

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN VORONEZH STATE UNIVERSITY: PRESENT AND FUTURE

With the rise of globalization, especially in the 21st century, and the resulting boost in international communication, the Russian higher education system is facing new challenges. Whilst previously universities focused on producing qualified specialists for domestic needs, today they need to become more international in order to operate effectively in the global education market and enable university graduates to compete for jobs internationally.

This requires a new approach in the strategic plans of Russian universities - namely, the internationalization of our education system. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines internationalization of education as a process when the purposes, functions and structure of the education become multidimensional (Hénard, F., Diamond, L., Roseveare, D., 2012). It is a dynamic process, which is continuously shaped and reshaped by the international context it occurs in. According to the International Association of Universities, these changes in context, “involve changes in the goals, concepts and strategies of internationalization” (IAU, 2012). We agree that it involves the integration of various international aspects not only into the administration process, but above all, into academic activities and research undertaken by universities. Thus, Voronezh State University (VSU) targets (1) the internationalization of the curriculum; (2) the internationalization of the teaching and learning processes through partnerships with institutions abroad and (3) the internationalization of relationships with potential foreign employers.

The first two points are the most significant. Numerous researchers put emphasis on the centrality of the curriculum considering “the internationalization of the curriculum and teaching and learning processes as critical elements of internationalization” (Bond, 2003a; Bond et al., 2003; Green & Olson, 2003; Knight, 1994, 1997, 2000a; Lemasson, 2002; Paige, 2003; Tonkin & Edwards, 1981). Indeed, the curriculum is qualified as “the backbone of the

internationalization process" (Knight, 1994, p. 6). So, why is it important to internationalize the curriculum in higher education? Because it seems to be an effective means of providing an academic environment that supports the diverse cultural learning needs of students in the international context. Russian students must be able to fit their culturally based learning expectations within the traditions of Western or Eastern curricular perspectives and pedagogical strategies. Obviously, education and the curriculum play a key role in shaping students' values as well as being typically reflective of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a particular culture and their home institution. That's why it requires thorough consideration.

Bearing this in mind, VSU puts a particular emphasis on foreign language training of specialists, ready to compete in the global market. The main player here is the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology of Voronezh State University. It produces specialists in teaching, translation and cross-cultural communication. The list of foreign languages studied by the students includes: English, German, French, Spanish and Italian. Besides, the integral part of the learning process at the faculty is studying cultural and social aspects of the respective countries. Thus, the faculty curricula include such disciplines as Geography and History of the respective countries, Culture Studies, Culture-oriented Linguistics, Translation and Interpreting, etc. Also, the students of the faculty have an opportunity for internships in a variety of partner universities. Their stay can last from two weeks to ten months depending on the purpose, tasks and activities they are involved in.

In the context of increasing globalization we can observe significant changes in the world demand for languages. Taking into consideration the increasing role of Asia and Africa in the world economy, The Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology has introduced some changes into its curriculum. Now, students have an opportunity to study the Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic languages. It has also helped to promote the university's international cooperation as, for example, our students can go to China for internships. Similarly, it has enhanced cooperation

with some Arabic countries. As a result, we have signed agreements on cooperation and academic exchange with five universities in Iraq.

In addition, the administration of VSU puts great emphasis on the language education of students in Science departments because, as we see it, it is absolutely necessary in the context of the internationalization of the curriculum and learning process. The system of extended, or supplementary, education involves training in translation for specific, professional purposes. Every year about two hundred students enrol on this programme with a view to developing their cross cultural communication skills, which, in their opinion, can prove really helpful, especially when young specialists apply for positions in foreign companies and organizations.

Internationalization of education implies developing academic exchange programs, which help Russian students to acquire new professional and cultural competences and skills and raise their personal competitiveness. VSU has cooperation agreements with over 100 universities from all over the world, including the largest universities of China, Germany, the USA and other countries.

Students participate in exchange programmes on a wide range of majors. Thus, those who specialize in physics, chemistry and IT usually study in the USA and Germany. The students of the Economics Faculty have internships in management, commerce, regional economy and marketing in the USA, France, Spain and Austria. The students of Philology and History Faculties study in Germany, Italy, Spain and Ireland acquiring communication competences in business. Every year a large group of students go to study Chinese in different universities of China. On the whole, in 2013, for example, 236 Russian students went abroad to study or participate in conferences and workshops.

