

INTERNALIZATION OF EDUCATION: RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Summary

The article presents the analysis of the current trends and obstacles that Russian higher education faces in internalization processes. They are rooted in historical and cultural aspects of the country's development and reflect the changes in motives for internalization. In order to become a valuable part of the global academia, Russian educational institutions should overcome legislative, administrative and cultural barriers and map out an education development strategy to engage all students, faculty members, and administrators in the process of internationalization, and provide them with suitable instruments to learn how to study, live, and work effectively in a globalized era.

Keywords

internationalization, higher education system, motives for internalization, approaches to internalization

Összefoglalás

A tanulmány azokat a jelenlegi folyamatokat és akadályokat elemzi, amelyekkel a nemzetköziesítés során az orosz felsőoktatás szembesül. A nehézségek az ország fejlődésével kapcsolatos történelmi és kulturális aspektusokban gyökereznek és a nemzetköziesítés motivációit tükrözik. Az orosz felsőoktatásnak törvényhozási, adminisztratív és kulturális akadályokat kell legyőznie annak érdekében, hogy intézményei a globális felsőoktatási intézményrendszer részeivé váljanak. Emellett olyan oktatásfejlesztési stratégiát kell kidolgoznia, amely a bevonja a hallgatókat, oktatókat és adminisztratív személyzetet a nemzetköziesítési folyamatokba, és megfelelő eszközrendszerrel látja el őket annak érdekében, hogy a globalizáció korában hatékonyan tudjanak tanulni, élni és dolgozni.

Kulcsszavak

nemzetköziesítés, felsőoktatási rendszer, a nemzetköziesítés motivációi és megközelítései

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Introduction

In the era of a global economy and international labor market, internalization of higher education has become a necessity and a driving force of economic and social development worldwide. It becomes obvious today that the national systems of higher education cannot develop beyond global processes and trends, beyond the demands of the world labor market. Countries face a crucial demand for graduates who are able to be an effective global citizen and contribute to the national economy and the society. Economic and political reasons make governments develop and implement programs and strategies.

In the new political and economic realities, Russian higher education faces new demands in every field of its activities, including international aspects, where new policies for the internationalization of Russian academia have to be worked out at all levels: national, local, and institutional (Petrovich 2010; Yampolskaya 2004)

The purpose of the article is to provide the historical framework of the modern Russian university system as a part of the global education system in order to better understand tensions and challenges that Russian higher education faces in the internalization process.

Internalization: essence, motives, approaches.

Internationalization became the most frequently used term in academic literature in the late 1980s. Prior to this period, terms like international education, comparative education, global education or multicultural education were in the center of academic debates. Traditionally, internalization is defined as “the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service function of the institution.” (Knight 1994; Knight–de Wit 1997) The broader definition suggested by Van der Wende (2007, 19) stresses “any systematic, sustained efforts aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labor markets.” Altbach (2002) defines internalization as a variation of practical initiatives of countries and individual academic institutions or systems to deal with those global trends. Examples of internationalization include policies relating to the recruitment of foreign students, collaboration with academic institutions or systems in other countries, as well as the establishment of branch campuses abroad.

The driving forces for the process of internalization have been identified (Knight 2004; Stier 2004) as *academic, economic, political and cultural or social*.

Academic motives are connected with understanding a world-wide essence of education and research. International dimensions of academic practices help achieve quality higher education in the country. *Economic motives* are linked with a demand for new sources of profit and development, the long-term economic effects. Higher education is considered as a great contribution to the skilled human resources that enhance the nation’s competitiveness in the world. Knight assumes that “if one is to ensure that improving the quality of higher education is the primary goal of internalization, not the development of international export markets, it is essential to find the balance between income-generating motives and academic benefits.” (Knight 2004, 67) *Political motives* are driven by a necessity to impact definite groups of people and enhance the political or ideological influence of the country. “Historically, international education was seen as a beneficial tool for foreign policy especially with respect to national security and peace among nations. While this is still a consideration today, it does not have the importance it once did.” (Knight 1997, 9) *Political motives* are usually in the scope of interests of policy makers and funded by government programs. *Cultural or social motives* are focused on the country’s culture and language and their promotion in the world. Internalization means understanding and respecting other

cultures and languages; it helps balance “the perceived homogenizing effect of globalization” (Knight 1997, 11).

