



EXPORT OF RUSSIAN EDUCATION AS A SOFT POWER INSTRUMENT: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Background: The article is devoted to a controversial and topical topic: the export of Russian education as an instrument of the "soft power" of the state. **Objective:** The purpose of the article is to consider the existing prospects for the spread of Russian education in the world. **Methods:** The methodological basis of the research is the method of comparative historical analysis, which makes it possible to identify the cause-and-effect relationships of the problem. Within the framework of the article, the author relies on the works of both theorists of "soft power" - such as J. Nye - and researchers who directly addressed the problem of the role of education in the development of the soft power of the state - such as A. Amirbek, E.V. Klyushnikova and L.N. Skakovskaya. **Results:** The problem investigated in the article is the role of Russian education in the world - and the need to develop the export of Russian education to other states. The Russian educational system is promising and competitive - the legacy of the USSR is felt, the educational system of which was one of the leading in the world. **Conclusion:** The ways and directions of the export of Russian education need serious debugging: especially within the framework of various anti-Russian sanctions by Western countries and information confrontation imposed on Russia in the international arena.

Key words: soft power, education, Russia, export, opportunities.



EXPORTAÇÃO DA EDUCAÇÃO RUSSA COMO INSTRUMENTO DE SOFT POWER: OPORTUNIDADES E LIMITAÇÕES

ABSTRATO

Antecedentes: O artigo é dedicado a um tema polêmico e atual: a exportação da educação russa como instrumento do "soft power" do Estado. **Objetivo:** O objetivo do artigo é considerar as perspectivas existentes para a difusão da educação russa no mundo. **Métodos:** A base metodológica da pesquisa é o método de análise histórica comparativa, que permite identificar as relações de causa e efeito do problema. No quadro do artigo, o autor conta com os trabalhos tanto de teóricos do "soft power" - como J. Nye - quanto de pesquisadores que abordaram diretamente o problema do papel da educação no desenvolvimento do soft power do Estado - como A. Amirbek, EV Klyushnikova e L.N. Skakovskaya. **Resultados:** O problema investigado no artigo é o papel da educação russa no mundo – e a necessidade de desenvolver a exportação da educação russa para outros estados. O sistema educacional russo é promissor e competitivo - o legado da URSS é sentido, cujo sistema educacional foi um dos principais do mundo. **Conclusão:** Os caminhos e direções da exportação da educação russa precisam de uma séria depuração: especialmente no âmbito de várias sanções anti-russas por países ocidentais e confronto de informações impostas à Rússia na arena internacional.

Palavras-chave: soft power; educação; Rússia; exportação; oportunidade

INTRODUCTION

The modern geopolitical picture of the world requires from states not only internal well-being, but also successful lobbying of their interests in the external arena. One example of such lobbying is the promotion of the national educational system, the successful result of which strengthens the concept of "soft power" of states and increases its role in foreign policy issues.

The author of this study is interested in finding ways to export the education system that Russia can use to lobby for its interests and ideas in world politics. The need to export domestic education is due to many factors:

- The negative image of Russia, actively developed by the US and EU countries;
- Expanding the national educational system of Russia outside the state - in order to increase the level of international trust in the state, attract new investments, etc.;
- Strengthening the "soft power" of Russia.

The educational system is in many ways the hallmark of the state. Competitive education in Russia is not such when it comes to international rankings: and this is largely due to the lack of a competent export policy in the framework of education in Russia. The author of the article understands that realizing the problem and outlining



a goal are only the first steps, and the path that Russian education has to follow in the foreign arena is fraught with great difficulties (including geopolitical ones). Therefore, this study focuses on considering the possibilities and likely difficulties of the modern export of Russian education.

