

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND MIGRATION

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN RUSSIA: KEY ISSUES OF STUDENT MIGRATION

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Abstract. Russia is actively involved in the process of international education. The number of international students in Russia is increasing, and in 2016/2017, it was almost 230,000. In this context, researching the international education and student migration has scientific and practical importance. The purpose of the study was to find out the main barriers for international education in Russia as well as to identify the key problems international students face in Russia. The main research methods were the analysis of statistical data and data of previous studies on student migration in Russia. In addition, to identify the main problems of international students studying in Russia, survey of 100 international students from various universities in Russia was conducted (45 male and 55 female respondents). The majority of respondents were from the following countries: Uzbekistan (N=16), Kazakhstan (N=15), Moldova (N=6), People's Republic of China (N=5) and Tajikistan (N=5). The findings show that there are a lot of barriers to the development of international education, and researchers highlight bureaucracy, too complicate process of quality assessment and university accreditation etc. Some scholars believe that Russia has entered the process of international education without fully taking into account the specifics of Russian higher education, and without conducting a deep analysis of the consequences of the transition to international principles of academic mobility. Analysis of the results of the survey of foreign students studying in Russia revealed key patterns of educational migration and the main problems faced by international students. Firstly, in contrast to academic mobility in Western European

universities, international students come to Russia for a full-time program, and the number of foreign students visiting one or two semesters is very low. A significant part of international students have poor skills of the Russian language; sometimes even students of Russian-language programs demonstrate only basic Russian. Russian language is a significant obstacle to including of students in the processes of academic exchange, and the insufficient level of Russian skills reduces the quality of education for those who study in Russia. Of course, there is every reason to assume that most international students have difficulties not only in study process, but also in everyday communication. At the same time a lot of international students studying in Russia do not speak English. One of the problems identified by international students is that in Russian universities, the practice of orientation week is not widespread, although the international students need in such kind support. Many students noticed that the process of granting academic visas is rather complicated and takes a lot of time, beside that there is a problem to get long-stay visa for relatives (spouse and children) of international students. According to survey, in some Russian regions there is a serious problem related to living conditions in dormitories. Also some international students have mentioned about follow problems of staying and studying in Russia: adaptation to climatic conditions, depression, difficulties in finding housing, poor environmental situation, loneliness, refusal of financial assistance to international students with disabilities, insufficient work of education department of university. The recommendations related improving situations were also discussed with international students. There is demand to developing online services, to facilitating visa services. The living conditions in dormitories need a special attention of regional and universities authorities. Among the most urgent measures for the further development of international education in Russia there are the promotion of the study of the Russian language abroad before coming in Russia and the development of social support system for international students in Russia.

Keywords: international education, international students, problems, Russia

Introduction

Currently, Russia is actively involved in the process of international education. In 2016/2017, the number of foreign students in Russia was almost 230,000. Russian higher education is popular in different countries. Most students come from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries (N=120, 000); the leaders are Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The number of students from Asian countries (China, India and Vietnam) is constantly increasing. Besides that, Russian universities are also in demand among citizens from Middle East and the

African countries (Iraq, Morocco, Syria, Egypt, Nigeria and Ghana): the number of students from these countries has increased by 19% and reached 31,360. Also, there is the highest growth rate (28%) of international students from Latin America (Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil). The most popular regions for international students from the countries of the former USSR are Moscow (25%), St. Petersburg (9%), Omsk Region (6%), and Tomsk Region (5%). Russian universities offer applicants more than 200 fields of study; however, according to statistics, engineering and technical specialties were the most popular among international applicants (22.5% of international students have chosen these specialties), and also medical science (20% of international students) (Study in Russia, 2019). In this context, research of the international education and student migration has scientific and practical importance.

The objective of the study was to find out the main barriers for international education in Russia as well as to identify the key problems that face international students in Russia.

Research methods

The main research methods were the analysis of statistical data and data of previous studies on academic mobility in Russia. In addition, to identify the main problems of international students studying in Russia, survey of 100 international students from various universities in Russia was conducted (45 male and 55 female students). The majority of respondents were from the following countries: Uzbekistan (N=16), Kazakhstan (N=15), Moldova (N=6), People's Republic of China (N=5) and Tajikistan (N=5).

Results

Russian higher education follows the global trends, and participation in higher education is increasing in Russia as well as in most economically developed countries (Bessudnov A., Kurakin D., Malik V., 2017:84; Schofer E., Meyer J. W., 2005). The development of international education and the increase in the number of international students in Russian universities are in many ways connected with Russia's accession to the Bologna process in 2003. At the same time, experts evaluate the implementation of the basic principles of the Bologna process in Russia differently. Even supporters of the Bologna process argue that in a number of fundamental principles of the Bologna process are not realized in Russian higher education system, in particular, the autonomy of universities is reduced, and the academic mobility of students are not developing sufficiently (Plaksiy S. I., 2012). In contrast to academic mobility in Western European universities, foreign students come to Russia for a full course of study, and the number of foreign students visiting one or two

semesters is low. In other words, international students arrive in Russian universities outside the framework of the Bologna Agreement.

Among the barriers to the development of international education, researchers highlight bureaucracy, too complicate process of quality assessment and university accreditation (Plaksiy S. I., 2012). Quite often, criteria for enrolling international students are not clear or they are presented not in a proper way. Some scholars believe that Russia has entered the process of international education without fully taking into account the specifics of Russian higher education, and without conducting a deep analysis of the consequences of the transition to international principles of academic mobility (Kupriyanov R. V., Vilensky A. A., Kupriyanova N. E., 2014).

