National Trends of Internationalization of Education in Voronezh State University: Present and Future

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Globalization of the education market is a definite consequence of economic and information globalization. Only global companies and organizations can be serious players in these areas, and accordingly, in education, only those universities that aim to meet international standards can become successful. Currently, all areas of university life are based on the principles of internationalization. A major role in this process is the creation of curricula and programmes that meet international standards. In today's world, university graduates must obtain the competencies required for them to work successfully not only at home but also in other countries. The key importance in this sense is the linguistic training of students. In addition to obtaining language knowledge and skills, students at Voronezh State University (VSU) serve a probationary period in foreign companies—our partners. These internships take place in the training centres of these companies, as well as directly in the enterprises themselves. An example of such cooperation has taken place with leading information technology (IT) companies: Atos, T-systems, NetCracker, SAP, and Data Art. As experience shows, additional language training is an important means of improving the professional preparation of students and their competitiveness in the international labour market.

Keywords: internationalization, education, universities, language training, internships, cooperation

Introduction

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 the education system. Over the past years, there have been a lot of discussions on the subject in the literature with different authors (e.g., Welgh & Luostarinen, 1988; De Wit, 2010; 2013) trying to revisit its substance. Examining the forces that drive the internationalization process in the sphere of higher education, they reveal the so called “internationalization paradox.” By this, they mean that many of the initiatives fail to deliver what they first promise. Analyzing this phenomenon, experts come to the conclusion that it is unlikely that higher education institutions will be able to transform themselves into truly global units because of historical and organizational barriers. Besides, there is a risk that they may be diverted from their main mission—to

educate their home based students and help them become global citizens. According to the analysts, these institutions should instead focus on the development and implementation of an import-export model of internationalization.

Internationalization of Education

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines internationalization of education as a process when the purposes, functions, and structure of the education become multidimensional (Hénard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 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 (IAU), these changes in context “involve changes in the goals, concepts and strategies of internationalization” (IAU, 2012). It is agreed 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: (a) the internationalization of the curriculum; (b) the internationalization of the teaching and learning processes through partnerships with institutions abroad; and (c) 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, 2003; Bond, Qian, & Huang, 2003; Green & Olson, 2003; Knight, 1994; 1997; 2000; 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 is why it requires thorough consideration.

VSU’s Internationalization Strategies

Foreign Language Training of Specialists and Students

Bearing this in mind, VSU puts a particular emphasis on foreign language training of specialists who are ready to compete in the global market. The main player here is the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology of VSU. 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 the cultural and social aspects of the respective countries. Thus, the faculty curricula include such disciplines as the 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 10 months depending on the purpose, tasks, and activities they are involved in.

In the context of increasing globalization, significant changes in the world demand for languages can be observed. 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, VSU has 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 200 students enrol in 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.

Academic Exchange Programmes

Internationalization of education implies developing academic exchange programmes, which help Russian students acquire new professional and cultural competences and skills and raise their personal competitiveness. VSU has cooperation agreements with over 150 universities from all over the world, including the largest universities of China, Germany, the United States (U.S.), and other countries.

Students participate in exchange programmes on a wide range of majors. Thus, those who specialize in physics, chemistry, and information technology (IT) usually study in the U.S. and Germany. The students of the Faculty of Economics have internships in management, commerce, regional economy, and marketing in the U.S., 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 2014, for example, 262 Russian students went abroad to study or participate in conferences and workshops. In order to ensure the high level of academic activity that would conform to international standards and to keep in line with the principles of the "Bologna process," in 2014, VSU continued its activities aimed at involving the teachers from international partner universities in the academic process. In 2014, their total number at the university reached 28.

International Projects

Since 2014, VSU has been implementing 11 international projects, including six Tempus projects, three projects of the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union (EU), one Erasmus Mundus project, and a programme of scientific cooperation between Eastern Europe and Switzerland. In the current year, the International Project and Programme Centre of VSU's International Cooperation Department, in collaboration with the university departments, prepared 20 projects within major educational and scientific programmes, such as Tempus, Erasmus, and the Seventh Framework Programme of the EU.

