical problem of research**.

Thus, the reflection of global discussions about higher education, combined with the prevalence and problematic practice of conducting mergers in Russian context, demonstrate the **relevance and topicality of this study**.

However, despite the relevance of such research and despite the existence of a practical problem, the topic of the experience of students who find themselves in a changing university, when they enter the one university and graduate another, has remained unexplored till now.

Research on university mergers usually focuses on the level of university administration, as well as faculty and research staff [Harman, 2002; Norgerd, Skodvin, 2002; Pavlyutkin, 2014; Stensaker 2007; Ursin et al., 2010]. The results of research on Russian university mergers indicate the effectiveness of reforms [Zinkovsky, Derkachev, 2016]. Literature on the "human factor" in organizational mergers [Mirc, 2007; Weber, Drori, 2011; Seo, Hill, 2015] cannot be directly applied to explain the situation due to the specific role of students as a group at the university (they are not employees of the organization, but customers, resources, products, and stakeholders) [Eagle, Brennan, 2007; Kamvounias, 1999; Klemenčič, 2014, 2015, 2017; Svensson, Wood, 2007; Tinto, 2017; Winston, 1999]. These contradictions fix the **scientific problem of research** and lead us to the purpose of this research.

Purpose, questions, assumptions, and objectives of the study

The **purpose** of the study is to identify what is the role of students as a special group at the university in the process of mergers and acquisitions of universities and describe university mergers from students' perspective. This is one of the very first studies of this topic, especially in Russian context (which indicates its **novelty and originality**).

The exploratory nature of the study was manifested in its multi-stage nature, where the results of each stage led to new assumptions and questions, and the collection of empirical data dictated the request for their theorization. Thus, the research questions appeared due to a series of assumptions, which in their turn appeared due to work with the literature and secondary analysis of data on international and Russian experience of university mergers and acquisitions.

One can see below these assumptions:

1) There are any practices of work with students during mergers based on ideas about the role of students in the university and the rhetoric of reforms that potentially improve educational environment for students. Actual information about the work was not collected earlier, so it requires research.

2) Student motivation, loyalty, and engagement are related to their subjective emotional experience, which in its turn can be determined by organizational changes triggered by mergers or acquisitions. Since this issue has not been discussed, it is necessary to describe how students experience the situation of mergers and acquisitions.

3) Changes that occur during mergers and acquisitions lead to certain results, in particular, to the redistribution of university resources for different groups within the university. At the same time, the results of reorganizations that students see for themselves as a special group are unknown outside of the dissertation research.

4) Students as a special group have their own ways of thinking about mergers and acquisitions, presumably related to the changing organizational identity of universities.

Accordingly, to reach the purpose of the dissertation research and to check the assumptions, it was necessary to answer the following research questions:

1. How is work with students organized in the context of university mergers and acquisitions?

2. How do students experience mergers and acquisitions?

3. How do students describe the results of mergers and acquisitions? What do students lose and gain as a group at the university because of the mergers?

4. What scenarios of mergers exist from the point of view of students and which of them are the most productive?

and to perform the following research tasks:

1. to develop a system of key characteristics of university reorganizations, based on the analysis of international experience of university mergers,
2. to analyze the history of Russian educational policy and identify the main waves of university mergers,
3. to identify several main research cases of university mergers in Russia and describe their characteristics related to the formation of a new organizational identity,
4. to conduct a series of interviews with students at the merging universities, identify and interpret categories describing their perspective, and analyze information in student groups on social networks,
5. to analyze how university mergers are represented,
6. to conduct a series of interviews with university teachers and administrative staff,
7. to offer recommendations for work with students in the context of radical organizational changes.

Theoretical framework, methodology and methods

The theoretical and conceptual basis of the study consists of two main parts: theories and research related to organizational change, and theories and research dealing with the role of students as a special group in a contemporary university.