Another priority of VSU connected with internationalization is teaching foreign students. The University became the educational centre for students from the former Socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America during the time of the USSR. At that time there were over 2000 students and interns from East Germany in VSU, which explains the numerous alumni associated with Germany now.

In 2012 VSU hosted 935 foreign students from 83 countries, which is 4.5% of the total number of students, including 79 graduate students and 59 postgraduates.

The largest group includes Chinese students and postgraduates. Over 150 students come from Arabic countries such as Iraq, Syria and Jordan.

Foreign students study at all 17 faculties of the university but the most important are the pre-university studies attended by 163 students. The teachers at this faculty not only teach students Russian but also help them adapt to Russian culture. The learning process is based on manuals and textbooks produced by the faculty. While taking the pre-university course, the students take an active part in the social and cultural life of the university. For example, they participate in the annual Festival of the Russian Language and Culture. They meet with Russian students and young representatives of different organizations.

Voronezh State University offers a wide range of programmes to foreign students such as a pre-university course, bachelor's and master's programmes, postgraduate studies, short-term internships for researchers and students, language courses and summer schools. The most popular faculties among foreign students are the Economics Faculty, the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology, Computer Sciences, International Relations and Pharmaceutics faculties.

The academic process at university embraces both the students and the teaching staff. The latter must be incorporated in the course of internationalization of education as well. With regard to this, VSU has been actively developing contacts with foreign partners. Highly appreciating the historical background and the academic expertise of top-ranking European and American universities, VSU has been engaged in sharing their successful experience. Undoubtedly, it can provide institutional guidance and examples of good practice in internationalization. For example, back in 1996-1999, we delivered a large-scale project within the European Union Programme, called University Management in International Affairs. As a result, over a hundred members of the teaching staff had an opportunity to stay in such famous universities as University of Leuven

(Belgium), University of Granada (Spain), Galway University (Ireland), etc. Needless to say our professors and academics benefited greatly from the programme.

Academic mobility programmes for students and teachers of Voronezh State University have resulted in new forms of cooperation. While there are some traditional departments like the Department of exchange programmes, new centres have been established specializing in the language and culture of a particular country. For example, there is a Centre of French language and culture, which has a good library and a collection of audio files and has close ties with the French embassy. This centre organizes French language courses and they are taught by native speakers. There are also other centres in VSU such as centres of Spanish, Irish, Italian, Chinese and other languages. Each centre is unique; however, together they are aimed at strengthening the international ties of Voronezh State University.

As mentioned above, VSU is concerned not only with internationalization of education as such, but also with enabling students to successfully meet requirements when applying for positions with international companies. To bridge this gap between the theory and real practice at work we are trying to establish relationships with potential employers, including those abroad. As an example, we have a number of university-based vocational training centres of some leading IT companies, such as: Siemens IT Solutions and Services, T-systems, and NetCracker. Here they also study foreign languages, such as English and German for career purposes.

As we see it, such changes and extension of curricula in addition to language learning increases competitive advantages of our students. It promotes cooperation between universities as well as student mobility, for example, within joint master's programmes aimed at obtaining the second degree. Promoting information availability as well as responsibility of staff members and students, we are extensively using the internet to monitor the defence of master's theses. We have a joint cooperation programme with the University of Marne-la-Vallee (Paris),

where our students have a defence of their degree projects on tourism management. We have also been cooperating with such universities as Lille University (France), Martin Luther University (Germany), University of Leon (Spain) and University of Perugia (Italy). Taking into consideration the strong links between Russia and these countries, we focus on training specialists for joint industrial and commercial cooperation programmes involving big companies. In addition to this, we have been collaborating with some American Universities, such as: University of North Dakota (Dickinson), Concordia University (Chicago) and University of Wisconsin-Madison. Here, the most popular sphere of collaboration is specialist training in IT.

The knowledge of foreign languages allows our staff members and students to attend international scientific conferences and seminars. Voronezh State University, taken alone, holds about 30-40 international conferences. International academic awareness of our professors and students enables them to increase the number of specialist publications in journals presented in data base of Web of Science and Scopus. In 2013, for example, we reported on publication of 178 articles.

Finally, our successful and productive collaboration with foreign partners enables Voronezh State University to be listed in international rankings. For example, our position in QS University Rankings BRICS is 91 and in QS World University Rankings is 700+. Our position in University Rankings of former Soviet Union countries is 24.

All in all, the achievements described above seem to contribute greatly to our international cooperation record and, hopefully, will enhance the university's future capacity for top-quality research and innovation.

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