Working within the framework of international projects and programmes requires special skills and abilities. At VSU, there is an annual professional development course in "international scientific and educational projects aimed at improving the quality of education" (72 hours), whose graduates receive a certificate of completing a short-term advanced training programme from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

An information session "European Programmes in the Field of Education and Science: Opportunities for Russia" was held in 2014. Among the participants, there were the acting head of the EU-Russian Cooperation Programme, delegate of the European Commission to the Russian Federation Nicola Scaramuzzo (who

presented new European education and academic mobility programmes), the deputy director of National Office Erasmus+ in the Russian Federation Anna Muravieva, and the head of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Moscow Gregor Berghorn.

Since 2013, at the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology, there has been an “Academic English” project aimed at teaching English to the academic and teaching staff of the university. The main purpose of the project is to improve the English language skills and competencies for academic and scientific activity in English.

Teaching Foreign Students

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 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). At that time, there were over 2,000 students and interns from East Germany in VSU, which explains the numerous alumni associated with Germany now.

In 2014, VSU hosted 1,026 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. VSU also had some students from Japan together with highly professional guest lecturers from Japanese universities.

The work on enrolling foreign residents in study programmes on a free basis (funded from the budget of the Russian Federation) was done in collaboration with Rossotrudnichestvo and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, using the information system of the allocation of quotas for international student admissions russia-edu.ru of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

Following the results of a competitive selection, VSU was third in the country by the number of international students allowed to be admitted on a free basis, with only the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia and Saint Petersburg State Polytechnic University (engineering fields and programmes) ahead.

Foreign students study at all 17 faculties of the university, but the most important are the pre-university studies attended by 265 students. 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.

In collaboration with the Department of Culture of the Voronezh Municipal Government, the Institute of International Education of VSU organizes the Annual International Song and Dance Festival. This year, over 700 participants took part in the three-day marathon, staging over 200 performances. At the closing concert of the festival, there were over 2,000 people.

On the initiative of the VSU rectorate, supported by the partner Minzu University of China (Beijing), the Institute of International Education of VSU organized the very First Festival of the Chinese Language, Literature, and Culture. Both Russian and Chinese students, as well as teachers and a large delegation from the Minzu University of China, took part in the festival. The colourful and creative programme evoked a wide response from the Russian and Chinese mass media.

VSU 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 Faculties of Economics, Romance and Germanic Philology, Computer Sciences, International Relations, and Pharmaceutics.

The academic process at the 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, VSU delivered a large-scale project within the EU programme, called University Management in International Affairs. As a result, over 100 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 professors and academics in VSU benefited greatly from the programme.

Academic Mobility Programmes

Academic mobility programmes for students and teachers of VSU 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 VSU.

As mentioned above, VSU is concerned not only with the 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, VSU is trying to establish relationships with potential employers, including those abroad. As an example, it has a number of university-based vocational training centres of some leading IT companies, such as Siemens, Atos IT Solutions and Services, T-systems, CISCO Certified Internetwork Expert, and NetCracker. Such programmes of Wizard Animation School as "Animation Expert," "Autodesk 3DS Max Expert," "Autodesk Maya Expert," and "Pixologic Zbrush Expert" are much sought after. Here, they also study foreign languages, such as English and German for career purposes.

Conclusion

Such changes and extension of curricula, in addition to language learning, increases the competitive advantage of 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, VSU is extensively using the Internet to monitor the defence of master's theses. It has a joint cooperation programme with the University of Marne-la-Vallee (Paris),

where VSU students have a defence of their degree projects on tourism management. VSU has 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, VSU focuses on training specialists for joint industrial and commercial cooperation programmes involving big companies. In addition to this, it has 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 staff members and students to attend international scientific conferences and seminars. VSU, taken alone, holds about 40-50 international conferences. International academic awareness of professors and students enables them to increase the number of specialist publications in journals presented in database of Web of Science and Scopus. In 2014, for example, VSU reported on publication of 210 articles.

Finally, VSU's successful and productive collaboration with foreign partners enables it to be listed in international rankings. For example, its position in QS University Rankings BRICS is 111-120 and in QS World University Rankings is 700+. Its position in National University Rankings of classical universities and science centres is 22.

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

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