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Directions for the Development of Russian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of the main directions of evolution of the Russian higher education system based on a combination of experience accumulated in higher education both during the Soviet period and over the past 30 years, including integration into the Bologna process, as well as attempts to predict Russia's opportunities to become one of the new global educational centers taking into account the objective processes of globalization, the introduction of innovative technologies in education and existing practices of integrating Russian higher education into internationalization processes. It seems that the basis of the Russia-centric model can be a combination of traditional and innovative educational technologies, the development of new formats of international cooperation in the field of education with the predominance of Russian educational practices. The paper presents the results of a study of current scientific and expert discourse on the state of Russian higher education, identifying the drivers of the formation of a Russian-centric educational model.

Keywords: higher education, innovations in education, russian educational policy, russian- centric model of education.

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Directions for the Development of Russian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of the main directions of evolution of the Russian higher education system based on a combination of experience accumulated in higher education both during the Soviet period and over the past 30 years, including integration into the Bologna process, as well as attempts to predict Russia's opportunities to become one of the new global educational centers taking into account the objective processes of globalization, the introduction of innovative technologies in education and existing practices of integrating Russian higher education into internationalization processes. It seems that the basis of the Russia-centric model can be a combination of traditional and innovative educational technologies, the development of new formats of international cooperation in the field of education with the predominance of Russian educational practices. The paper presents the results of a study of current scientific and expert discourse on the state of Russian higher education, identifying the drivers of the formation of a Russian-centric educational model. The article summarizes the nature and types of educational technologies used in modern domestic higher education, assesses the quality of teaching in modern Russian universities, as well as the need for foreign citizens to obtain higher education in the Russian Federation based on pilot surveys of Russian and foreign students conducted by the author.

Keywords: higher education, innovations in education, russian educational policy, russian-centric model of education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Russian higher education today is undergoing significant changes against the backdrop of tectonic geopolitical transformations, a change in the educational paradigm from utilitarian to value-based, the return of Russian higher education to educational models that were implemented before the start of the process of Russia's accession to the Bologna process, attempts to build a new one or correct the one that has already developed to date higher education systems taking into account modern realities. The ongoing processes of shifting global educational centers also raise the question of the possibility of not only more actively integrating Russia into the global educational space, but also of the possibilities of positioning Russia as a new key global educational center. We assume that right now the necessary and favorable prerequisites and conditions for this are taking shape, which is confirmed both by the presence of corresponding priorities of the highest political and administrative elite, strategic goals and objectives of the Russian state, and by the preservation of the status of the Russian Federation as a host country for foreign students, and by growing interest from non-Western states to receive education in Russia and create new formats of interaction in the educational sphere between Russian universities and foreign educational structures with a focus on domestic standards and educational programs. *The purpose of this article is to determine the prospects for the*

formation of a Russian-centric model of higher education. *The objectives* are to study the current state of Russian higher education with identifying the drivers of the formation of a Russian-centric educational model; generalization of the nature and types of educational technologies used in modern HE in the Russian Federation; assessing the quality of teaching in modern Russian universities, as well as determining the need for foreign citizens to obtain higher education in the Russian Federation.

We note that this article is one of the first attempts to outline the preliminary contours of a new Russian-centric educational model, the clarification of which will occur in the process of implementing relevant educational government policies in practice.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sources for this article were studies and expert positions presented by representatives of the Russian scientific and teaching community in leading journals on the issues of assessing the accumulated experience and prospects for the development of Russian higher education today, as well as statistical data and opinions of specialists on the issues of internationalization of higher education. Many years of professional experience of the author's involvement in both educational and research activities (participation in research projects, educational work with students of Russian universities, teaching as a guest lecturer at foreign universities, management of English-language programs and participation in the implementation of educational master's programs in foreign languages in Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov, NUST MISIS) can also be considered sources for the formation of a research position.

The conclusions of the article are also based on the results of several empirical studies conducted by the author in 2023 in Russian universities.

2.1 Current State and Prospects for the Development of Russian Higher Education

The Russian higher education system in the post-Soviet period radically changed the direction

of its development several times, from integrating into the global educational (primarily Western, European) space through integration into the Bologna system to abandoning it at the beginning of 2022 and heading towards building its own, taking into account both understanding the experience accumulated over a thirty-year period, the need to respond to the demands and needs of the modern national economy, and under the influence of global processes and challenges (pandemic, transformation of the global management system in various areas, including education).

