

HIGHER EDUCATION AND GLOBAL COMPETENCE: RENEWING THE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPT OF UNIVERSITIES IN RUSSIA

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Abstract. *The world is changing at an increasing pace. We are living in a time of dramatic transformations such as globalization with its impact on economic competitiveness and social cohesion, international mobility, new occupations and careers, advances in technology and its use. Such processes affected the higher education of many countries, including Russia, and created the concept of global education. Nowadays our students have the opportunity and challenge of living and working in such a diverse and rapidly changing world. Thus, renewing the educational concept of universities is becoming relevant. In this article, the authors consider definitions and dimensions of global competence as an essential component of training young specialists as well as 21st century learning in the context of global competence. The authors present how global competence is defined as the combination of the four dimensions and how each dimension builds on specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and values: Also, the paper considers the ways of renewing higher education in Russia and points of growth.*

Keywords: *21st century skills; global competence; globalization; globally competent student; higher education; educational concept.*

Introduction

Since the middle of the 20th century, globalization has determined the entire course of the world development. Globalization is an objective reality in which «Russia should be integrated into a global world», «participate in the Bologna Process»; however, with an indispensable condition – to adopt the best practices of other countries for Russia's environment, preserve the identity and dignity of Russian education.

What we are facing today is very profound problems in our higher education and science. Over the past 20 years, we have completely lost international competitiveness in these areas. We need radical changes. The first thing to start with is to reconsider the higher educational system. By reconsidering we mean the process of renewing the educational concept of universities in Russia.

In the modern world education is the foundation of economy based on the knowledge. Two decades ago universities' main task was to train specialists for

specific jobs but now it is not enough for the 21st century society. Many of them (universities) make use of methods dating from the mid-20th century. «We are the inheritors of the educational system of the industrial age. If we do not make it fit the needs of the new economy and new social processes, our civilization is bound to lag behind» (Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, 2008). Education must enable a person with an opportunity to broaden his/her professional and cross-cultural horizons. Today is a world of creative individuals who desire and are capable of taking responsible decisions in the context of free choice, living in a multicultural environment. As a result, modernization of higher education itself becomes vital. There is a need to develop a new model of education that would bring to the person awareness and understanding of the catastrophic position of the Planet and humanity as a whole in all its aspects (ecological, economic, moral, etc.). Nowadays, every person must first know about the global dynamics of the world and, moreover, understand that in the current information society and the extremely unstable political situation in the world, it is not enough just to «know», to have «skills and abilities», to adapt to the environment. We need personal qualities that would allow us to change the world for the better, be able to anticipate unknown challenges and threats, consciously and actively oppose them. In a word, a modern person should be creative and responsible (Ilinskiy, 2012).

The purpose of the article is to consider global competence in the context of higher education and show the importance of renewing the educational concept of universities in Russia.

The aims of the article are the following: (1) to consider the definitions and dimensions of global competence; (2) to reveal four dimensions of globally competent students; (3) to consider the ways of renewing higher education in Russia.

Research Methodology

The selection of scientific literature resources for this research paper was criterion-based. The criteria were the following: (1) the resource had to be scientific (based on research or conceptual evidence and published as an article, monograph, PhD dissertation or a research report); (2) the keywords for selection were 21st century skills, global competence, globalization, globally competent student, higher education, lifelong learning, mobility; (3) the resource could have been written in Russian or English languages.

«The research paper employs the method of literature review which is an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers. In writing the literature review, the purpose is to convey to the

reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic. As a piece of writing, the literature review is defined by a guiding concept» (Taylor, 2010). The performed steps of the literature review were as follows: (1) organizing the literature selection and review by relating it directly to the research question the authors develop; (2) synthesizing results into a summary of what is and is not known; (3) identifying areas of controversy in the literature.

Global Competence: definitions and dimensions

The concept of global competence has been investigated by academics and researches for the last three decades. We have examined an array of definitions to address the issue of what the global competence is.

Curran (2003) associates global competence with a «developed appreciation of other cultures and the ability to interact with people from foreign lands». Also, Curran suggests that global competence is when you are able to learn new environment without difficulties while experiencing it and reflect upon the experience at its completion (Curran, 2003).

NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2003), presents global competence as one of its association's priorities, and suggests one can become globally competent by studying abroad. However, the association does not provide the definition of global competence (NAFSA, 2003)

Hunter (2004) explains the term by defining the human's personality as the one who is «having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one's environment». According to the author, global competency includes such credentials as knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students can acquire from their educational experiences (Hunter, 2004).

Providing the definition, Fernando Reimers (2010) stresses a view on the nature of global competence: «the knowledge and skills that help people understand the flat world in which they live, the skills to integrate across disciplinary domains to comprehend global affairs and events, and to create possibilities to address them» (Reimers, 2010).