The article is based on the work of such researchers as A. Amirbek, & Y.K. Kanat (2014), E.M. Kharitonova (2015), E.P. Panova (2012), A.V. Torkunov (2012) and others. Modern domestic discourse divides the problem of exporting Russian education into two blocks: positive (within which Russia is viewed as a country that has attractive territoriality for foreigners and has very low prices for higher education in comparison with leading countries) and negative (which describes Russia as a country with a negative international image, a low level of digitalization of education and Russia's lag behind leading international universities). After performing a comparative historical analysis, we developed our own research hypothesis, within which the clear strengths of Russian education need support from the "soft power" of Russia, and this model should be strengthened through improving the international image of Russia and increasing funding for domestic education.

The study is based on a brief historical overview of the problem of "soft power", which turns into the potential of Russian education in the international arena based on the capabilities of domestic "soft power". The study analyzes the possibilities and limitations of the export of Russian education. The author selected sources according to the principle of research by scientists of two problems: the impact of education exports on the "soft power" of the state and the theoretical essence of soft power.

EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF 'SOFT POWER'

'Soft power' is based on the attractiveness of state's foreign policy, culture and core political values (Nye, 1990; Leonova, 2013; 2015; Rusakova, 2015). M. Kroenig, M. McAdam, & S. Weber (2010) state there is no consensus within the scientific community on how to measure 'soft power', which leaves much room for interpretation. The idea of 'soft power' has also been developed by scholars such as N. Ferguson (2004), S. Lukes (2005), G. Gallarotti (2011), A. Wojciuk, & M. Michaiiek, (2015). Many Russian researchers, such as M. Lebedeva (2017), E. Kharitonova (2015), Y. Nikitina (2014) and others, having analyzed and reconceptualized 'soft power' in their works, postulate that educational exports constitute an important 'soft power' tool. However,



the term 'soft power' appeared in Russian scientific discourse only in the 2000s, and at this some representatives of Russia's authorities for the first time began to refer to this concept (Wilson, 2015). It is noted that Russia focuses on the development of its soft power instruments, including education, in the post-soviet states due to the strong attractiveness of Russian culture in the region (Wilson, 2015; Ligorio, 2019). Some foreign experts see that Russia follows up on the Soviet footprint in terms of 'soft power' and export of education (Dougherty, 2013).

Russian political leaders also presented their views of what 'soft power' should look like. In 2008, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov defined 'soft power' as "the ability to influence others using one's civilizational, humanitarian, cultural, foreign policy attractiveness and that of other types" (Shestakov, 2008). In 2020, this understanding was supplemented by a negative connotation. As per Lavrov, the USA uses 'soft power' for "indoctrination and brainwashing" and relies upon 'soft power' instruments to modify the attitudes of political class "for subsequent regime change" (RIA Novosti, 2020); meanwhile, Russia has to actively explore these instruments (Zhuravleva, 2020). Back in 2017, Russian President V. Putin (2012) defined 'soft power' as a "complex of instruments and methods of attaining foreign policy goals without using weapons but through informational and other influence".

Russian politicians believe that 'soft power' can also be used for evil. This stance shows that 'soft power' is viewed as a means of influence and propaganda and not as a tool increasing state's attractiveness. Russian officials consider 'soft power' an important element of foreign policy strategy while extremely politicizing the original scientific concept (Kharkevich, 2014).

J. Nye (2011) attributes education to 'soft power' explaining that it is one of the sources of its use. This is indeed true in many cases and many of the recent works focus on the role of education in state's 'soft power' potential (Kharitonova, 2015). 'Soft power' is a set of instruments that help propagate non-material values of a state abroad to advance political agenda.

From this point of view, educational programs would have long-term effects (Panova, 2012), as it is exactly in student years that a person is most susceptible to absorbing certain values and professional competences which are supposed to help him succeed in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



The focus of the research is on the effectiveness of exporting higher education as the main factor in the development of the "soft power" of the state. The effectiveness of the export of education determines the spread of the cultural characteristics of the state in other countries, the improvement of its international ranking and the confidence of its peer countries in it, economic growth associated with the influx of new students and an increase in injections (including foreign capital) into the financial system. Effectiveness of educational exports as an instrument of 'soft power' can be accounted for by several factors. For instance, a person having obtained quality education in a foreign country and then used it as a comparative advantage to build a career in their homeland will spread the values absorbed during studies thus expanding the state's 'soft power' capacity (Amirbek, & Kanat, 2014; Cowan, & Arsenault, 2008). It is the reproduction of values without aggressive propaganda that induces positive attitudes and actions towards such a state.