Researches identify different approaches towards the promotion and implementation of internalization programs: the *activity*, *competency*, *ethos* and *process approaches* (Aigner et al. 1992; Arum–Van der Water 1992; Knight 1994; 1996; 1997).

The *activity approach* traces back to the 1970s – early 1980s and the term of international education. It deals with the specific activities like curriculum, student or faculty exchange, technical assistance and does not consider the relations between and among the activities. The *competency approach* is grounded in developing skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values in students, faculty and staff. The approach is focused on the curriculums and programs that are oriented towards the global job markets demands and concerns and the development of appropriate competences. The *ethos approach* relates to developing a supportive organizational climate or a culture within the institution that values its intercultural initiatives and perspectives. The *process approach* deals with policies and procedures that help integrate intercultural/international dimensions into teaching, research and service.

Internalization of Russian higher education: historical perspective

From its beginning, the Russian academia can be considered as the result of the international policy of the national royal elite. The Russian Academy of Sciences (1724) was formed by foreigners invited by Peter I and the first students (they arrived with their professors) were also foreigners. Russian higher education as a national system aiming to educate its citizenry and be available to the general population of the country traces back to the Soviet times, the 1930s. From the very beginning, educational institutions were administered, controlled and funded by the government; they had to meet immediate state needs. The state was always the sole ruler of the academic establishment, and education was considered as a copestone of ideological issues and socialist transformation.

After WW II Russian higher education was an active participant of international academic cooperation and it had some specific international targets closely linked to the state policy and realities. Internationalization was mostly directed to “the creation of a new, communist minded generation of European people through the socialist academic system” (Fadeev 1974). The Soviet format of the unified and centralized academic system and its functions were installed in the countries of the Soviet Bloc and in some Asian countries; thousands of students from these countries studied in the USSR annually. Soviet higher education and science were reported to be advanced, well organized, and a challenge to European and US educational systems (Rickover 1959; Roosevelt 1957).

The most famous and unique project of academic internalization was the People’s Friendship University founded in 1961 in order to provide professional and ideologically correct education to students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The institution had the superior status, specific administrative and financial privileges as it was considered to be a special establishment promoting Soviet policy, culture and lifestyle. 90% of the learners were foreigners and only 10% came from the USSR. PFU manifested the continued strength of political will in Soviet higher education, with academic internationalization as a means to achieve political goals.

For the rest of the Soviet institutions, international student exchange and academic mobility was relatively small. Gaining international experience was not a usual academic practice, but rather an exotic activity for most of the students and faculty of the Soviet university communities. Only six percent of all Russian universities had any students and faculty traveling abroad for research or study purposes before 1993 (Vyssee obrazovanie v SSSR 1990).

Inter-university collaboration included international conferences, meetings, research programs, academic or student exchanges and scholarly teams, but it never changed the ground of state education systems, their culture, traditions or models (Scott 2000). Inter-government agreements between university administrators and federal officials aimed at better communication between national academic systems could not change organizational structures, funding procedures, credit or evaluation mechanisms (Scott 1998).

Internalization of Russian higher education: current trends

Global economy and world labor market made world education systems enhance the curriculum with international content and develop English-medium programs for international students. Circulation of international instructional materials, textbooks, and syllabi became a routine reality of global academia, stimulating the development of compatible training programs in different countries and university systems (Knight 2008).

In Russia, the process of education internationalization coincided with “Perestroika”, the collapse of the USSR and the socio-political reconstruction of the country. In order to face the challenges of globalization, the Russian Federation proclaimed internationalization to be an essential element of the reformation of its national higher education system (Yeltsin 1992). There was a shifting emphasis on motives for internationalization – from political motives to economic and cultural ones. Therefore, internationalization in Russia became an essential component of the market transformation of the national economy and a crucial force for establishing a new state educational system aimed at new social goals and rooted into new community values. Western principles of academic freedoms, institutional autonomy and liberal knowledge were declared to replace Soviet academic principles of uniformity and state authority.