During the period of integration of Russian higher education into the European educational space, and in a more general context, the introduction of a utilitarian approach based on commercialization into the social sphere, including education [Alexandrova 2023; Yakovleva 2023, 39], the quality of education has decreased significantly [Andryushina, Lutsenko 2014], education itself has become a "service" provided by educational agents [Andryushina, Grigorieva 2023], education has completely ceased to be present not only in practices, but also in the very nature of the domestic education. In addition, the marketization of education has become the cause of growing socio-territorial differentiation at all levels of education [Cherednichenko 2023], "social degeneratism" and "virtual lull" instead of real improvement in the level and quality of life" [Gretchenko, Odegov 2023, 67], inability higher education systems to train specialists with qualifications that meet the expectations of employers [Razumova, Teleshova 2023, 340-344], reducing costs for the social sphere in general and for education in particular.

In this sense, the call for a return to the interpretation of education as a benefit within the framework of the traditional value approach for Russia seems very appropriate and timely, and education certainly includes an educational component. At the same time, as we [Andryushina, Grigorieva 2023, 476] and many other colleagues noted, there is always the threat of "sliding" into a dogmatic bias of the educational and edifying function through the creation and implementation of strictly ideologically motivated

courses in higher education. It seems that in practice, a full-scale return to Soviet educational ideological models is unlikely due to the different motivations of Soviet and modern youth [Gretchenko, Odegov 2023, 62], the excellent attributes of the Soviet and modern Russian “chronotopes” [Yakovleva 2023, 43], as well as current models of pedagogical and educational activities, which were significantly influenced by both the elements of the Bologna system and the processes of internationalization, which will be discussed later. At the same time, the preservation of positive and effective scientific and educational practices used back in the USSR is also necessary due to the proven Soviet system of higher (and secondary school) education, which allowed the USSR to be a superpower state in the era of bipolarity, actively and successfully opposing its educational models American and, in many ways, surpassing them [Makhchelyan 2023, 49-52]. We should not forget that leading Russian universities and faculties, even during the craze for Western educational practices, maintained their own traditions in the form of a mandatory entrance test in addition to the Unified State Exam and a five-year specialty. The introduction of the Unified State Exam has also become a highly discussed aspect of reforming domestic education. Without going into the study of the pros and cons of introducing the Unified State Exam (a huge layer of domestic literature and statistics is devoted to this), it should be noted that firstly, Russia never switched to the Bologna system in full; this was prevented by the national characteristics of the ruling and regional regimes in implementing the principles of a rather rapid restructuring of Russian education “according to Western patterns”; secondly, the domestic education system is an extremely unstable area that is constantly being reformed (which is happening at the moment). In other words, state educational policies of the post-Soviet period are characterized by the “pendulum nature” of their implementation, the predominance of latent decision-making mechanisms in the interests of frequently changing political and managerial teams with often opposing interests and goals, and the strong dependence of national priorities on the international situation. The main driver of

decision-making in the field of education is the highest political will. Such politicization of the educational sphere predetermined the spasmodic nature of reforms, “frequent changes in indicators of educational effectiveness, constant reformatting of educational “content” in the form of updating standards, Federal State Educational Standards, the emergence of different options for implementing a multi-level model of higher education, etc.” [Andryushina, Grigorieva 2023, 477].

The process of internationalization has a huge impact on education, which has already become the very context of the existence of national educational systems, individual universities, teachers and students. This is the reality of the new century, the process of giving educational models and practices an international character [Knight 2003, 2]. Moreover, internationalization, on the one hand, is an objective process that does not depend on the priorities and strategies of national political and administrative elites; on the other hand, internationalization can and should be managed, since it is implemented through the export of higher education (“soft power”), positioning the state in modern geopolitical, social, cultural, economic and other spaces. Over the past 30 years, the potential for internationalization of higher education has been realized most effectively by American and European universities, long remaining global monopolistic educational centers that attract foreign students and specialists to solve problems of promoting their own neoliberal values on a global scale. [Giroux, Karmis, Rouillard 2015, 146-150], and meeting the national needs of the labor market and economy. However, over the last decade there has been an expansion of the range of education centers; there have been more of them due to the inclusion of Asian, Russian, and Australian universities.

The list of countries hosting foreign students and teachers includes countries in the Asia-Pacific region (especially China). Russia occupies a special position in it, which in the period from 2014 to 2019. attracted about 300 thousand foreign students and, despite forecasts regarding the loss of leading positions in the list of host

countries, managed to maintain them [Andryushina, Ryabinina 2023, 26].