The US National Education Association refers to global competence as the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of international issues, an appreciation of an ability to learn and work with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, proficiency in a foreign language, and skills to function productively in an interdependent world community (Van Roekel, 2010).

Another definition we find in the book «Educating for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World» given by Bryan Melnick who relates

the competence to a specific skill: «global competence isn't as much about knowledge of other nations as it is about the skill of relating to people of diverse backgrounds» (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011).

Global competence Task Force under the auspices of the Council of Chief State School Officers EdSteps initiative (CCSSO-EdSteps) and the Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning describes global competence as «the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance» (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011).

Bird Bear (2017) refers to credentials needed for contemporary world: «global competence is vague and an umbrella term in some ways, but it's really the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that you need to thrive in a global environment, marketplace, or the world today» (Bird Bear, 2017).

Considering all the above definitions, we may conclude that they all have some common features. So, for example, all the researches mention interaction as an important criterion, particularly communication with people from diverse backgrounds. Some of the scientists outline the cultural component in their definitions.

In our research, we draw on the definition provided by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (2018) which includes all the components that reveal the content of the «global competence». Global competence is described as «the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and worldviews of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development» (OECD, 2018).

The above definition indicates four key dimensions of global competence that the higher educational system in Russia needs to focus their students on to become successful in the 21st century: «(1) the capacity to examine issues and situations of local, global and cultural significance (e.g. poverty, economic interdependence, migration, inequality, environmental risks, conflicts, cultural differences and stereotypes); (2) the capacity to understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views; (3) the ability to establish positive interactions with people of different national, ethnic, religious, social or cultural backgrounds or gender; and (4) the capacity and disposition to take constructive action toward sustainable development and collective well-being» (OECD, 2018).

As the focus of our research is the renewal of the higher educational system in Russia in the context of global competence, our target group is students studying in the universities. But before we comment on four dimensions, it is important to mention the fact that Russia is a multiethnic and multicultural state.

In the globalized world, every individual is becoming increasingly dependent on changes. «The development of tolerance and the promotion of a cultural dialogue between people with different traditions and views can represent a contribution of Russian education to the consolidation of society» (Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, 2008). Furthermore, today Russia's higher education is becoming more popular among students from different countries. They come to study here diversifying the educational environment. Therefore, the importance of integrating the global competence is obvious.

Speaking about four dimensions, we consider them to be strongly interconnected and interdependent. For instance, students from two different cultural backgrounds who work together for a university project demonstrate global competence as they: «get to know each other better (examine their cultural differences); try to understand how each perceives his or her role in the project and the other's perspective (understand perspectives); negotiate misunderstandings and clearly communicate expectations and feelings (interact openly, appropriately and effectively); and take stock of what they learn from each other» (OECD, 2018).

The following diagram, developed by the OECD PISA (2018), presents how global competence is defined as the combination of the four dimensions and how each dimension builds on specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and values:

(OECD, 2018)



Figure 1. The dimensions of global competence

The authors of the diagram put forward the comprehensive analysis of each dimension. We shall make reference to this source while considering them but adopting the content to the context of the higher educational system in Russia.

As noted in their work (OECD, 2018), the first dimension (to examine local, global and intercultural issues) refers to students' ability to think critically while forming their own opinion about the global issue. Those who acquire such skill «draw on and combine the disciplinary knowledge and modes of thinking acquired in universities to ask questions, analyze data and arguments, explain phenomena, and develop a position concerning a local, global or cultural issue» (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). They also mention media literacy as a requirement. A student who is able to «access, analyze and critically evaluate media messages, as well as to create new media content» can be considered as a globally competent student (Buckingham, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2005).

The second dimension outlines that students are able and willing to consider global issues, other people's points of view and behaviours from multiple viewpoints. The more students get to know about other cultures', the wider their world becomes. «They acquire the means to recognise that their perspectives and behaviours are shaped by multiple influences and that others have views of the world that are profoundly different from their own» (Hanvey, 1975). When students acquire this competence they become able to see through «another cultural filter providing opportunities to deepen one's own perspectives, and thus make more mature decisions when dealing with others» (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997).

The third dimension is about cross-cultural interaction. This dimension explains what students are able to do when they communicate with people from different cultures. They know and understand the cultural norms, styles of interaction and degrees of formality and they are flexible to adapt. Students appreciate a respectful dialogue. It focuses on student's capacity "to interact with others across differences in ways that are open, appropriate and effective". Effective communication is when you are able to understand others and be understood (Barrett et al., 2014).

The last dimension emphasizes well-being and sustainable development. Students here are active and responsible members of society who are ready to respond to any local, global or intercultural issue. They are eager to «improve living conditions in their own communities and also to build a more just, peaceful, inclusive and environmentally sustainable world» (OECD. 2018).

