



CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION THROUGH UNIVERSITIES: ARE EDUCATIONAL PREFERENCES OF STUDENTS IN BELARUS SIMILAR TO THOSE IN LITHUANIA?

ТРАНСГРАНИЧНОЕ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО ЧЕРЕЗ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЫ: ОДИНАКОВЫ ЛИ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫЕ ПРЕДПОЧТЕНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ В БЕЛАРУСИ И ЛИТВЕ?

COOPERAÇÃO TRANSFRONTEIRIÇA ATRAVÉS DE UNIVERSIDADES: AS PREFERÊNCIAS EDUCACIONAIS DOS ESTUDANTES NA BIELORRÚSSIA SÃO SEMELHANTES ÀS DA LITUÂNIA?

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The article provides a comparison on educational preferences of student in Belarus and Lithuania. If the educational preferences of students from Belarus and Lithuania are similar, then this contributes to cross-border cooperation between the universities of these two countries.

Methods: The reliable research methods that the author used in the study were: literature review, questioning and statistical processing of questionnaires, verification of statistical hypotheses.

Results: It was statistically proved that educational preferences in Belarus and Lithuania are similar. This means that student educational preferences in Belarus and Lithuania are in cognitive proximity. The difference must not be taken into account in planning Cross-Border cooperation Belarusian and Lithuanian universities. The results are highly statistically significant (99,0%). In this case, you have a decision-making process with accurate, controlled probability.

Conclusion: The difference of the educational preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian students is not a barrier to the construction of Cross-Border cooperation in the field of higher education. This scientific fact is in a good practical significance for Cross-Border cooperation in higher education. For example, for creation of knowledge networks.

Keywords: Cross-Border cooperation. Globalization. Educational preferences. Knowledge networks. Belarus. Lithuania.





RESUMO

Objetivo: O artigo fornece uma comparação sobre as preferências educacionais dos alunos na Bielorrússia e na Lituânia. Se as preferências educacionais dos estudantes da Bielorrússia e da Lituânia são semelhantes, isso contribui para a cooperação transfronteiriça entre as universidades desses dois países.

Métodos: Os métodos de pesquisa confiáveis foram utilizados no trabalho: revisão da literatura, questionamento e processamento estatístico de questionários, verificação de hipóteses estatísticas.

Resultados: Foi estatisticamente provado que as preferências educacionais na Bielorrússia e na Lituânia são semelhantes. Isso significa que as preferências educacionais dos alunos na Bielorrússia e na Lituânia estão em proximidade cognitiva. A diferença não deve ser levada em consideração no planejamento da cooperação transfronteiriça universidades bielorrussas e lituanas. Os resultados são estatisticamente significativos (99,0%). Nesse sentido, temos um processo de tomada de decisão com probabilidade precisa e controlada.

Conclusão: A diferença das preferências educacionais dos estudantes bielorrussos e lituanos não é uma barreira para o desenvolvimento da cooperação transfronteiriça no campo do ensino superior. Este facto científico tem um bom significado prático para a cooperação transfronteiriça no ensino superior. Por exemplo, para a criação de redes de conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: Cooperação transfronteiriça; Globalização; Preferências educacionais; Redes de conhecimento. Bielorrússia. Lituano.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) is part of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), whose main objective is to support progress towards "an area of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness" between EU Member States and their neighbours (Cross-Border Cooperation, 2014). The article of J. Lyshchikova (2022) provides a comprehensive review on theoretical and empirical research in the field of interregional cooperation. The author (Lyshchikova, 2022) has considered summarize the types and forms of interregional cooperation, the tools by which interregional interaction is carried out, as well as key drivers contributing to its strengthening, deepening and development and the main barriers that hinder and/or reduce the intensity of interregional cooperation.

One of the main development trends of the worldwide educational services market is globalization (Wende, 2003).





The global modern economy requires states not only internal well-being, but also successful lobbying of their interests in the foreign arena (Ostashova, 2022). One of the directions of such lobbying is the promotion of the national education system to foreign markets (Ostashova, 2022).