In 2022, 362,000 foreign students studied at Russian universities at all levels of education and the Russian Federation ranked sixth in the world in terms of the number of foreign students studying in the Russian Federation, and by 2030 the total number of foreigners could increase to 435,000 people!. At the same time, 17,000 foreign students study under the quota of the Russian Government.

New international formats of cooperation in the field of higher education with the participation of key modern states also require special consideration. Thus, the development of joint educational programs and a network of branches is no longer a novelty in the regional and global educational spaces [Burquel, Shenderova, Tvorogova 2014, 146-150]. At the same time, new innovative formats are emerging in the form of network and joint universities. And Russia has already become a permanent participant in new international educational formats. Of particular interest is the joint Russian-Chinese university MSU-BIT in Shenzhen, the main goal of which is to create a world-class educational center based on the best Russian educational programs for training specialists for the Asia-Pacific labor market. It is noteworthy that education is conducted primarily in Russian, while the Joint University has English-language programs, as well as education in Chinese.

These trends raise the issue not only of reforming the higher education system at the national state level, but also of the possibility of forming a Russia-centric model of higher education as a global educational center.

So, today we have a mosaic combination of the remnants of Soviet educational practices, introduced and “sprouted” elements of the Bologna system with Russian specifics, as well as the new most relevant practices of building our own educational model based on updated political priorities. In May, Russian President V.V. Putin signed a decree launching a pilot project on higher education reform for the period 2023–2026. This

means replacing a bachelor's degree with a basic higher education, and a master's degree with a specialized one (by specialized training we mean a master's degree, residency, and assistantship-internship). The purpose of the experiment is to examine different models and possible solutions within the new higher education system. The project will be implemented in six universities in the country (Moscow Aviation Institute (MAI), MISiS University of Science and Technology, Moscow Pedagogical State University (MPGU), St. Petersburg Mining University (SPGU), Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (IKBFU) and the National Research Tomsk State University (TSU), in certain specialties, primarily engineering and technical profiles. For example, starting from the new academic year, MISiS will open master's programs in IT and economic specialties lasting a year. For the research master's degree, the two-year duration of study will be retained, which will provide students with the necessary knowledge to build a scientific career (but it is expected that, if necessary, it can be extended by another year). It is precisely these kinds of assumptions that allow us to say that, in general, change programs are not yet fully prepared and their adjustments are implied based on intermediate results.

It seems that the drivers for creating a new model of domestic higher education today are the use of a value paradigm, a combination of education and upbringing, the return of effective Soviet educational practices, as well as political will in the form of “a synthesis of all the best that was in the Soviet education system and the experience of recent decades”¹. The quality of both the new national Russian and Russia-centric models in the regional and global spaces will be largely determined, among other things, by a reasonable balance of traditional and innovative educational technologies used in Russian universities to ensure the quality of education.

¹ Full transcript of Vladimir Putin's message to the Federal Assembly on February 21, 2023 // Komsomolskaya Pravda: [website]. Полная стенограмма послания Владимира Путина Федеральному Собранию 21 февраля 2023 года // Комсомольская правда: [сайт]. 21.02.2023. URL: <https://www.kp.rudaily/27468/4724024/> (дата обращения: 21.08.2023).

2.2 Innovations and Traditions in Russian Higher Education

The concept of innovative education as a new type of education has existed in theoretical discourse since the 70s of the twentieth century, however, modern processes of transition to the information society and knowledge economy have actualized at the beginning of the current century the issue of training specialists with a new set of knowledge, skills, competencies formed in the learning process. Thus, the innovative activity of educational agents and, first of all, universities, their openness and ability to introduce new innovative technologies is both the subject of theoretical and conceptual understanding and applied value [Bykova 2017].

The fourth technological revolution and the formation of a knowledge society are changing both the methods of acquiring knowledge and skills and the content components of education. The development of technology has contributed to the exponential growth in the use of digital educational platforms, products, methods of accumulation and transfer of knowledge in general. Thus, in the last ten years, the most popular and significant trends in education and pedagogy have become: the use of distance and hybrid education formats, increased demand from students for an increase in the share of practical courses and disciplines, the use of short-term courses (MOOCs), expanding the opportunities for students and listeners to independently build educational trajectories and influence the content of educational programs, the use of gamification technologies in the educational process, and the use of artificial intelligence.