Moreover, providing better education services for both domestic and foreign students can directly influence the state's prestige in the global arena. If a country is capable of providing competitive knowledge which is fully in line with the global market requirements, it will be able to attract top students from all over the world. Besides, relatively low costs of educational services constitute another comparative advantage for the exporting country given the quality of these services is still high.

Table 1. Russian projects 2018-2019 on the growth of exports of domestic education by 2025 (Garant, 2020; Docplayer, 2019; Krasnova, 2019).

Name of the project	Growth rates of education exports by 2025	Indicators of an increase in the number of foreign students by 2025
"Development of the export potential of the Russian education system" (closed (not completed) in 2018)	370 billion rubles	700 thousand people
"Export of education"	450 billion rubles	600 thousand people

Such KPI adjustments reveal a relatively low quality of strategic planning in Russia's educational sector. Responsible officials do not seem to take into account all opportunities and limitations of Russian educational exports.



In order to attract more foreign students into Russian universities and achieve the federal project KPI targets, it is absolutely vital to keep in mind a number of factors and limitations that impede the implementation of such strategies.

RUSSIAN EDUCATION'S EXPORT POTENTIAL

Even though Russia lags far behind the Soviet Union in terms of international exchange intensity, nowadays the country is well positioned to increase educational exports and attract more foreign students. We further suggest that an analysis of export potential be made based on singling out comparative advantages of Russian education for foreigners along with the existing limitations.

Table 2. Benefits of Russian education

Benefits of Russian education	Description
Regional factor	<p>CIS constitutes an important historically and linguistically entrenched export market for Russian education. The Russian language acts as a lingua franca in the post-Soviet space.</p> <p>In the 2017/18 academic year, Kazakh nationals constituted the largest group (41.3 thousand) among foreign students in Russian universities. Kazakhstan is followed by China (29.2 thousand) and Turkmenistan (22.1 thousand) (Krasnova, 2019). Notably, until 2018 de facto there was no consistent methodology for counting foreign students in Russian educational institutions. Nowadays, this is handled by the FSS Customs Service counting the number of foreign nationals crossing the Russian border and stating education as their primary travel purpose. In 2019, it published statistics for the first six months of the year: Kazakhstan scored the highest (59.3 thousand Kazakh students), then comes China (21.2 thousand), Uzbekistan (14 thousand), and Ukraine (13.7 thousand), and, surprisingly, only 231 foreign students came from Belarus (RBC, 2019). Rosstat provides similar data for the 2018/19 academic year: the number of foreign students enrolled in full-time university programs totaled to 177.7 thousand, which brought the share of foreign nationals in the total number of students to 7.7% (Federal State Statistics Service, 2019). 117.5 thousand students came from the CIS countries, which accounts</p>



	<p>for 66.1% of all foreign students in Russia. Top countries of origin were Kazakhstan (39.6 thousand), Turkmenistan (23.1 thousand), Uzbekistan (16 thousand), and Tajikistan (14.4 thousand). Based on the above statistical data, the CIS factor is key to the export of Russian education (Arefiev, 2020). Even though there are also students coming from Iran, India, South and North Korea, Egypt, Morocco, Vietnam, USA and UK, they are considerably less numerous than the CIS countries' nationals.</p> <p>The international dimension to Russian education has distinct regional specifics. Russia constitutes the main educational market in the whole post-Soviet area. On the one hand, it indicates the highest quality of Russian educational services within the region. On the other hand, this impedes further internationalization of Russian education, as CIS countries' students get enrolled in Russian-language programs. Therefore, it is essential to supplement satisfying the CIS demand with developing a parallel export route aimed at countries further afield.</p>
<p>Value-for-money factor</p>	<p>Lower educational costs at Russian universities in comparison with those in the West is likely to be considered the key comparative advantage by foreign students. Russia de facto acts as low-cost provider in the global education market. According to the data provided by "Study in Russia" and "Russia.study" – official web portals on Russian higher education for foreign students, – the average cost of 1 year of studies in undergraduate programs ranges between \$2,000 and \$3,715 (Sociocentr, 2021). To compare, the average annual tuition fees in Australia, UK and USA range between \$13,000 and \$66,090 (Nagornova, 2020, p. 207).</p> <p>Moreover, the Government of Russia allocates funds to subsidize foreign students' education. Each year there are up to 15 thousand state-funded admissions to secondary vocational, higher education and supplementary vocational programs among foreign applicants (Garant, 2013). Not only do the subsidies cover tuition fees but they also allow eligible foreign students to apply for a monthly stipend. This constitutes an additional incentive for foreigners to choose Russian educational programs.</p>