The supporters of the development of the Bologna system in Russia emphasize that it provides an opportunity to create greater flexibility of training and study programs (Schedrovitsky P., 2016). The Bologna system intends a unified system of modules recognized by the international academic that creates opportunities for students to change his place of study for one or more semesters. Unfortunately, in Russian universities, today there are quite few programs in English, which makes it difficult to include international students in the educational process. But at the same time, it should be emphasized that the migration policy is aimed at attracting international students to Russia.

“The concept of the state migration policy in the Russian Federation for 2019-2025” defines the promotion of the free mobility of students, researchers and teachers as one of the main directions of migration policy, that implies "increasing the accessibility of educational services for foreign citizens, including improving the rules for entry into the Russian Federation and the stay of foreign citizens on Russian territory in order to study in Russian educational organizations" (The concept of the state migration policy of the Russian Federation for 2019-2025, 2018). However, currently there are many obstacles to the development of international education in Russia, and one of the main barriers is the Russian language. As earlier studies have shown, in general, the level of Russian language proficiency of foreign students is very poor. 70.5% of international students in Russian were not able to understand and speak Russian at all; 10.6 % - could read, but have not skills of spoken language; 6% were able to speak very basic Russian; 3.3% had an average level of knowledge of Russian language; 3.1% - spoke Russian at a fairly good level; and for 6.5% foreign students Russian is the native language (Arefyev A. L., Sheregi F. E., 2014). Language problem is typical first of all for student immigration from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Unfortunately, in these

countries it is a common practice to ignore Russian language courses or other Russian training forms before coming to Russia.

The results of a survey of international students

Analysis of the results of survey of international students studying in Russia allows to identify the key patterns of educational migration and the main problems faced by international students. Firstly, most students come to Russia for full-time programs, not exchange programs for a semester. In our study, 86 students out of 100 respondents study in full-time programs at Russian universities. Secondly, most often, in Russia universities, international students study undergraduate (bachelor) programs (N=74). Russian master's degree programs are less in demand among international students. A significant part of international students have a poor skills of the Russian language; for example, 9 respondents studying in Russian-language programs were able only catch general ideas of the conversation. At the same time, a lot of international students in Russia do not know English either, that could be connected with the country of origin. Of course, it is reasonable to assume that most international students have difficulties not only in study process, but also in everyday communication.

The results of survey demonstrated that only 30 international students had orientation week and other orientation activities at the beginning of their first semester. Only 26 responders have a tutor, that is, a person who helps to adapt to the new learning environment.

According to international students' opinion, in some Russian universities there are the serious problems related to living conditions in dormitories. One student describes the conditions in his dormitory as the most difficult situation he faced in Russia, as sanitary norms were not accomplished in the dormitory, and there were bugs and cockroaches in rooms.

Despite language difficulties, only 3 respondents stated about difficulties in the study experience. Also in the answers to the question about difficulties of living and studying in Russia the following problems were mentioned: adaptation to climatic conditions, depression, difficulties in finding housing, poor environmental situation, loneliness, refusal of financial assistance to international students with disabilities, insufficient work of education department of university. The respondents believe that it would be good to be able to register once during the whole period of study and to apply for registration online, to speed up the process of issuing documents confirming the status of the student, as well as to better inform students about the registration of various documents and to give them clear instructions. Married students are also concerned about visa for their relatives (spouse and children) at the time of study.

Further, international students emphasize that it would be better communication if universities officials and employees of migration services were able to speak English, and they advise all foreign applicants to learn Russian before coming to Russia. Several respondents report about the need to introduce more courses in English at Russian universities. Also, students really want the staff at the university empathize with students who have not yet mastered the Russian language.

In terms of medical care, international students offer to make a uniform policy of voluntary medical insurance for a particular University, because now students have to look for a medical insurance company themselves. Respondents also note that it is necessary to provide information support about medical care in Russia and help international student to get medical service; for example, one respondent notes that he was denied medical care at a university clinic because he was not in the database; through it was not his fault. Some students suggest legal providing international students an opportunity for part - time work.

Discussion

International education is now considered as one of the most important areas not only of education, but also of the migration policy of the state. The inclusion of Russia in the processes of international educational mobility meets the geopolitical and economic interests of the country. However, the studies' results demonstrate that there are currently quite many barriers to the expansion of Russian international education. There are obstacles to the implementation of reverse academic mobility in our country, including the mismatch of social and living conditions offered by the Russian side to west standards in some regions, insufficient guarantee of the quality of education, underdevelopment of the system of recognition of foreign documents on education, long time period for consideration of documents; the process of granting study visas remain rather complicated and longtime. Poor knowledge of the Russian language of international students is a significant obstacle to the inclusion of students in the processes of academic exchange, and it declines the quality of education for those who study in Russia. In this regard, among the most urgent measures for the further development of international education is promoting Russian language courses abroad, facilitating the process of granting visas for international students, developing a system of social support for international students in Russian universities. It should be paid attention to the experience of Western European countries, developing strategies to attract international students. The priority measures are (1) good reception conditions that mean first of all the "improvement of the procedure for granting visas by simplifying the list of documents required for a visa application and by further developing

digitization”, and (2) support throughout their studies (Strategy to attract international students, 2018). The implementation of such measures will significantly increase the strengthening of Russian universities’ position in the field of international education.

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