



# Features of the Development of the Export Potential of the Russian Higher Education System in the Digital Economy

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## Abstract

The article, based on the materials of copyright research with the help of systemic, neo-institutional, historical, comparative analysis, identifies and critically explores the problems and specifics of the competitive advantages of the Russian higher school of Russia in the digital world, and also outlines the path of effective development of its export potential. It is concluded that it is necessary to look for opportunities and introduce ways of constructively combining the classical university strategy oriented to the interests of society and science and the principles of “academic capitalism”; it is necessary to develop within the framework of the Bologna model of the national form and content of the higher school system, which would reflect the unique achievements of the culture of our society. In this direction, it seems promising to expand e-learning in the form of short modular programs with an emphasis on practical skills, required in daily work on the basis of traditional universities. The driving forces, competitive advantages, and peculiarities of the development of this model are taking into account the Soviet experience of teaching foreign students, the fundamentality of training, the relatively low cost of services, the orientation to study in the areas of natural sciences and mass specialties of students from China, India, Central Asia and the Middle East, South America.

## Keywords

Academic capitalism • Higher education • Distance learning • Public policy • New management • Educational services • Entrepreneurial university • Export of education

## JEL Code

I210 • I220 • I230 • I280

## 1 Introduction

In the world's higher education systems, the focus on profit-making is increasing. In a number of leading countries, for example, in the United States, higher school activities are carried out almost only in the fairway of the ideas of “academic capitalism”: the creation of training courses and the beginning of scientific research greatly depend on their economic efficiency, prospects for investment, fundraising. In this regard, universities are considered as entrepreneurial structures (within the framework of the concept of an “entrepreneurial university”). The development of the trend is facilitated by increasing informatization and digitalization, which make it possible to significantly reduce costs and significantly expand the range of consumers (students), including through the use of distance learning technologies. The latter allows the export of educational services to new markets, which brings more and more income. Digital remote technologies in higher education gained particular relevance and demand in the alarming realities of the first half of 2020 when the emblem of the whole world was a “self-insulated” person in a mask and gloves.

The Russian higher education system, sent by the Russian government, has recently also been trying to become a larger participant in the world market for science and education: since 2018, the federal project “Export of Education” has been implemented.

In connection with the above, it becomes necessary to identify and critically analyze such specific features of the higher school of Russia, which are its advantages, make it possible to increase its attractiveness in the international educational space in conditions of digitalization, increasing

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competition, globalization, and orientation towards profitability.

## 2 Methodology

The methodology of the research combines classical approaches to science and education by Merton (1973); Humboldt, 2002), as well as modern concepts of “academic capitalism”, “entrepreneurial university”, “new managerialism”, considered through the conceptual prism of the theoretical provisions of Castels (2004); Dickson, 1984; Ridings, 2010; Schiller, 1980).

Leading in the study were methods of comparative, systemic, neo-institutional, and statistical analysis, methods of expert survey, questionnaire, and focus groups, in the organization and conduct of which the authors participated.

In January 2019, an expert survey was conducted in nine regions of the Volga Federal District of Russia on the topic “Domestic higher school in modern conditions and its capabilities in Russia and the world”. On condition of anonymity, 34 participants (professors and teachers from universities, employees of ministries and departments, of which 21% of doctors and 45% of candidates of sciences in history, sociology, political science, philosophy, jurisprudence, economics) answered 22 questions of a standardized questionnaire.

In December 2018, 220 foreign students were interviewed through questionnaires at the Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmully (BSPU) and the Ufa State Oil Technical University (USTU) to clarify the characteristics of their behavior and preferences.

In March 2018, a series of focus groups on the topic “Development of the export potential of the Russian education system” was held to consider the possibilities of attracting foreign students and factors for the development and containment of exports of Russian higher education. The discussion was attended by 20 experts from among the staff of international departments of universities and colleges, ministries, and departments.