The globalisation is the main force changing the world today and ways of international cooperation. Forces of demand and supply are changing the dynamics of the higher education market (Pathak et al., 2010). For example, the paper (Wende, 2003) addresses the growing demand for access to higher education and the conditions under which this is leading to a worldwide market. The supply of cross-border education and the export of educational services play an increasingly important role in fulfilling this demand (Aydrus and Filippov, 2008).

Leading world countries began to consider the higher education market as a part of their foreign policy, pursuing geo-economic and geopolitical goals (Phillips and Stahl, 2001). Also, the use of higher education (HE) as "soft power" has a long history in Europe (Polglase, 2013). So, higher education is undergoing a serious transformation under the direct and indirect influence of global trends.

Some authors showed that Eastern Europe is a weak player in the global educational services market (Abdrakhmanova, 2017; Aydrus and Filippov, 2008; Okulicz-Kozaryn et al., 2020). Cross-border cooperation in the field of higher education is one of the ways to increase the role of Eastern European Universities in the market of higher education services.

On the one hand, Cross-Border cooperation occupies an important place within European industrial relations practices and can support new forms of capacity-building, as well as labour market institutions (Hammer, 2010; Bart, 2009).

On the other hand, education plays a central role in preparing individuals to enter the labour market, by offering them the opportunity to improve and increase their amount of knowledge, skills and abilities (Diaconu, 2014).

Also, in the context of digital economy special attention is paid to cognitive proximity, which leads to the creation of knowledge networks (Lyshchikova, 2022).

In our study, we will pay attention to such pair of Eastern European countries as:

- Belarus and Lithuania.





So, two post-socialist countries located close to each other were selected for the research. Both countries were republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. They share a common economic, historical, and cultural past. Lithuania is a member of the European Union. Belarus is not a member of the European Union. It was interesting to see how the difference in the economic, historical, and cultural realities of two neighboring countries has affected the Cross-Border cooperation. The main source of the author's interest is the problem of international cooperation of these countries in the field of higher education.

The choice of the countries was made on the basis of Cross-Border cooperation programs.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of the study is to compare educational preferences of students in Belarus and Lithuania. This purpose corresponds to the concept of cognitive proximity, which leads to the creation of knowledge networks. It was investigated educational preferences of students concerning the method of providing educational services at lectures.

The research question is the next: are educational preferences of university students at lectures in Belarus similar to those one in Lithuania?

If the educational preferences of students from Belarus and Lithuania are similar, then this contributes to cross-border cooperation between the universities of these two countries. If the educational preferences of students from Belarus and Lithuania differ significantly, this creates barriers in cross-border cooperation between universities of Belarus and Lithuania. So, educational preferences of students of Belarus and Lithuania were compared.

The study was carried out since December 2018 till April 2022. The reliable research methods that the author used in the study were:

- Literature review;





- Questioning and statistical processing of questionnaires;
- Verification of statistical hypotheses.

At the first stage, the author described the state of research in this field. And the purpose of the study was formulated in the form of question, the answer to which was required to be obtained.

Then one-time questionnaire survey was organized (Dobrenkov et al., 2004; Kravchenko, 2014). Concerning to the method to obtain necessary data, it was a standard method of self-registration. Using this method, every respondent writes the needed answers, independently filling out pre-distributed special registration forms. Here the author used the registration form.

There are 9 important items in the questionnaire. The main issue of the questionnaire is number 5. It was a main question: Which of methods of providing educational services at lectures do I prefer?

There were three possible answers to the question (Okulich-Kazarin et al., 2019):

1. The lecturer has a presentation, and I write from slides.
2. The lecturer dictates, and I write the lecture.
3. The lecturer tells, and I note.

The first option of the answer corresponds to the visual method of providing educational services in lectures. The second and third variants corresponds to the auditory method of providing educational services in lectures.

At the next stage, the author used serial (nested) sampling (Selvamuthu et al., 2018; Singpurwalla, 2015; Vasileva et al., 2012) in the study. Serial (nested) sampling means that the series of units should be selected. The series of respondents were selected randomly. When choosing respondents, the author sought to achieve the maximum degree of diversity. A detailed description of the method of selecting students for the survey is given in the article (Okulich-Kazarin, 2022).

Then continuous questionnaire survey was carried out in each country.

Table 1 presents common characteristics of respondents.