Thus, firstly, the **research on the "human side" / "human factor"** of mergers and acquisitions, and resistance to change was analyzed [A. A. Armenakis, H. S. Feild, H. J. Walker; A. F. Buono, J. L. Bowditch; P. Haunschild, R. Moreland, A. Murrell; J. Jetten, P. Hutchison, M. L. Lensges, E. C. Hollensbe, S. S. Masterson; N. Mirc; M. G. Seo, N. S. Hill], taking into account concepts of organizational identity and its changes in connection with mergers and acquisitions [B. R. Clark; S. M. Clark, D. A. Gioia, Jr, D. J. Ketchen, J. B. Thomas; L. Empson; M. A. Hogg, D. I. Terry; D. Knippenberg, B. Knippenberg, L. Monden, F. de Lima; B. Stensaker; J. Välimaa; D. J. Weerts, G. H. Freed, C. C. Morphew] and the concept of radical organizational change in the context of university mergers and acquisitions [Greenwood, Hinings, 1996; Pavlyutkin, 2014],

To understand the **role of students as a special group** at the university, theories describing the concept of "student voice" [Bragg, 2007; McLeod, 2011; Seale, 2009], significant factors of student experience [P. Ashwin; A. W. Astin; B. M. Baxter Magolda; M. D. Berzonsky, L. S. Kuk, J. Daniels, J. Brooker; D. B. Jackson, P. Kaufman; F. Mael, B. E. Ashforth; M. Klemenčič; G. W. Hinchliffe, A. Jolly; E. T. Pascarella; L. Scanlon, L. Rowling, Z. Weber; T. L. Strayhorn; V. Tinto], and studies of education in the Bourdieu tradition (development of the theory of capitals by P. Bourdieu) [Sokolov et al., 2014; Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990; DiMaggio P., Tomlinson, 2008] were considered.

The study was planned and conducted using qualitative methods in a soft research strategy. The lack of information about the situation and opinions of students and the lack of a developed

tradition of describing students in the merging universities induced the research in the logic of grounded theory [Strauss, Corbin, 1994], where the theorization and conceptualization followed the analysis of empirical data.

Data collection and analysis took place in several stages between 2015 and 2018. The research design of multiple case studies [Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009] was chosen for the data collection and analysis. Six main research cases were selected after the analysis of international and Russian experience of university mergers. A series of observations and analysis of the representation of the merged universities in the public space (open days and other events, university websites, university museums) was conducted. Information about students' reactions in social networks was found. 6 interviews were conducted with university teachers and representatives of the university administration. 56 interviews and 4 focus groups with 85 students and graduates in total were done. Finally, text analysis procedures within the framework of grounded theory was organized.

Table 1 – Cases of university merges in Russia, chosen for the research

№	Short description	Methods of data collection	Representation of merged universities
Finished (by the moment of the research) university mergers			
1a	Merger of two high-ranking regional universities – classical and engineering with a big branch network – to establish a Federal University.	Interviews with graduates, university professors and administration. Analysis of universities' representation in public space.	The merged universities are represented as equal partners. Engineering directions in the united university are emphasized more. The history of universities is shown as common in the city and region. New symbols of the united university are created.
1b	Merger of several regional universities of various levels – classical and teacher training – to establish a Federal University.	Interviews with graduates, university professors and administration. Analysis of universities' representation in public space.	New symbols of the united university are created. The organizational identity and history of the united university are presented primarily as the identity and history of the oldest, most famous, and academically strong university.
1c	Amalgamation of several small, middle-ranking Moscow universities, specializing on economy and management, by a high-ranking big university of the same educational directions.	Interviews with graduates, university professors and administration. Analysis of universities' representation in public space.	The organizational identity of the affiliated universities is completely «dissolved» in the consolidating university. They are mentioned as a tool for enlarging the oldest and most academically strong university.
Current (by the moment of the research) mergers			

2a	Amalgamation of a middle-ranking Moscow teacher training university with a big branch network by a high-ranking and famous teacher training university.	Social media analysis. Individual interviews with students, university professors and administration. Focus-groups with students. Analysis of universities' representation in public space.	The organizational identity of the affiliated universities is completely «dissolved» in the consolidating university.
2b	Merger between several Moscow middle- and low-ranking engineering universities to establish a new polytechnic university.	Social media analysis. Individual interviews with students and university professors. Analysis of universities' representation in public space.	The merged universities are represented as equal partners. New symbols of the united university are created. The new mission of the united university has been designated.
2c	Merger between two middle-ranking regional universities – classical and engineering – to establish a regional flagship university.	Social media analysis. Individual interviews with students, university professors and administration. Focus-groups with students. Analysis of universities' representation in public space.	The merged universities are represented as equal partners. New symbols of the united university are created. The new mission of the united university has been designated.