The turn towards learning and accepting foreign academic experience was often considered as “Westernization” and was widely discussed among politicians and scholars. Some Russian educators associated it with the positive change toward the industrialized, developed world (Ivanova 2005). Others defined the process as the conversion from a solid, well organized, and scientifically productive Soviet higher education to the unknown, market-oriented and in this sense “anti-scholarly” Western academic system (Fionova 2006; Kara-Murza 2008). By engaging in the Bologna Process, the Russian government initiated a process of adopting a system of comparable higher education degrees around three cycles, developing a credit system similar to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and adopting appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. The period 2000–2014 saw a significant increase in academic mobility, academic and research partnership, as well as the internationalization of the curriculums.

Academic internationalization has become an institutional strategy for Russian universities. Encouraged by new possibilities for direct inter-institutional communications with foreign academic institutions, Russian academic establishments form joint research ventures and cooperative curriculum; develop dual-degree programs, and publish collective scholarly collections of articles.

According to the research of 2014, 46% of Russian HEIs cooperate with different international organizations of education, technology and quality assurance and 89% have bilateral agreements with international educational institutions, mostly from Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (77%), the USA (17%) and China (17%).

Russian HEIs participate in the internationalization process in order to develop connections with international partners (80%), provide better mobility opportunities for the Russian students (75%), attract more international resources (knowledge, finance) (45%), improve the image of the HEI in the RF (40%), attract international students (35%), develop

better reputation of the HEI in the EU (30%), develop better relations with the employers (10%).

About 50 000 Russian people (no more than 1% of the total number) are studying in universities of Germany, France, Great Britain, the USA and other countries of the world. 240,000 foreign people are studying in Russia: 72% of them are from the former Soviet republics – Russian-speaking students from CIS countries (Kazakhstan, Belarus and Turkmenistan). The rest of the students are from Asia (56%), Africa (18.5%), Europe (5%), South America (3.3%), North America and Australia (0.5%).

The most popular cities are Moscow (25%), St. Petersburg (9.7%) and Siberian cities Omsk (4.8%) and Tomsk (4.2%). The People's Friendship University is still the most popular institution for foreign students (mel.fm).

A recent trend of internalization is the development of collaborative programs between institutions in different countries that lead to double (or multiple) degrees. There are about 317 EU-Russia Joint Programs with the leading subjects Social Sciences, Business and Law (47%), and within this category Management and Economics as the most popular areas. The second place is held by Joint Programs in Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction (23%) followed by the Humanities and Arts (10%), Science (9%), Services (6%) and Others (5%).

The numbers have so far remained fairly low in terms of the students (2.8% of all mobile (foreign) students (rbth.com) and the programs and they reflect the current reputation of the national system of higher education on a global level.

The policy-related response to the challenges of internalization has made Russian government develop status building initiatives to gain world class recognition and higher rankings. "Russia does not have any alternative to becoming a natural part of the global academic community, and I, as the President, together with the Prime-Minister and the government of the country make all needed efforts, for the Russian higher education to enforce its position in the European unified educational space as an equal and valuable, respected member." (Medvedev 2012)

These targets have been developed in the "Roadmap of education and science effectiveness enhancement" and in "the measures of the State support for the leading universities aimed their competitiveness amongst leading world educational & research centres" – referred as the "5–100 Project." The project is aimed at maximizing the competitive position of a group of leading Russian universities in the global research and education space; moreover doing well in rankings has some political motive and is considered as "equivalent to an "instrument of competitive battle and influence" (New York Times 25 March 2012). At least five universities should get into the top 100 of the global rankings by 2020. Russian universities have been in QS rankings since 2005. The number of participants since then has grown: 3 participants in 2005, 5 in 2008, 18 in 2013, and 21 in 2014. Russian universities are reported to have very competitive faculty student ratio, and the weakest points are citations per faculty and proportion of international faculty.