Increasing environmental uncertainty (geopolitical instability, pandemics) is also constantly changing the range of innovative educational technologies. COVID-19 has become a serious challenge for education in general, the consequences of which continue to be understood by practitioners and researchers around the world. In general, experts note such consequences of the pandemic for education as the expansion of digital learning formats, which existed long before 2019, but became widespread and implemented

only in connection with the pandemic. At the same time, COVID-19 has updated other non-digital innovations: increased attention to psychological well-being and social interaction (family environment, reflection of emotions, the influence of physical and mental well-being on the assimilation of information).

In 2023, the greatest challenge for education was the creation and active use of generative programs (ChatGPT and others). The emergence of this phenomenon has excited both experts and researchers and forced practitioners, especially teachers, to rethink questions about existing educational models, methods of assessing knowledge, and social roles in education [Dimitriadou, Lanitis 2023; Pavlik 2023].

However, national educational practices demonstrate different degrees of manifestation of the above global educational innovations. So, in Russia in 2023, many of them turned out to be less pronounced. Innovative technologies “at the intersection of online and offline formats” have become the most relevant in domestic education, namely: hybrid learning, combining study and practice through digital technologies, network technologies, online micro-learning for progress in work. For all these trends, the ability to learn independently and design your own educational path “in small steps” is especially important. In this regard, the “autonomous learning” trend can be called key for 2023².

In order to study educational innovations that currently exist in the Russian higher education system, as well as to understand the prospects for the further development of the Russian Federation as a global educational center based on the use of both advanced educational innovations and proven and popular classical practices to actively attract foreign students, The author conducted two pilot surveys.

The first survey using remote technologies (Google forms), aimed at collecting and

² Global trends in education in the Russian context. Мировые тренды образования в российском контексте. [Электронный ресурс]. URL: https://ioe.hse.ru/edu_global_trends/ (дата обращения: 28.07.2023)

summarizing the opinions of Russian students on how they interpret educational innovations, what innovations are used in their universities, and which ones should be implemented more actively, took place in May 2023. It was attended by 52 students from Moscow State University and MISIS, both technical (42.3%) and socio-economic profiles (57.7%), (bachelor's/master's ratio - 50% to 50%, gender ratio - girls 57.7 %, boys 42.3%). The results of this study showed that for the majority of respondents (44.2%), educational innovations are associated with a hybrid model of education (involving the use of both distance and full-time learning), gamification of the educational process, and the formation of educational content by students independently. In other words, respondents interpret educational innovative technologies through a process. It should also be noted that the data from our May survey confirmed the all-Russian trends in the educational sphere for the period 2022–2023, identified by experts from the National Research University Higher School of Economics.

In addition to procedural innovative educational technologies, some students from both Moscow State University and MISIS paid attention to the content aspects of learning (38.5% of students associate innovative educational technologies with innovative, practice-oriented courses). However, we note that innovation for students is still a form through which students learn in a new way, rather than the context and content of education.

According to the results of a survey in May 2023, the classic full-time format (50%) became the predominant form of education, prevailing over hybrid (15.4%) and distance learning (1.9%). But “a wider range of elective courses for the implementation of individualized educational trajectories, along with gamification technologies, are not sufficiently implemented in practice” [Andryushina, Andryushkov, Grigorieva 2023, 165].

The second remote study - a survey, conducted in November-December 2023, also using Google forms, involved foreign students studying at Russian universities, not only Moscow, but also

regional ones (MSU, MISIS, MSPU, Moscow State Academic Art Institute named after V. I. Surikov, St. Petersburg State University, Mordovian State University named after N. P. Ogarev, Northern (Arctic) Federal University). The purpose of the study was to find out the opinions of foreign students about the motivation to receive education in the Russian Federation, the degree of satisfaction with the quality of Russian higher education, the management of educational programs, organizational and living conditions of stay in Russia, as well as to clarify the need for foreign students to introduce innovative technologies on a larger scale with the identification of specific innovations, for which they have a demand. 78 respondents took part in the survey, the majority were citizens of China (33 students), as well as Vietnam (3 students), Afghanistan (1), Syria (2), Yemen (9), Zimbabwe (1), Congo (3), Niger (1), Kazakhstan (5), Kyrgyzstan (1), Tajikistan (1), Turkmenistan (8), Uzbekistan (9), Ukraine (1); the bachelor's/master's ratio is 46.2% and 53.8%, respectively.