Having considered all the above dimensions of global competence, we can conclude that development of global competence and its integration into the universities' context will make students globally competent which allow them to successfully integrate into the diverse and rapidly changing world.

Renewing the Educational Concept of Universities in Russia

According to The National Education Association (NEA) President Dennis Van Roekel (2010) universities must prepare our students to understand and address global issues and hence re-examine strategies and curriculum so that students can meet the 21st century needs (Van Roekel, 2010). The new higher educational standards, course books and methods should take into account the students' interest in becoming globally competent. The considered above dimensions of global competence are supposed to give directions towards a new curriculum.

Today, the universities still fail to provide the required set of civil and social skills. For example, economics and law should be compulsory courses in all the higher educational establishments regardless their orientation – engineering, human sciences, etc. because these courses should give students practical knowledge that is important for careers no matter in which domain they will be subsequently applied.

The universities «revolution» under the global competence concept also focuses on the internationalization of education. Of course, most Russian modern universities are involved in the international activities but this is usually the most simple, ordinary level of internationalization. At a higher level, the internationalization of higher education can be seen as a process of systematically integrating the international component into the education, research and public activities of universities.

NEA (2010) proposes some steps that universities can take to promote global competence: (1) “align teacher preparation programs with global perspectives; (2) design and support professional development programs with a global focus; (3) find new ways to foster international exchanges; (4) expand the teaching of foreign languages” (Von Roekel, 2010). Realizing these steps we will be able to solve academic mobility and internationalization of curricula problems.

The university curriculum should be reconsidered taking into account the following aspects to meet the requirements of the 21st century: Information and Communication Technology literacy, knowledge, innovation skills, thinking, media and real-life experience in the context of core university subjects (Paige, 2009). Authentic learning is also one of the criteria for the 21st century therefore students should engage in the educational environment effectively and develop 21st century skills through critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving. According to Lombardi (2007) “in this way, students will be prepared with the necessary knowledge and life skills that will help them be successful in their future careers” (Lombardi, 2007).

The educational concept should focus students on the development of knowledge and motivate them to become global citizens with a set of 21st century skills. Also, Lombardi (2007) states, the curriculum should be linked to the real world which will motivate students' participation and understanding of the academic subjects, as well as prepare them for adult life (Lombardi, 2007).

According to the Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, our universities cannot always meet the requirements of the modern world. Therefore, the improvement of our universities is among the priorities of our education project. Since 2007, Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation has been creating a network, which currently consists of 40 leading Russian universities, including traditional universities, federal universities, and national research universities like the National Research University of Electronic Technology. Universities are expected to become competitive internationally. To achieve this aim, the Government launched a special project in 2013 and selected 14 universities through an open tender that received additional funding to address the considered above issues. From 2013 to 2015, 88 applications were filed and 21 universities became winners. In 2016, the project "Flagship Universities" was launched to raise the effectiveness of universities at regional as well as international levels.

Samara State Technical University is one of the higher education institutions to have won in this competition. The government has provided support in the form of subsidies. The university has created its own development programme to be implemented within the period of 2016-2020 to address the issues set by the government. Traditionally, the mission of the university is to develop students' knowledge and skills; educate a harmonious person who has the capacity for continuous self-development and is aimed at successful problem-solving. At the new stage, the university as a regional flagship higher education institution focuses on the creation of mechanisms to develop interdisciplinary competences which will help to meet the needs of 21st century.

According to the development programme, the structure of the university is being changed. The key elements are the institutes, project management centre, project-based learning centre, expert council and project teams implementing new principles of educational process. The educational process is being implemented on the basis of the modular principle. There is a unity of educational space in terms of humanitarian, socio-economic, natural-science and general professional training for 1st and 2nd-year bachelors and the flexibility of variable components of professional training. The new educational programme is aimed at achieving such learning outcomes as interdisciplinary and meta-professional competence, "soft skills", providing effective application of professional competencies for the future career.

Samara State Technical University is working towards global perspectives. For example, university staff and students take part in international grant programmes, such as Erasmus+ to increase the low level of student mobility and improve teaching staff quality. Apart from that, there is a centre for academic mobility where students and teachers take foreign language courses for different purposes to be able to present the university at the international level.

Conclusions

Today we are living in the world of globalization which means the conventional approaches to higher education don't meet the requirements of 21st century. Hence, there is a need to move towards global competence in the context of higher education. Having considered an array of definitions and dimensions of global competence proposed by various researches and scientists we have distinguished the main features of global competence which show the direction to the higher education of the future. If we want to integrate global competence, universities need to reconsider the entire existing system of higher education with the focus on the global skills development.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation has already launched programmes to help Russian universities become competitive and prestigious internationally. Nearly 40 universities have received subsidies from the government and are working towards the new educational concept. For example, Samara State Technical University as a flagship higher education institution has reconsidered the conventional approach and in the process of implementing the new one according to the demands of the global world.

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