Special attention was paid to the ethical program of this research. First of all, such a research problem was identified that could potentially improve the situation of those who were being studied [Creswell, 2014]. At the level of procedures, the rules of anonymity and confidentiality were observed. Moreover, both people, participants of the study, and specific universities analyzed in the study were anonymized. During interviews and focus groups, permission for audio recording and data usage was granted. The same ethical standards were applied when collecting and analyzing data in social networks [Ess, 2007].

Respondents for individual interviews were found through announcement in social networks, through student groups in social networks, during observation at open events in universities, and due to agreements with the university administration. Focus groups were organized in universities with the assistance of the university administration. (Further analysis took into account the possible impact of this format on students' feedback).

All stages of the study were necessary to answer four key research questions. The table below shows which methods of data collection helped answer the questions of the dissertation research.

Table 2 – Research questions and data collection methods

Research question	Data and methods of data collection
How is work with students organized in the context of university mergers and acquisitions?	Interviews with students and graduates. Interviews with university teachers and administrative staff. Analysis of students' opinions in social networks. Secondary analysis of information on the Russian experience of university mergers.

How do students experience mergers and acquisitions?	Interviews with students and graduates. Analysis of students' opinions in social networks.
How do students describe the results of mergers and acquisitions? What do students lose and gain as a group at the university because of the mergers?	Interviews with students and graduates. Analysis of students' opinions in social networks.
What scenarios of mergers exist from the point of view of students and which of them are the most productive?	Secondary analysis of information on international and Russian experience of university mergers. Expert interviews about the history of mergers and acquisitions in Russia. Analysis of the representation of merging universities in the public space. Interviews with students and graduates.

During data analysis we followed procedures developed within the framework of the grounded theory, which includes the stages of open, axial, and selective encoding [Strauss, Corbin, 1994].

Main results of the research

Position of students and work with them in the context of mergers and acquisitions

We have shown that in the situation of mergers and acquisitions of universities as a radical organizational change, students as a special group at the university, as usual, do not participate in the activities necessary for conducting mergers and acquisitions. In addition, they are informed about the reorganization after the decision is made. Individual student engagement initiatives are sporadic, rather than systematic. This information was obtained by comparing data obtained in interviews with students and graduates, data from teachers and administrative staff, analysis of student groups in social networks, and secondary analysis of data related to mergers and acquisitions of universities in Russia.

The involuntary nature of the merger, the fast timing of its implementation, and in some cases conflicting information about whether the merger is being canceled or continued – all that was shown in this study when analyzing the national experience is reflected in the responses of students. Frequent communication policy, when the university management does not share plans, goals, and prospects for reorganization, allows subjectively – according to students' feedback – to increase anxiety and perceived injustice. One way to reduce this anxiety, perceived unfairness, and resistance to change is to provide social support to students, active communication, openness, and transparency at all stages of the merger; prompt communication, rumor analysis, and involvement in decision-making, such as inclusion in working groups with faculty and administrative staff [Ursin, Aittola, 2019; Harman, Harman, 2003; Seo, Hill, 2005]. However, according to data obtained during the dissertation research, students are usually not included in events dedicated to reorganization. They are usually even informed at the last moment (in some cases during the summer holidays or during exams), when rumors and predictions of worst-case scenarios have started to spread informally. And the maximum amount of information and involvement is in official meetings, where students signed documents that they were notified about the future reorganization.

From interviews and analysis of student groups in social networks, it was found that students regularly learn about the reorganization through news and rumors in social networks, rather than through official meetings explaining upcoming events, which characterizes

communication in an organization that is in a state of uncertainty [Pavlyutkin, 2014], and serves as a source of anxiety, stress, and potential conflicts during and after the merger [Seo, Hill, 2005].