Therefore, the priorities are, in particular, advanced skills in English, recruitment of international specialists, unrestrained academic mobility and online education programs. Russian universities have already made the first steps in the direction: about 400 international staff people are employed by Russian HEIs, the total number of publications in international scientific journals has increased to 2.5-fold, the number of highly cited publications to 3,5-fold. Each university-member of the Project 5–100 has to present its own concept of development to the Council for Improvement of Competitiveness (mma.ru).

Another priority is human resources development emphasized by the government. Based on the Presidential Decree 967 "On Strengthening Human Capacity of the Russian Federation" (28.12.2013), the Ministry of Education and Science and a non-commercial organization Agency for Strategic Initiatives developed a pilot project 'Global Education'.

The project provides an opportunity for Russian citizens to study at world leading universities and assistance in employment after the study. It is supposed to send 3 000 students to study at leading world universities in such areas as sciences, medicine, social work management, engineering and high technologies.

Obstacles in Russian academia internalization

The benefits of internationalization are many and varied: growing scale of international activity in the sphere of higher education, developing new forms of higher education internationalization, adopting the best world educational models. However, the statistics and universities' ratings show that Russian universities have not attained a high level of internationalization yet.

Some challenges are connected with long procedures to obtain a working visa for a long-term period and diploma recognition issues. Changes in recruitment strategies, incentives, and immigration policies are examples of efforts to attract and retain students and academics with a potential to enhance the human capital of a country.

Poor knowledge of foreign languages of most Russian students and teaching staff (though it is substantially better among younger scholars than older ones) is identified as one of the critical problems (Balykina 2012). Improving spoken and written ability for key research personnel is a key tactic that Russian universities have adopted to improve publication outcomes and the number of courses taught in English.

A very important obstacle with respect to higher education progress is the decrease in state funding received by universities. Public spending on higher education has fallen from 4.1% to 3.6% of GDP within the last 2 years (vedomosti.ru). Low wages and limited job prospects for young researchers have resulted in a problem of an ageing faculty and a large degree of brain drain. A lot of Russian graduates and scholars use research or study abroad as an actual job search (Ledeneva 2002); the amount of students who leave for the West has grown to over ten thousand each year since the 1990s (Agamova–Allahverdyan 2007). Most of these students obtained graduate degrees and over 70% of them have not returned to Russia (Zayonchikovskaya 2003). Over a hundred thousand scientists from the former Soviet realm emigrated to Western Europe and North America during the first ten years after the fall of the USSR (Kalabekov 2007).

An evident obstacle on the way to becoming a valuable part of the modern global academia is the contradiction between the classical pattern of top-down, centralized, administered and government-funded Russian HEIs and the principals of academic freedom and autonomy, diversity and public good of the global academia. The implementation of many international projects is very Soviet in its organizational core: the initiatives are mostly “top-down”, with deadlines, budgets and strategies developed and provided by the government.

University cultures also reflect the very much “top-down” structure of Russian universities. Changes in culture come very slowly; it will take a lot of time and efforts to make Russian HEIs utilize progressive academic practices with internationalization as a fundamental basis for every significant part of their everyday activity. In the meantime, it is worth seeking policy lessons from other countries with “top-down” academic cultures (e.g. China, Korea) with respect to how they have managed their rise in rankings.

Conclusion

Russian higher education is still in the transition mode – it is not the old Soviet system any more, but it is not a modern Western-like university system either. Russian federal authorities approve modern tendencies in inter-institutional academic cooperation; they initiate programs

aimed at providing a rich international academic experience for students, improving students' opportunities for employment and HEIs rating in the global education system. The resources, however, are rather scarce. The government expects that internationalization initiatives will promote knowledge production to solve regional or global problems (e.g., environment, health, etc.).

Universities could attract more international students to study in Russian universities through more effective recruiting strategies, modernizing university infrastructure, teaching in English. Spreading the internationalization process throughout the overall system of higher education, the internationalization of the curriculum, learning outcomes and teaching methods could make it a valuable part of the global academia and help finalize the transformation of the Russian academia into a modern and effective education system.

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