## 3 Results

During the discussion held in the framework of the focus group, the participants identified the main problems of promoting Russian higher education abroad and proposed solutions to them. Among the main difficulties were: a lack of analytical information about the requests and preferences of foreign students, a lack of educational programs in foreign languages, a low level of service on university campuses, poorly established assistance to foreign students in adapting

and resolving household issues, a shortage of teachers who are fluent in foreign languages, an unsatisfactory level of recognition of Russian universities. To correct these defects, a program of the following measures was developed:

- Sending requests to foreign missions and their relevant ministries in order to ascertain the current needs of their and potential students in their countries;
- Development and implementation of remote education programs with international certification in foreign languages;
- Increasing the number of foreign teachers;
- Establishment of centers to adapt and assist foreign students in socialization;
- Further training of teachers leading courses for foreign students;
- Increasing the level of participation of Russian universities in international educational events;
- Strengthening contacts with foreign public organizations and Diasporas;
- Active work in foreign social networks.

The discussion participants considered the development of online (e-learning) to be the most promising direction. Separately, it was noted that the prospects for the export of Russian higher education directly depend on the economic situation of our country, which is now very unenviable.

It is easy to see that the Discutants have identified purely applied aspects, which is due to the administrative specificity of their work.

During the questionnaire of foreign students, conducted in December 2018, some data were refined, as well as additional answers to a number of questions that were discussed earlier in the focus group. As it turned out, about 80% of foreign students are natives of the republics of Central Asia who speak Russian quite well, no more than 15% of respondents faced a language barrier (many studied in Russian-speaking schools), are quite familiar with the local cultural code. Apparently, due to these circumstances, the students, in general, adapted quite well to the new living conditions. This is therefore hardly contrary to the focus group's conclusion on the challenges of adaptation, which are broader in scope and relate more to the issue of building an infrastructure of integrated and benevolent support than to the personal qualities and knowledge of people, through which they are more easily integrated into other contexts. The confirmation here is that more than 50% of respondents replied that relations with neighbors in the place of residence are completely favorable. 70% prefer to live with local students.

What is expected is that only about 50% of respondents expect to receive during training completed experience in the

specialty, which they will use in the future. Most likely, this not very high result is a consequence of the large structural problems of Russian higher education; it's not so high quality and prestige.

Of particular interest is the fact that about 60% of students in the future intend to find employment in Russia, which indicates their general satisfaction with the conditions in which they find themselves (regarding the situation in the places where they came from). It remains to be seen whether they initially considered the Russian higher school as an auxiliary mechanism of labor migration, or whether such an orientation appeared in them only during the training process.

The presented picture complements and expands the expert survey. When asked "what is the place of the Russian higher school in the modern world", most experts chose the "peripheral" option (45.7%). In smaller parts, the answers are "central" (38.2%) and "subordinate to foreign education systems" (10.8%), 5.3% found it difficult to answer.

A significant part of respondents (45.9%) replied that higher education contributes to the strengthening of the status of the Russian state and society in the world; with a number of reservations (there are reserves, problems with the quality, form, and content of education, etc.), 12.4% also agreed with this; 10.2% are unambiguously sure of the opposite; found it difficult to answer 2.5%.

When asked whether the export programs of Russian higher education in the world will be successful, experts answered the following: yes—68.8% are fully confident of success; rather no than yes—6.1%; no—9.8%; 5% found it difficult to answer.

Experts highlighted such main difficulties in exporting Russian higher education as technical and technological backwardness, the inability to massively create and produce unique new technologies, innovations against the backdrop of economic decline—55.1%; Nationalization and bureaucratization of higher education—27.9 percent; insufficient professionalism of PPP, weak staff capacity—13%; insufficient attention to the issue of promoting Russian higher education abroad—3%; found it difficult to answer—1%

The main differences between the higher school of Russia and those in other countries were 41.2% of experts associated with living standards and economic situation; 34.7%—with an undemocratically oriented, stagnant and depressed, inefficient power system (this implied a connection with the economic situation and standard of living); the rest found it difficult to answer.