Table 1: General characteristics of the respondents

| No | University | Specialty | Number |
|-----------|---|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Belarus | | | |
| 1 | State Technical University of Gomel (n. Pavel Sukhoi) | History | 16 |
| 2 | | Marketing | 40 |
| 3 | Gomel State University (n. Francisk Skorina) | Economics and Management | 51 |
| 4 | | Organization of production processes | 20 |
| | Sum: | | 127 |
| Lithuania | | | |
| 5 | European Humanities University | International law | 15 |
| 6 | | Visual design and media | 18 |
| 7 | | Media and communication | 15 |
| | Sum: | | 48 |
| | Totally: | | 175 |

Source: own results.

According to Table 1, there were 127 respondents from Belarus and 48 respondents from Lithuania. Statistical methods make it possible to compare samples with different numbers of respondents (BUS 9641, 2010).

In total, 175 respondents of universities took part in the survey (Table 1). Then, the author has calculated statistical indicators, such as the expected value, \bar{X} (BUS 9641, 2010); the standard deviation for the sample, δ_x (BUS 9641, 2010); the standard deviation for the population, δ_{x-1} (BUS 9641, 2010). After that the author determined the average values and the variation of the indicators. Later the data were presented (according Selvamuthu et al., 2018) in the tabular and graphical form for the further processing. Then, two statistical hypotheses were formulated by the author and verified. The methodology of statistical research is borrowed from the source (Singpurwalla, 2015).

It was evaluated the difference (BUS 9641, 2010) of two mathematical expectations.





And, at last, after discussion of the received results, the author was able to draw conclusions.

3. RESULTS

3.1 THEORETICAL BRIEF

Some issues of cross-border cooperation in the field of higher education have been studied by scientists before this study.

One of the serious theoretical publications in this direction is article of **Lyshchikova (2022)**. This author claims that, in the context of globalization and digitalization, cooperation between territories is primarily regarded as an exchange of knowledge, information, and technology. The creation of knowledge networks (**Lyshchikova, 2022**) that increase the cognitive proximity between regions is possible within macro-regions that were created in the economic space of the European Union.

Cooperation programs between Belarus and Lithuania (European neighbourhood and partnership instrument, 2007) includes several of local programs. For example, one of a priority of program is "2.2. Enhancement of education, health and social sphere development." For example, it was the project "1VL-975 (project LLB-2-141). Healthy Lifestyle Promotion in Educational Institutions in Lithuania and Belarus Cross-border." One more project, related to education was the project "1S-438 (project LLB-1-099) Enhancement of Education, Health and Social Development for Joint Community Target Groups in Cross Border Region of Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus."

The paper (Polglase, 2013) explores how effective EU higher education policies have been in Belarus and offers examples of initiatives with the potential to develop HE as a transformative power in the country. Belarus has remained a laggard in its engagement with European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and student mobility from Belarus within the EHEA is poor.

The author of the work (**Astapenia, 2018**) showed that the Belarusian-Lithuanian relations have great potential. Both countries are interested in easing tensions between





them, and this can be achieved through a broader exchange of information, for example by expanding university cooperation.

According to the author (**Ostashova, 2022**), it is extremely important to maintain the status of the main education market in the post-Soviet space. Theoretically and empirically, the author shows the main ways to improve exports to other regional markets of educational services:

- increasing the availability and quality of Russian educational services,
- accelerating the digitalization of education,
- simplifying migration policy,
- transition to market methods in university management.

For example, Gordon et al. (2016) studied the opinions of students from some Eastern European countries. It was qualitative, consisting of in-depth interviews, for discovering students' standpoints and attitudes towards admitting European bonds ... As the findings show, students' understanding of the Europeanization process is varied, and so are their endeavours of spreading the importance to adhere to the European Union and to share the European spirit among students belonging to EaP states.

Before that, researcher Nadalutti (2014) argues that the constant Cross-Border interaction is leading to greater mutual understanding, long-term transnational initiatives and an increasing emphasis on shared interests and values.

Thus, it is clear that the development of cross-border cooperation through universities is very important for the social and economic sphere of many countries. Belarus and Lithuania are among them.