	<p>For instance, medical education in Russia attracts many Indian nationals appreciating the value-for-money and willing to return to India upon graduation to work in rural areas or medical centers with no expensive advanced equipment (Lebedeva, 2017; Lebedeva, & Faure, 2009).</p>
<p>Currency factor</p>	<p>Not only tuition costs but also general living expenses are to take into account when considering educational trajectories. The Russian ruble's weakness against the US dollar and other key world currencies considerably lowers the relative cost of living in Russia for foreigners.</p> <p>There are also other comparative advantages of Russian higher education that are sometimes mentioned, such as fundamental nature of gained knowledge and great variety of available educational programs (Klyushnikova, & Skakovskaya, 2018, p. 92). However, it is exactly the 3 above-enlisted factors that determine the export potential of Russian education. The CIS factor is vital for promotion of Russian 'soft power' within the post-Soviet area, as future political leaders of the former Soviet republics are currently studying in Russian universities. Comparatively low educational costs attract students not only from CIS and Western countries but also from developing states. These very factors determined some positive results in Russia's export of education. In 2019, the number of foreign students in Russia was 278,000. This number accounts for 6.6% of total number of students in the country. In comparison, the share of foreign students among total number of students in China and the US is 1.7% and 5.5% respectively (Li, 2008; Yang, 2007).</p>

Unfortunately, there are also several negative factors affecting the attractiveness of Russian education for the foreign audience:



Table 3. Negative Factors of Russian Education

Negative Factors of Russian Education	Description
Recognition issue	Limited opportunities for recognition of Russian diplomas constitute one of the key limitations to the export potential of Russian education and its use as an instrument of 'soft power'. Although there have been signed many bilateral agreements on mutual recognition of educational certificates, the procedure itself remains complicated and time-consuming.
Low-ranking issue	The situation is further exacerbated by poor performance of Russian educational institutions in international rankings. It is only the Moscow State University that is counted among the top 100 world universities in the QS ranking (QS Community, 2021). It can largely be attributed to the lack of market-oriented approach in educational institutions' management that directly affects their development and competitiveness in the global market. However, by now 5 Russian universities have received QS Stars given to educational institutions meeting high-quality standards in certain areas (QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, 2021), which shows that there remain potential for positive change.
Migration regulation issue	Russia de facto 'loses' many foreign students interested in obtaining education in its universities due to the complexity of migration regulation procedures. This includes restrictions for nationals of certain countries, migrant registration issues, problematic visa and study permit validity extension, as well as administrative expulsion and deportation of students due to rapid visa expiry (Klyushnikova, & Skakovskaya, 2018, p. 93).
Obsolescence issue	Nowadays, the system of Russian education does not comply with the modern labor market requirements (TASS, 2019). This non-compliance is accounted for by long-outdated educational programs and standards (HSE, 2019; Zvezdina, & Serkov, 2018). The country proved unable to create and implement ideas in either hard or soft sciences. There is a need to hasten the transition towards a knowledge-based society.

