

Internationalization in Higher Education in Russia: Challenges, Lessons and Prospects of Collaboration with Vietnam

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Received 25 April 2017

Revised 11 June 2017; Accepted 28 June 2017

Abstract: The article addresses the needs of educational system in context of rapidly developing globalization and explores internationalization of higher education as one of the main factors which contributes to integration of international dimension to professional training at universities. Different components and strategies of internationalization, such as strong collaboration in teaching, internationalization of the curriculum, cooperation in researches and knowledge production, students and professors' mobility, and participation in international networks are analyzed in connection to education reform in Russia. The article provides the comparison of internationalization policies in Russian and Vietnamese education systems, argues that innovations in higher education should be adjusted to the national interests, traditions and mentality and finally describes new strategies in collaboration of Russia and Vietnam in the field of education.

Keywords: Higher education, internationalization, reforms, collaboration of Vietnam and Russia.

The economic and political forces of ongoing globalization forge such a worldwide educational platform where common knowledge and integration of scientific researches play the key role in order to create a 'knowledge society' which is capable to maintain all innovations in technique, technology, information and communication. Thus globalization is in need of internationalization of education which would provide the growing international labor market with educated specialists with relevant

knowledge and skills and facilitate their communication.

1. Internationalization: goals and indicators

Internationalization of higher education is usually defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" [1]. Though according to many experts, the main factor which affects national systems of education is the economic ideology of globalization, which accentuates priority of the market and the declining role of the government sector in education, internationalization in education in

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<https://doi.org/10.25073/2588-1116/vnupam.4099>

some of its aspects is not a new phenomenon. Pilgrimage of students in the medieval Europe, the strategy of colonial powers to educate the cadre elite from the vassal countries in metropolia are early examples of students' mobility. Meanwhile, foundation of the universities by the colonial empires of the late 19th - early 20th centuries at their overseas territories could be compared to contemporary export of education. The educational model which had been implanted from the West didn't change much after the former colonies got independence; they often used the same principles to operate the existent and to open new universities. After the World War II during the period of the "cold war" the confrontation between the West and the socialist countries spread out to the system of education and two ideological camps began a strong rivalry in attracting the students from the developing countries. 'Internationalization' at that time was seen as students' migration to the countries which could provide education for rapid developments of new liberated post-colonial industries.

In the turn of millennium when globalization adjusted the roles of states, transnational corporations, financial systems, various national institutions and international organizations to modern development process, the goals and the policies of education were also revised. In the more interconnected world internationalization in higher education, once seen as students exchange and export of educational models, now has got more complex interpretation which also includes stronger collaboration in teaching, internationalization of the curriculum, participation in international networks, cooperation in researches and knowledge production, professors mobility and common tools of innovative management .

2. Education reform in Russia: pros and cons

In Russian higher education ideas of 'internationalization' had been rooted in

universities' cross-cultural cooperation beginning from the 18th century. In the Soviet period, especially after the World War II, the aspects of internationalization in the university life became more diverse and the number of foreign students enrolled to USSR universities approached 130 thousand (third place after USA and France at that time). Collapse of the Soviet Union and transition of Russia to the market economy raised the question of commercialization in training professionals, both national and foreign. If in the Soviet time, internationalization in education had been understood mainly as the presence of foreign students in national universities and also as a propagation of ideological values of the former regime, after 'perestroika' the universities began to develop new forms of internationalization through reform of curriculum, international and regional cooperation in teaching and researches, distance learning, etc.

Considering new economic demands at the epoch of globalization Europe began to form the common educational space almost two decades ago when in 1999 the Bologna agreement was signed marking the start of unification of national high education systems in Europe. Russia has joined the Bologna agreement in 2003 declaring that will complete the education reform in 2010. Though, the current reform had faced a lot of obstacles - mainly the resistance of universities and educators themselves. From one side, remembering the quote of Woodrow Wilson, the 28th president of United States, from the time he had been the President of Princeton University "It is easier to change the location of a cemetery, than to change the school curriculum", one can interpret such approach as a conservatism of the universities. From another side, the borrowed innovations not always correlate with national traditions and mentality. A large number of discussions on this topic disclosed anxiety provoked by the Western model of modernization in university system and called for consideration of local context.

Russian high education system historically based on the German model, by the end of the 20th century was recognized internationally, organically embedded into economic system of the country and corresponded to national mentality. At present, for the sake of rapid integration into Euro-American system the government took the course on the radical changes. However, the cardinal reforms caused such contradictions as: transition to multilevel (bachelor – master degrees) system and non-acceptance of bachelor degree by the employers in many spheres; students mobility and poor financial support for it; professors mobility and “brain drain”, vassalage of the reforms from the market which led to the decline of fundamental science in favor of profitable researches. We shall briefly inspect the above mentioned concerns since it can attract attention of Vietnamese educators who are involved in the similar process of transformation of high education system previously based on the Soviet standards.