3.2 PRIMARY AND STATISTICAL PROCESSING OF QUESTIONNAIRES

The results of the primary and statistical processing of the main issue No 5 of the questionnaires are given in Table 2.

In the table 2, for statistical calculations, the value "1" was taken by the author for the visual lecture method of providing of educational services. It was the answer No 1. The value "0" was taken by the author for the auditory lecture method of providing of educational services. The answers No. 2 and No. 3 of the main issue were combined for





this aim.

Table 2. Results of processing of questionnaires

(number of variants of respondents' answers to issue No 5)

| No | Country | The number of choices | | | \bar{X} | δ_x | δ_{x-1} |
|----|-----------|-----------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|----------------|
| | | response 1 | response 2 | response 3 | | | |
| 1 | Belarus | 90 | 30 | 7 | 0,71 | 0,45 | 0,46 |
| 2 | Lithuania | 35 | 3 | 10 | 0,73 | 0,44 | 0,45 |

Source: own results.

According to Table 2, the average sample values \bar{X} for Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents are 71% - 73%. This means that students from both countries prefer a visual way of receiving educational services at lectures.

The sizes of the indicators of table 2 allows to compare two things (Vasileva et al., 2012) - the sample mean (\bar{X}) and the mathematical expectation of the General population (μ).

Table 2 shows that the same indicators of educational preferences of students from Belarus and Lithuania is different. However, the values of \bar{X} have a slight difference. The values of δ_x also differ somewhat from each other.

However, the data in Table 2 does not answer the main question: are educational preferences of university students at lectures in Belarus similar to those one in Lithuania?

In other words, we cannot say for sure is the difference of these General populations is significant? Or is this difference a result of random deviations?

Verification of statistical hypotheses gives an answer to this question with a very accurate and controlled probability.

3.3 VERIFICATION OF TWO STATISTICAL HYPOTHESES FOR EVALUATION THE DIFFERENCES OF THESE INDEPENDENT SAMPLES

The statistics, which form the basis of the criterion for testing the equality of the mathematical expectations of two General populations, are based on the difference





between the sample averages $\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2$. In order to estimate the differences of two mathematical expectations, the author used a standard statistical formula. A detailed description of the formula is given in the sources (Selvamuthu et al., 2018; Singpurwalla, 2015; Okulich-Kazarin et al., 2019):

$$z = [(\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) - (\mu_1 - \mu_2)] / \sqrt{(\hat{S}_1^2 - \hat{S}_2^2)}, \quad (1)$$

here \bar{X}_1 - average size for the sample taken from the first General generation,
 \bar{X}_2 - average size for the sample taken from the second General generation,
 μ_1 - the size of mathematical expectation for the first General generation,
 μ_2 - the size of mathematical expectation for the second General generation,
 \hat{S}_1 - average error of the sample taken from the first General generation,
 \hat{S}_2 - average error of the sample taken from the second General generation.

The Research hypothesis: there are no significant differences between two independent samples (Vasileva et al., 2012).

The Research hypothesis is $H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0,0$ (BUS 9641, 2010).

The Research hypothesis asserts that there are no significant differences in the preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents, if one does not take into account random deviations (Vasileva et al., 2012).

The Alternative hypothesis: there are significant differences between two independent samples (Vasileva et al., 2012).

The Alternative hypothesis is $H_1: \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0,0$ (BUS 9641, 2010).

The Alternative hypothesis asserts that there are significant differences in the preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents, if one does not take into account random deviations (Vasileva et al., 2012).

The author has estimated the difference of two mathematical expectations (BUS 9641, 2010; Chto takoe z-ocenka, 2021) at a confidence level of 99,0 ($p = 0,01$; $Z_{\text{tabl}} = 2,58$). The author presents the calculation results for Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents in Table 3.