<p>Language issue</p>	<p>There are only some 16 Russian universities having launched English-language courses and educational programs (Study in Russia, 2021).</p> <p>As a result, we can assess the impact of these negative factors. In 2021, Russia has only 17 universities in the QS World University Rankings, this result accounts for 3.4% of top-500 universities in the ranking with the average score being 34.2 points (QS Community, 2021). China and the US have 26 (5.2%) and 86 (17.2%) universities among the QS top-500 with average score being 41.6 and 50.8 points respectively. As for the Scopus database, China and the US had 473,211 and 446,468 articles accounting for 22.65% and 21.37% of acknowledged scientific works in 2018 (Gokhberg, 2020). However, Russia had only 66,648 articles or 3.19% off papers in Scopus. Russia is still inferior to China and the United States in terms of representation on the international educational market.</p>
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OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL EXPORTS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF RUSSIA'S 'SOFT POWER'

Having compared all the advantages and problems of Russian educational exports, we can now proceed to outlining **opportunities** for the export potential development:

1) Diversification of export markets. It is vital to prioritize development states as a new prospective destination for educational exports. For instance, India, Vietnam, Iraq, Iran and Nigeria can become new important sources of incoming foreign students having challenged China's monopoly in this sphere (Tsvyk, 2018). It is exactly these countries that demonstrate the most favorable demographic situation: they have the largest population aged 18-22 which continues to grow (United Nations, 2021) and make the greatest contribution in the fast-increasing academic mobility in the international education market. Russia needs to broaden the scope of English-language educational programs, facilitate migration regulation for foreign students and create comfortable environment for incoming students in terms of their cultural adaptation and socialization.

2) Digitalization. It is also essential to proceed with the digital transformation of both export-oriented and internal segments of Russian education, which is particularly



acute in times of the COVID-19 pandemic when all possible interpersonal interactions are limited to the digital space. Employment of new technologies should aim at increasing availability of information on higher education in Russia, enhancing accessibility of entrance exams for foreigners and expanding opportunities for distance learning. The use of cloud services, online training platforms and 'big data' technologies (Shchukina, 2020, p. 191) can increase the competitiveness of Russian education in the global market. In order to proceed with this technological modernization, it is vital to ensure cooperation between Russian universities and IT companies.

However, the realization of these opportunities may be affected by two major

LIMITATIONS

1) Low funding. The higher education in Russia receives considerably less budget money in comparison with other countries. Education is indeed one of the low-priority line items in the Russian budget, which is not the case in many foreign states. The share of Russia's GDP going to the educational funds is lamentably small (Konstantinov, 2019; Ostashova, 2020).

2) Negative international image. Russia faces severe criticism within the international community and decreasing credibility in the eyes of younger generation abroad. Surveys performed in 14 developed states revealed that 66% of pollees characterize Russia as 'unfavorable' (Huang, 2020). In the USA, 72% of the surveyed were of the same opinion (Gallup, 2021). The published results do not precise the respondents' age but even so they attest to unfavorable perception of Russia internationally. Also, the Ukrainian crisis and subsequent events had a negative impact on Russia's international reputation having made the Kremlin to change its plans to increase the number of foreign students (Wilson, 2015). To return its reputation in long-term perspective Russia will have to improve the efficiency of its 'soft power' by means of providing education for foreign students and expecting them to return home and 'promote Russia's interest'.



CONCLUSION

Educational exports prove to be a promising instrument of Russia's 'soft power'. Unfortunately, the country is still unable to compete with such global leaders as USA, UK and China. Therefore, Russian officials need to pay attention to the identified comparative advantages, issues, opportunities and limitation to develop a policy approach that could help gradually build the capacity of Russian educational exports. It is crucial to preserve the status of the main education market in the post-Soviet space, as well as attract more students from developing states through improving accessibility and quality of Russian educational services, in particular via boosting educational digitalization. Russian education is sure to become more attractive to foreigners in case authorities implement some structural reforms, namely review the migration policies and shift towards a more market-oriented approach in university management. This is likely to move Russian educational institutions higher in global rankings, tailor Russian educational programs to the needs of the modern labor market and, consequently, help solve the problem of Russian diplomas' recognition abroad and attract more foreign students.

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