2. 1. Internationalization which first of all requires unification of the curriculum has obligated Russian universities to switch from the 5 years training programs with the diploma of the specialist at the end to the multilevel system: bachelor (4 years) - master (2 years) degrees. This system at the first stages of the reforms has created a number of problems for students as well as for teachers and employers [2]. The bachelors often can't find good jobs in industry and economics; they are regarded as half-educated since the employers are convinced that the graduates can't get any practical experience without two-three months training in the economic sector of their specialization as it had been stipulated during the 5-years study cycle. From another side, masters are not in demand in many professional fields, such as industry or agriculture. Moreover, the reduction of government funding and growth of students' self-financing in education make 6 year education program hardly affordable for many families regarding the low income and the poor condition of bank

loans policy for education purpose. In this situation the difference in social and financial status of those who possess bachelors and master degrees can increase social injustice in Russian educational system, unfamiliar with this phenomenon during Soviet period.

2. 2. One of the main goals of the reforms confirmed in Bologna is mobility of students and teachers. Though by statistics of UNESCO the level in international students mobility had increased for the last 25 years by 300%, in general it has many obstacles, mostly but not only linked to such issues as visas, or recognition matters and costs [3]. Thus, the majority of Russian students still are not able to go to study abroad. Now the number of students from Russia in foreign universities is more than 50 000 (by the information of UNESCO: there is no precise statistics, since the records are provided not by all countries), however this number is insignificant (approximately 1,2 %) compare to the total quantity of students enrolled in higher education program - 4, 76 million for the year 2015 [4]. The situation with Vietnamese students studying abroad is more encouraging: the report the government submitted to the National Assembly on October 18, 2016 stated that now 130,000 Vietnamese citizens study overseas. (around 5 % from the total number of students – 2,2 million).

Academic mobility of teachers also has a dual nature: there is a great geographical inequality in the streams of the qualified teachers. Some countries constantly recruit international academic personnel for development of their national educational system; others use only their own resources or even lose qualified specialists. “Even within the global North, inequalities of academic mobility are significant. Within the well-known and highly regarded ERASMUS programme in Europe, for example, one survey showed the extent of dominance by the major systems. According to the survey, some 60 percent of mobile academics came from the five largest and generally wealthiest member nations: 14 per cent each from Germany and United Kingdom,

12 per cent from France, 11 per cent from Spain, and 9 per cent from Italy” [5]. In Russia the academic mobility of universities staff is still not widely developed because of the absence of infrastructure able to provide the effective academic exchange, insufficient financial base, absence of planned strategies in this sector of academic activity, and language barrier. The similar situation we find in Vietnam where the teachers academic exchange is mostly one-directional – being a receiver of temporary lecturing academics from overseas, Vietnam educational system is not yet able respond equally.

2.3. Theorists of internationalization in education note that within the frames of the market economy earning money is a key motive for all internationalization projects and programs. This statement evokes the main concern of the opponents of Bologna reforms in Russia who suppose that vassalage of these reforms from the market and reduction of financial infusions from the government can transform universities into the business structures since they would be obliged to do more profitable researches to the detriment of fundamental ones. Long-term needs in development of science, economic, culture of the nation, thus, would be replaced by the short-term demands of the market. The fear that the labor market will transform the proportions of theoretical disciplines in favor of more practical special disciplines is not groundless: Russian education now risks losing one of its prerogatives – the deep knowledge by students of fundamental sciences which allowed them later in their careers to easily switch to different fields of research or change specialization.

Moreover, in Russian education system, based on the ideas of Fichte and Humboldt, narrow professional education was considered less important than general one, since only the later could develop the understanding of all interconnections and processes in nature and in human existence. So straight borrowing of the foreign ideas, just like copy and paste, without adaptation to national cultural peculiarities and

traditional education system can easily cause various negative impacts. Probably the similar reasons provoked mass protests of school and university students in Germany on the 10th anniversary of Bologna agreement in 2009 when young people criticized the changes in education and complained that many companies refuse to recognize a bachelor degree as an evidence of complete university education.

In addition, in Russian mentality education was always considered to be one of the most important human virtues and knowledge was regarded as spiritual value you could get through intellectual efforts or experience but not just take or buy. It means that for some national societies, even at the time when transnational corporations dictate their rules and the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the World Bank define global economic policies, education is still seen not only as the market product and can't be thought of in the terms of provider and consumer. The role of the teacher in such societies is not devalued to simple knowledge transferring. He is a real educator capable to form personality of a student. I can't agree to be just “a provider of educational service”; I want to stay a Teacher.