The following answers were received to the question about what problems of modern Russian higher education are basic: 32.1%—a departure from the national traditions of higher education and a rejection of past experience; 24.9%—uncertainty and ambiguity (secondary) of status in the

Bologna system; 15.4%—pressure from the government and state bureaucracy; 12.8%—weak funding; 8.6%—distance from educational standards and practices of leading foreign countries; 4%—non-compliance with the requirements of the Bologna system; 2.2%—found it difficult to answer.

More than 70% of experts are sure that export programs of Russian higher education are unlikely to be successful in Western Europe, almost 20% are sure of the opposite (10.1%—yes, in most cases, 8.9%—yes), 8% believe that never, 1%—found it difficult to answer.

The radically opposite situation is with the question of export programs of Russian higher education in Asian countries: more than half of experts are confident in the success of the programs (31.3%—yes, in most cases, 28.9%—yes); 18.1%—rather not, than yes; 12.8% of experts believe that never; 8.9% found it difficult to answer.

41.3% of experts believe that export programs of Russian higher education can be successful in the countries of the East; almost as many are sure of the opposite (24.6%—yes, in most cases; 18.8%—yes); 9.7%—never; 5.6% found it difficult to answer.

67.8% of experts do not see prospects for exporting Russian higher education to North America; 20.2% believe that export programs of Russian higher education in the future can be successful in the countries of Central and South America.

The vast majority of experts (82.9%) are confident that the export programs of Russian higher education will be successful in the CIS countries, a small part of experts (7.5 and 5.3%) are confident of the opposite; 4.3% found it difficult to answer.

The answers of experts about the competitive advantages that can ensure the success of export programs of Russian higher education were distributed as follows: their own traditions and experience of higher education—30%; strong natural and technical education—27%; long-standing friendly interstate relations—24%; strong positions in the preparation of mass specialties (doctors, engineers, etc.)—18%; found it difficult to answer—1%.

31% of experts believe that sustained economic growth and social stability in Russia will ensure the success of export programs of Russian higher education; 26 percent preferred State support; 24%—promotion of export programs of Russian higher education; 15% relied on the independence of the higher education system in international cooperation; 4% found it difficult to answer. At the same time, 92% of respondents agreed that e-learning and network universities can become one of the most important factors in the success of Russian higher education exports, especially in the field of natural and technical sciences, taking into account the Soviet experience, which has not yet been completely lost.

## 4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The series of studies produced three classes of data: instrumental and pragmatic recommendations from focus group participants, information on the behavior and orientation of the priority public group, and expert synthesis.

Consideration of these outcomes is based on the following general theoretical provisions. The authors of the article proceed from the thesis of V. Humboldt that “a higher educational institution is” nothing more than the spiritual life of people whose leisure or internal desire leads to science and research” (Humboldt, 2002). In such an organization, professors, teachers, researchers, students collectively serve society and science, contribute to scientific progress in accordance with the principles of universalism, collectivism, disinterest, and organized skepticism proclaimed by Merton (Merton, 1973).

At the same time, capitalist realities seriously influenced this classical vision of the university, which nowadays has been expressed in the forefront of the concept of “academic capitalism”. Its authors, Slaughter and Leslie, view universities as actively competing in the market for commercial companies specializing in the provision of paid educational services, the sale of research and development results (licenses, patents), the creation of small enterprises, the attraction of grants, donations, and the conclusion of trade contracts (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1977; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). It was for such structures that Clark introduced the idea of an “entrepreneurial university” understood as “a conscious effort to create an institution that requires purposeful work and tension,” whose main principle is “risk-taking when mastering new practices, the result of which is unclear” (Clark, 2000).