Table 3. Data to verification of statistical hypotheses





| № | Name of indicators | Series number | |
|----|---|---------------|-----------|
| | | Belarus | Lithuania |
| 1 | the size of a sample, n | 127 | 48 |
| 2 | the expected value, \bar{X} | 0,71 | 0,73 |
| 3 | $\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2$ | 0,02 | |
| 4 | $\mu_1 - \mu_2$ | 0,00 | |
| 5 | the standard deviation for the sample, $\bar{\sigma}_x$ | 0,45 | 0,44 |
| 6 | average error, $\hat{S}_x = \bar{\sigma}_x / \sqrt{n}$ | 0,040 | 0,063 |
| 7 | \hat{S}_x^2 | 0,002 | 0,004 |
| 8 | $\hat{S}_1^2 - \hat{S}_2^2$ | 0,002 | |
| 9 | $\sqrt{(\hat{S}_1^2 - \hat{S}_2^2)}$ | 0,044 | |
| 10 | $ z_{stat} = [(\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) - (\mu_1 - \mu_2)] / \sqrt{(\hat{S}_1^2 - \hat{S}_2^2)}$ | 0,455 | |
| 11 | the value z_{tabl} for the level of significance 99,0 | 2,58 | |
| 12 | Result, $z_{stat} < z_{table}$ | Yes | |

Source: own results.

As it is shown in Table 3, $|z_{stat}| = 0,455$. Since z_{tabl} is higher than $|z_{stat}|$, then the Research hypothesis is accepted: there are no statistically significant differences in the preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents, if one does not take into account random deviations.

The difference in the preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents is not a barrier to the development of Cross-Border cooperation in higher education. So, the difference must not be taken into account in planning Cross-Border cooperation in higher education of Belarus and Lithuania.

4 DISCUSSION

The results of the study can be considered as a reason for discussion. In this study, the opinions of 175 independent respondents of the surveyed countries were transformed into a strong scientific fact. We cannot consider the results obtained as a new scientific tendency, a new scientific law or a new scientific regularity. We can be sure to take the results as the new strong scientific fact.

At the same time, according to Table 2, students from both countries prefer a visual way of receiving educational services at lectures. This fact is confirmed by the data published earlier in the article (Okulich-Kazarin, 2020).





It should be useful for the construction of Cross-Border cooperation:

- There are no statistically significant differences in the educational preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents, if one does not take into account random deviations. So, educational preferences of student in Belarus and Lithuania are similar.

- The difference in the preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian respondents is not a barrier to the construction of Cross-Border cooperation in higher education of Belarus and Lithuania.

Can we trust the results of our research?

The verification of statistical hypotheses has shown that the results are highly statistically significant (99,0%). The result indicates that the decision will be correct in about 99,0% of cases and wrong only in 1,0% of cases. In this case, we have a decision-making process with the accurate, controlled probability. So, the theory of statistics does not give us reasons to doubt the correctness of our results. Everyone who does not agree with the obtained results must receive the own results. S/he should organize a new own study (BUS 9641, 2010) and must use a much more sample or much higher statistical significance. Thus, we are sure that 175 respondents are enough to obtain a quite reliable result in the study.

5 CONCLUSION

This study is related to the construction of Cross-Border cooperation of Belarus and Lithuania in the field of higher education.

The study was carried out in order to find the answer to the research question: are educational preferences of university students at lectures in Belarus similar to those one in Lithuania?

The purpose of the study has been achieved, since the answer to the research question has been found.

At the first time, the new strong scientific fact has been received:

1) It was statistically proved that educational preferences in Belarus and Lithuania are similar. This means that student educational preferences in Belarus and Lithuania are





in cognitive proximity.

The difference of the educational preferences of Belarusian and Lithuanian students is not a barrier to the construction of Cross-Border cooperation in the field of higher education. This difference must not be taken into account in construction Cross-Border cooperation in higher education of Belarus and Lithuania.

This scientific fact is in a great practical significance for Cross-Border cooperation in higher education. For example, Cross-Border cooperation of Belarusian and Lithuanian universities may lead to creation of knowledge networks.

2) The research is of theoretical importance for researchers in social sciences:

- Changes in the economic, historical, and cultural realities of both countries didn't lead to significant differences in the students' educational preferences in Belarus and Lithuania.

- A revision of the didactic theory is required.

3) The results are highly statistically significant (99,0%). The result indicates that the decision will be correct in about 99,0% of cases and wrong only in 1,0% of cases. In this case, we have a decision-making process with the accurate, controlled probability.

4) The task of the next study lies in the practical plane. This task is to compare educational preferences of students in other countries of Eastern Europe.

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