Reforms in Vietnamese higher education related to internationalization of educational process encountered similar problems caused by formal borrowing of foreign concepts. Discussing the limitations of reform outcomes the scholars argue that “importing the curriculum from a Western country without thoughtful consideration of the local culture, history and dynamics would result in low cost efficiency and cost ineffectiveness, leading further to a huge waste of resources”. They also emphasize “the importance of an inward-looking approach to higher education reforms because it brings the centuries-long Vietnamese cultural values into play” and the role of “culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy” in the process of internationalization [6].

3. Internationalization in Russia: following world tendencies

Nevertheless, despite all these contradictions, internationalization continues to develop and strengthen its position in Russian high education. If by quantitative parameters which characterize internationalization Russia is far behind the West, it doesn't yield to other countries by nomenclature of educational products and services which includes work on new programs, universities' collaboration in different spheres, exchange of students and academics, distance learning, work on agreements about mutual recognition of diplomas, intensification of foreign-language learning, increasing of foreign students presence at the universities and so on [7]. The strong stimulus for internationalization of educational programs is creation of global educational alliances and the growing influence of international professional associations. Along with development of new educational standards and paradigms we can see a lot of examples of integration into the meta-programs of international cooperation. One of such examples is that MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations), RUDN (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia) and RGGU (Russian State University for the Humanities) perform a program on human rights with such partners as European Interuniversity centre on human rights and democratization (so called Venetian consortium) and with the Office of the High Commissioner for human Rights in UN.

Some of the higher education institutions develop export of educational services operating their programs abroad, as Moscow International Slavonic Institute and Moscow State University of Industry - in Bulgaria [8]. Many others open their branches with the variety of departments but mostly on the territory of the former Soviet republics. Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University in Bishkek can be considered the biggest one by the number of

students (11 thousand). Plekhanov Russian University of economics for example has its branches in 6 foreign countries, and distinguished technical universities, like Moscow Technical University of communication and informatics, collaborate with numerous foreign companies both in research and training.

Another form of universities collaboration is a dual degree. In statistics of European International commission on education Tempus for the year 2012, 246 dual degree programs in Russia at 79 universities are mentioned. However, it's still difficult for possessors of these degrees to find a job on the international labor market because there are many competitive applicants with diplomas from renowned European schools. On the Russian labor market employers still show preference to Russian diploma from the solid universities and the working experience. Some dual degree programs are represented by unpopular and unknown foreign universities and sometimes are not licensed in the country of the provider.

An important factor in internationalization is a language of education. The most attractive and the most popular language of instructions for majority of international students is English. Though Russian students join dual degree programs taught in English at home campus and even go for full or part-time education programs to English speaking countries, there is still a big gap between those whose level of English is sufficient for these forms of education and the majority which feels disadvantages of the language barrier [9].

An effort to attract foreign students to national university is one of the main component of internationalization along with export of education and appropriation of international knowledge. At present (statistics for 2015/2016 school year) nearly 240 000 foreign students study at 798 state and municipal universities and institutes of Russian Federation. Many of national universities have

not used all the resources for attracting potential students: they still need to modernize their programs, to create better studying and living conditions and to promote their education services on international market. Contrarily, some of the established Moscow universities experience an influx of those who desire to enter their different faculties and programs. Therefore, Lomonosov Moscow State University (MGU), Sankt-Petersburg State University, Bauman Moscow State Technical University (MVTU) and some others have to limit the number of foreign students in order to satisfy the demands of Russian applicants.

Entering the international market for education, Russia not only aims to get a material profit, but also tries to create and develop a base for long-term international relations in culture, economy, and politics, professional and personal communication. The government of Russian Federation supports many developing countries by providing a number of scholarships which fully cover tuition. In its resolution # 638 from the 25th of August 2008 the government of Russian Federation increased to 10 000 the number of scholarships from the federal budget for foreign citizens and compatriots from abroad. Quota for such scholarships is gradually rising for many African, Asian and South-American countries including Vietnam [10].

4. Internationalization in Vietnam and its priorities

Internationalization and reforms in the current higher education system of Vietnam in many aspects are similar to Russian situation. Vietnam that turned from the planned to the free market economy only 30 years ago has experienced unprecedented economic growth during these three decades and after the period of political and economic isolation from the West tries to rapidly achieve economic and cultural integration with more developed countries worldwide and regionally. This target

demands an infusion of sufficient number of high qualified professionals first of all in industry and in financial sector. In this context internationalization in higher education becomes the key issue of educational reforms.

Unlike Russia, Vietnam had never exported educational services. Contrarily, “the character of higher learning in Vietnam has been significantly shaped by external influences” including Chinese, French and Soviet. “Curriculum content, intellectual influences, foreign teachers and language of instruction all show clear influences from abroad [11].