At the same time, there is a certain contradiction between the responses of students and the information received from teachers, who are also administrative employees. While the teachers talked about how they worked with the students to inform them and involve them, the students said that they found out everything through unofficial channels and were not involved. Considering the factor of social desirability in the responses of administrative staff, and given a possible explanation for this discrepancy by sampling, we can fix some failure in communicating with students and involving them in the work of the university, which enhances the effects of non-engagement and feelings of anxiety and injustice.

Thus, the clash of opinions between different groups during radical organizational changes highlights the specifics of the student voice as participation [Seale, 2009] (and its absence) and shows how some groups are more influential and heard at the university than others. Accordingly, during merging universities, students are in a situation of non-involvement and lack of voice, which is argued by teachers and administrative staff by their social immaturity and finality of students' stay at the university.

The experience of mergers and acquisitions as a radical organizational change

Through empirical research, we postulate that mergers as radical organizational changes create uncertainty. In connection with the unsettled policy of communication with students described above, they increase the sense of injustice and insecurity, as well as the actualization of the "we-they" dichotomy.

Summing up the information obtained in the empirical study, it became possible to reveal that students often experience anxiety even at the first stages of university mergers. Students describe the situation of organizational transformation as extremely emotionally charged, uncertain, and potentially unfair for them, while emotions in the educational process should be taken into account [Kaufman, 2014].

These results correlate with research on the "human factor" in mergers and acquisitions, which explains that members of merging organizations try to cope with uncertainty by predicting the worst-case scenario [Seo, Hill, 2005, p. 424] and use such categories as "death" or "loss" in their evaluation of mergers. Similar epithets "death", "destruction", "end" occur in this study. In the Russian context, the similarity of the words "to merge" and slang expressions in the meaning of "to lose", "to fail" is often used in the speech of students and in their discussions on social networks and provides an additional frame for describing reactions to the merger.

It is impossible to note the different processes that take place for students from different universities participating in the merger. In some cases, for students at a consolidating university in the case of a takeover scenario, serious changes in organizational characteristics do not occur. Such situations, unlike those described above, do not signal about the emotionally experienced situation of unification. However, they demonstrate that students are not involved in the process of university change.

Unintentionally, university mergers cause students to see the "Other" (students from the university-partner in the merger). Theoretically, this can become a moment of actualization of student identity, help determine who they are and who they are not. In practice, this is reflected in the activation of the position "we are against them" [Hogg, Terry, 2000], conflicts, mutual suspicion, readiness to attack the other side [Seo, Hill, 2005, p. 429].

It turns out that the practice of mergers and acquisitions has lost students as special type of stakeholders and students as both buyers, employees and key resources of universities, which must

be included in the work of the university [Winston, 1999] for the development of the university and its reputation. The experience of injustice and insecurity at a time can lead to negative consequences for the students themselves, their motivation, engagement, and loyalty as students and graduates and for the reputation of the university and its long-term planning. This is because of the emotional satisfaction which plays more serious role in the loyalty of graduates than educational process itself [Mael, Ashforth, 1992]. However, the experience of changes described here can also be determined by the scenario of representing the merger and building a new organizational identity of the merged university.

Results of mergers and acquisitions that are significant for students

This paragraph concerns the question of how students describe the results of mergers and acquisitions, what they lose and gain as one of the groups at the university. To answer this question, we used data from interviews with students and graduates, as well as analysis of students' opinions in student groups in social networks.

Based on the results of empirical research, we show that merging as a radical organizational change leads to the redistribution of valuable resources of the organization. Using the concepts of "situational" and "resulting" benefits of higher education, identified by Mikhail Sokolov and his colleagues, who continue the Bourdieu line of education research [Sokolov et al., 2014], we supplemented the classification with the help of field data from this study.

Thus, we postulate that valuable resources that can be lost or found due to a merger are a list of situational and resulting benefits, which includes organizational characteristics, characteristics of the educational process, university culture, as well as the "status" and "prestige" of one or another university. This redistribution is emotionally significant, asymmetric for students from different universities participating in the merger, and non-linear (for example, they can lose the situational benefit of "time spent on the road" and gain a resulting benefit of "a more prestigious diploma").