Commercialization of universities also determines changes in the structure of their management, which compiles the requirements of financial efficiency in the spirit of “new management.” Technocrat managers are gaining increasing weight in the university hierarchy. In support of this, Rogero gives an example of Italian universities, which have now become very similar to commercial corporations (Rogero, 2011).

These changes lead to the fact that in the direction of education, universities depart from the goal of educating a versatile developed person and focus on the training of a qualified performer who is most in demand in those market conditions that will be relevant at the time of graduation.

The transformation of the institutional foundations of the university unshakable from Antiquity has long troubled many. So, Dixon emphasizes that the emphasis on profit-making inevitably leads universities to change their original social progress-oriented and selfless search for new knowledge (classic) development strategy and come to the

service of large capital holders and their economic needs (Dickson, 1984). In addition, the digitalization of capitalist society leads to limited access to information, increased information control, and increased manipulation of information for the benefit of Governments and corporations (Castels, 2004; Schiller, 1980), as a result of which the public space is reduced, and the area of accessible and reliable information is narrowed (Habermas, 2000).

The authors of the article share these concerns and support the thesis that the interests of society and science should come first in the higher education system. At the same time, the trend of commercialization of higher education, apparently predetermined by the very nature of the capitalist system, cannot be denied. Therefore, it is necessary to look for opportunities and ways to constructively combine the classical university strategy and the principles of “academic capitalism” in the field of export of higher education. Warning skeptical irony (like the one expressed by A.S. Pushkin in the poem “Poltava”: “You can’t pull a horse and awe in one cart”), you must immediately give a successful example. O. Yulijoki convincingly shows how in a number of universities in Finland traditional values, socially significant practices, ideals, and norms of science and market orientation coexist productively (Ylijoki, 2003). It is noticeable that it is not without problems associated with both the constant increase in workload, the intensification of daily work, the increase in projects, and the resulting imbalance between different types of activities; but there are also solutions to these difficulties.

It is advisable to implement these opportunities and experience in Russia, the higher school of which is largely in line with global trends. At the same time, a number of factors affect the Russian higher school, which, according to the authors, directly correlates with the specifics of the development of its export potential. Firstly, we are talking about the fact that at present there is an unprecedented drop in the international prestige of Russia, associated with certain political, economic, and other circumstances. Secondly, the Russian state, perhaps for the first time since the imperial times of Peter I and Elizabeth of Russia, has almost completely likened its higher education system to foreign schemes—according to the Bologna Agreement and other models developed in Western countries. In fact, the results of the difficult and long development of the optimal system of higher education in Russia, which was conducted by the smartest representatives of the Russian people for national development, were pushed far into the background. As a result, there is now a loss of national traditions (fundamentality, specialty, etc.) in the field of education, which for a long period were distinctive features and competitive advantages of the Russian higher school around the world.

In connection with the presented at the forefront, the task of developing the national form and content of the higher school system, which, as it was before, would reflect the unique achievements of the culture of our society throughout its history, is again being put forward. This can be done in the Bologna format, as shown by the experience of Germany, which in the new conditions managed to preserve its centuries-old traditions of higher education. And only in the fairway of this approach can you develop an effective strategy for the development of exports of Russian higher education—a strategy that would fill the Bologna form with domestic content, including the sum of the achievements and traditions of the Russian higher school and taking into account the realities of “academic capitalism” and digitalization.

Based on these considerations and research results, the following model of effective export of Russian higher education is proposed: the development of e-learning (avoiding problems with the adaptation of foreigners) in the form of short modular programs with an emphasis on practical skills required in daily work on the basis of traditional universities. The driving forces, competitive advantages, and features of the development of this model are the consideration of the Soviet experience in teaching foreign students, the fundamentality of training, the relatively low cost of services, the orientation to study in the areas of natural sciences (mathematics, physics, biology, etc.) and mass specialties (doctors, engineers, etc.) students from China, India, the countries of Central Asia and the Middle East (later South America).

It seems that a strategy based on these features and models may well become cost-effective in the digital economy.

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