At present when Vietnam aims to develop knowledge-based economy and is in need of highly skilled specialists with international education and experiences such components of internationalization as strategic partnerships and student mobility become the priorities. The Ministry of Education and Training of the country has developed a special scholarship projects to support education of Vietnamese students abroad – Project 322 for the level of bachelor and master degrees and Project 911 – for PhD level. Both in the frames of the projects and privately, there are more than 100 thousand Vietnamese students enrolled in the foreign universities at the 2010s (125000 in 2013/2014 by the information of Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training).

Though the education abroad is the most significant part of internationalization, the majority of Vietnamese students are not able to study overseas because of the lack of financial support and low level of general incoming knowledge. Therefore it becomes crucial to reinforce internationalization at local universities via partnerships with foreign institutions and upgrading of existing curriculum. Establishing a Wholly Foreign-Owned University – RMIT, the partnership in training with universities from different Western countries and countries of ASEAN with the dual diplomas are successful examples of internationalization in practice [12; 13].

5. Russian-Vietnamese cooperation in education: new strategies

In Russian-Vietnamese cooperation in education and science internationalization is also a long-standing phenomenon. Its complex history which was based in different times in geo-political or ideological interests now develops in a new direction taking into account mutually beneficial relations.

From the late 50s of the last century, we can already observe the prototype of internationalization in Soviet educational politics. Even it was typical for the Soviet system to provide free education at the leading universities of Russia and other republics of the Soviet Union to students from the socialist and developing countries, Vietnam was a very special case. Its example demonstrates that the various strategies of what we now call internationalization have enrooted in both countries education since 1960s. While thousands of Vietnamese students studied in the Soviet universities and institutes, hundreds of teachers from the Soviet Union had been working in Vietnam teaching Russian language and technical sciences which had been in demand for developing national industry. Many universities of the engineering profile used Soviet educational programs and materials, the libraries had been equipped by Russian books on different engineering subjects.

Till the early 1990s Soviet Union supported continuous training of Vietnamese specialists who had the opportunity to go for short-terms courses to Soviet universities to update their knowledge and improve qualification. A well-composed system of continuous learning for Russian language teachers in Vietnam embraced all educational levels – from school teachers to university professors. Once in five years they spent the whole school year in Russia at refresher training courses. The specialists of the department of Pushkin Institute of Russian language which had been opened in Hanoi in 1983 helped to the local teachers to prepare new programs and tutorial

materials, the main textbooks of Russian language for schools and universities had been created in Russian-Vietnamese co-authorship.

Analyzing the history of this cooperation even the Western experts conclude that “the contribution of the former socialist states, notably the USSR, should not be underestimated, contributing to a much swifter development of human and institutional resources than would ever have been possible without this key external support” [14].

In 1990s, when Russia had its own economic problems caused by the radical political and economic changes, this system of collaboration in education stayed inactive. The 21st century opened new perspectives for the development of Russian- Vietnamese relations in education: Russia recommenced different forms of collaboration gradually broadening its range according to demands of both countries. Internationalization aspects at present include: 1) training of Vietnamese students in Russian universities - around 5000 students now, with a strategy of Russian Ministry of education and science to raise a number of scholarships for Vietnamese students every year (895scholarships had been provided for the academic year 2016 - 2017); 2) students and academics exchange; 3) joint educational programs; 4) collaboration in researches.

Many universities from the Eastern territories of Russia have a special interest in establishing profound relationship with Vietnam. Far East Federal University for example, has built up partnership with Hanoi University of Science and Technology in language students exchange, with Da Nang University in the sphere of machine building and nanotechnologies and since December 2011 has established research program on food technology with Nha Trang University. Many other examples can be given in order to prove the significant role of internationalization in high education of both countries. The developing economy of Vietnam is in need for the high qualified specialists not only in the

sphere of management (Western universities can probably better satisfy the requirements in this sphere), but first of all in its main strategic sectors like energetic, shipbuilding, biochemistry, processing industry, and oil and gas production and processing, where Russian programs of training can fill the niche.

It should be emphasized that Russian-Vietnamese collaboration in education could be more effective if managers in education would faster respond to current needs of industry and economy. A long tradition in cooperation, knowledge of national peculiarities of each other, long-term friendship and mutual sympathy of two nations can contribute to development of new links and modern strategies.

Thus, collaboration in education for both sides has entered a new phase where internationalization plays a key role. The goal of Russian educational policy in this field is to provide common European standards with incorporation of national component which according to the rector of Lomonosov Moscow State University academic V.A. Sadovnichiy includes scientific character of education, its fundamentality and comprehensiveness of knowledge [15].

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