Like Russian respondents to the May survey, foreign students in the November-December 2023 study also noted the traditional full-time format of teaching in Russian universities as dominant with a classic set of lectures and seminars (80.8%), the use of a hybrid (30.8%). It is noteworthy that maintaining the full-time format is desirable for 59% of students, which is an important requirement for university administrations and represents a traditional educational format for Russian higher education! Also, respondents would like to see greater implementation of gamification technologies in education (41%), because to date, 19.2% of respondents noted the use of gaming methods and technologies. It was interesting to note that the majority of foreign students (67.9%) do not use generative technologies in the educational process, while there is a request for the implementation of ChatGPT (12.8% of respondents noted the more active use of ChatGPT as desired changes in the educational process).

Thus, we can conclude that the introduction of generative practices in Russian higher education has not become (yet!) a pressing challenge, but

one should predict the need to take measures to regulate the use of generative forms of learning and education and for representatives of traditional education agents to take a proactive position in this matter.

Analyzing the motivation of foreigners to obtain higher education in Russia, slightly less than half of the respondents (46.2%) indicated as the main reason the fact that Russian universities in general provide high-quality higher education, which is competitive and provides the opportunity for successful employment in the future in any country in the world, and for 9% of respondents, learning the Russian language and becoming familiar with Russian culture is the dominant motive for enrolling in a Russian university! For 7.7%, the brand of a Russian university is important as a condition for the implementation of favorable career trajectories. In other words, Russian universities are attractive, and the diploma they issue is valuable on a global scale. The same percentage of respondents (7.7%) plans to further study in graduate school and defend candidate and doctoral dissertations in the Russian Federation.

The affordability of study, associated with the depreciation of the ruble against traditional world currencies (dollar and euro), also became a significant factor determining the educational choice for 12.9% of students. However, they noted that obtaining a diploma from a leading Western university would be preferable for them, provided that tuition fees in Russia and in European and American universities remained the same.

Assessing the quality of Russian education, 59% of respondents consider it very high versus 33.3% of students who expected a higher level and quality of education. Extremely low ratings were given by 5.1% of respondents. As for the management of educational programs, organizational and living conditions of stay in Russia, 71.8% of foreign students are completely satisfied with the quantity and quality of activities (regarding both educational and extracurricular processes) for the adaptation of foreign students implemented in their universities. 76.9% are satisfied with the quality of administration/management of the

educational program. 61.5% of respondents consider the set of compulsory disciplines in the curriculum to be quite sufficient, while 30.8% note the predominance of theoretical disciplines and would like to have more practice-oriented courses. 46.2% of students were completely satisfied with the list of elective courses; approximately the same number of respondents (42.3%), however, would like to be able to build individual educational trajectories based on a wider range of electives. It is noteworthy that immersion in Russian culture is a key need for the overwhelming number of foreign students (87.2%), who would like to enrich their stay in Russia with more excursions, visits to different Russian regions, and in-depth study of the Russian language.

These results allow us to talk about the consistency and relevance of Russian educational programs in different universities, and the accumulated experience in their management. Thus, in general, today Russian universities are competitive subjects of the global educational architecture, and it is necessary to improve the quality of teaching, including through the personalization of educational student trajectories, more active use of gamification technologies, as well as expanding tools for more actively introducing foreign students to Russian culture, tongue.

III. CONCLUSION

To summarize, we can say that taking into account the study of the accumulated post-Soviet experience of the functioning of a rather eclectic (combining Soviet practices, elements of the Bologna system and the current processes of building a HE system that meets the interests of the national economy and development) domestic higher education, the drivers of the creation of a new model of Russian higher education today are a return to the value paradigm, a combination of educational and educational functions, current favorable political will and strategic priorities associated with the formation of an effective higher education system relevant to objective processes (globalization and internationalization)

and national demands, which can be in demand not only within the country, but also beyond.

Raising the question of the possibility of transforming Russian universities into global educational centers and relying on the results of a pilot survey with the participation of representatives of different world regions (excluding North and South America), it is quite possible to talk about positive prospects for creating a Russia-centric model based on high assessments of Russian education and fundamental traditions teaching (full-time format, a traditional combination of lectures and seminars for Russian higher education) in Russian/Soviet higher education, taking into account the introduction of the latest educational innovations, as well as the high demand from foreign students and applicants for obtaining diplomas from Russian universities, studying in Russian and immersion in Russian culture and academic traditions.

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