The table below shows these significant for students changes because of the university mergers.

Table 3 – Changes in mergers and acquisitions that are significant for students

Situational benefits	Resulting benefits
Organizational characteristics	
Location of buildings and their infrastructure (canteens, libraries, laboratories, gyms), places in student dormitories and payment for them, time spent on the road	–
University culture	
Specifics of intra-university communication, professional education vs research, different academic orientation, traditions, holidays, history	contribution to cultural capital
Characteristics of the educational process	
Teaching staff, number of fellow students, internships and internships, track, level of tolerance for academic cheating, strictness of exams and defenses of graduation papers	"quality/level of education" = contribution to cultural capital
"Prestige", "status" of the university and its diploma	
Affiliation and student identity	Diploma and reputation of a graduate = contribution to symbolic capital

Responses to organizational changes are not symmetrical for students from different universities participating in the study. In the case of subjective and objective inequality of partner universities, students of "weaker" universities describe themselves as "winners", because of the opportunity to become a graduate of a more "status" and well-known university. They also quickly begin to identify themselves as students at the consolidating university. Thus, the merger becomes an opportunity to strengthen or lose the symbolic capital of higher education and its identity as a student and graduate.

Students at the consolidating university, on the contrary, describe the merger situation as "unfair" to them, devaluing their status and identity of future graduates of their university, as a kind of inflation of the future diploma. This is typical of "more successful groups" that show less enthusiasm and stronger biases [Haunschild et al., 1994] in their attitude to mergers.

At the same time, mergers and acquisitions of universities that include universities with different academic backgrounds bring together the elite and mass higher education sectors and make it impossible for graduates of combined universities to demonstrate positional differences and different levels of symbolic capital [Tomlinson, 2008]. This, in turn, destroys the existing system of hierarchies of universities and their graduates. It turns out that mergers and acquisitions of universities with their a priori blurring of organizational boundaries and with an unsettled intra-university communication policy seem to provoke a fixation on the categories of "status" and "prestige" of the university and a focus on the positioning of their diploma [Collins, 1979], rather than knowledge and skills.

Scenarios for mergers from the students' perspective

This section answers a research question about which merger scenarios exist from the students' perspective and which are the most productive for them. To answer this question, we used a secondary analysis of information on the domestic experience of university mergers and expert interviews on the history of mergers and acquisitions in Russia, interviews with students and graduates, and, finally, an analysis of the representation of the merged universities in the public space.

In the study, it was important to show how the type or scenario may be related to how students will evaluate and experience their experience of university reorganizations. This assumption was based on an analysis of the literature showing that the characteristics of the merger and its partner universities are important for the success of the reorganization [Gummett, 2015; Harman, 1991; Kyvik, Stensaker, 2013; Norgeard, Skodvin, 2002].

However, interviews with students showed that students as a special group at the university are not familiar with the official details of reorganization and do not focus on such major organizational changes as, for example, changes in the level or sector of the educational system or the restructuring of the university (what is described in the literature on university mergers and acquisitions as significant factors for analysis and management). This situation can be interpreted as a sign of students' lack of involvement and lack of information.

By analyzing the representation of merging universities in the public space (analysis of websites, museums, observation at open events) along with interviews with students, it became possible to identify scenarios for mergers from the point of view of students. These scripts are in the student typologies can both correspond and not correspond with the official version of the script or the type of merger. They are emotionally evaluated by the participants of the study. They determine, according to students, the experience of students during the reorganization and the distribution of valuable resources of the university after the merger or acquisition.

Table 4 – Scenario of mergers' representation from the students' perspective for every research case

№	Merger/ Amalgamation	Scenario of mergers' representation from the students' perspective
1a	Merger	"Creating a new one" + "Rivalry"
1b	Merger	"Dissolution"
1c	Amalgamation	"Dissolution"
2a	Amalgamation	"Dissolution"
2b	Amalgamations and then merger	"Dissolution" and then "Creating a new one"
2c	Merger	"Creating a new one" + "Rivalry"

In the "rivalry" scenario, each of the universities participating in the merger remains visible and visible separately. Universities are more or less equally represented and have not symbolically merged into a single organization. In this case, there is a certain rivalry, re-evaluation and redistribution of situational and resulting benefits. The "Dissolution" scenario is connected with cases of asymmetric acquisition and loss of situational and resulting benefits.

The last of the scenarios is the "creating a new one" scenario. In cases where mergers are positioned as equal partners, and merging universities choose a new name, formulated a new mission, and articulate a new organizational identity, students from each university participating in the merger often qualify the reorganization as beneficial to them. They start to build their student identity, respectively corporate identity of the merged university, and according to an interview, recognized that they pleased to become part of this important project.

The fact that students recognize the "creating a new one" scenario as the most productive correlates with the thesis that mergers can be an occasion for rethinking and re-creating organizational identity [Stensaker, 2007]. Working with organizational identity issues should be a necessary step in preparing for strategic changes [Fumasoli et al., 2014], and the formulation of a new goal gives different groups in the organization confidence that they can move forward due to changes [Winston, 1999].

Theoretical and practical significance of the research

The subject of the work falls into the sphere of education research in those areas where interventions and changes in education and their effects are studied, as well as management of educational organizations, socio-cultural aspects of education development, social and group processes in education and educational policy.

The thesis was based on a qualitative inductive approach and a conceptual framework of research that combines various concepts and approaches derived from organizational theory, sociology and philosophy of education, social psychology, and organizational ethnography. These research bases allowed us to collect and interpret data at the intersection of large problem fields – changing higher education and attention to the student experience, concerning students who face radical organizational changes in higher education and are forced to change with it.

The theoretical significance of the research consists in the development of ideas about the position of students as a special group in contemporary changing universities, the introduction of

major educational policies and interventions for students, and the proof of the need to take into account the subjective experience of various groups when analyzing changes in higher education.

The results of the research, as well as the methodological approaches developed in the dissertation project, can be used for further research of students' opinions, reactions, and self-descriptions in the situation of various changes at the universities.

Research of students in mergers as an innovative topic contributes to the formation of a new research agenda, respectively. Its direct continuation can be studies of the transformation of student cultures and organizational culture of universities in the course of mergers and acquisitions, research of students' educational results in organizational transformations, correlation of the role of students and the experience of students in changes with their socio-economic status, type of student personal project or student culture. In addition, the experience and role of students in reorganizations can be compared both with other groups within the university (teachers, administrative staff) and with similar groups outside the higher education sector (secondary school students).

Another group of studies where the results of the study can be applied, in particular, the scheme of changing situational and resulting benefits of education for students, is the study of other organizational changes in the university and higher education (the consolidation of faculties, the transition to a distance learning format, and so on).

Finally, a dissertation study of students in university mergers in relation to the literature on the "human factor"/ "human side" of organizational mergers has shown the specific role of students in the university. Significant changes in organizational culture and identity, changing organizational characteristics can be compared for students and employees of organizations. But the identified special temporality of students' stay at the university (the traumatic experience of reorganization will end faster for them, but will remain with them as graduates forever) and the resulting benefits of higher education, cultural and symbolic capital, which are re-evaluated during mergers and acquisitions and come to the fore for students, and demonstrate the role of students as a special group at the university.

The practical significance of the research is in its use both in organizational and educational activities. This research highlights the problematic and significant aspects of mergers and acquisitions for students as one of the groups at the university, thus the research results can be used to find the best management solutions during the organizational changes:

a. Support for organizational changes in education, taking into account the most significant changes for students in the distribution of the benefits of higher education,

b. Building a strategy for the merged university, taking into account the importance of representing the merger as a process of creating a new university, in which all partners can increase their cultural and symbolic capital,

c. Performing tasks of communication, informing, and involving students that are formulated in research on mergers and acquisitions of universities, but are not implemented in practice in Russian reorganizations.

In addition, the materials of the research can be used in developing the content of educational disciplines dedicated to university and higher education research within the topics of the role of students as a special group at the university and radical organizational changes in higher education.

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