Requirements of “National Standards” and the Labor Market for the Training of Russian-Speaking Specialists in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: The diversification of global labor market demands has a serious impact on the goals, methods, forms, and content of teaching foreign languages to Chinese students in universities. Published in 2018, the first “National Quality Standards for Vocational Training of Bachelor Students in Multi-Disciplinary Universities of the Classical Type” are intended to lay down the normative basis and to provide practical recommendations on ensuring the quality of training Chinese young professionals in accordance with international standards of vocational training and strategic plans of the PRC leadership for creating an international transport corridor “One Belt – One Way”. The experience of organizing student learning according to the “specialization + foreign (Russian) language” model at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (Guangwai University) is presented in the article. As the results of the study show, this process is in line with the search for a balance between national standards and transnational requirements for the quality of student training and is aimed at improving the competitiveness of Chinese graduates with knowledge of the Russian language in the international labor market, primarily in the post-Soviet Eurasian space. In accordance with the plans of the PRC leadership, the new Silk Road will pass through the post-Soviet Eurasian space, uniting the East with the West.

1. Introduction
At the beginning of 2018, China unveiled the new “National Quality Standards for Vocational Training of Undergraduate Students in Multidisciplinary Universities of the Classical Type” (普通高等学校本科专业类教学质量国家标准) (hereinafter referred to as “National Standards”) [1]. The “National Standards” are a response to the strategic initiatives of the President of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping, formulated in the form of an international economic cooperation project “One Belt - One Way” and the concept of forming a “community of a single destiny of mankind”. The idea of reviving the Silk Road between the East and the West, laid back in the 2nd millennium BC, the basis of this concept. However, in the modern vision, this concept is called “One Belt – One Way” sets as the goal the formation of a new trade-economic and socio-cultural model of integration of the countries of Eurasia [2].

2. Materials and Methods
At the same time, the “National Standards” is a clear set of requirements for the quality of professional training of students enrolled in undergraduate programs, including future specialists with knowledge of the Russian language. Language is a means of communication and a kind of bridge between two nations; therefore, in both countries, great importance is attached to the study of the language of the partner country. The “National Standards” introduced new opportunities and challenges to the Russian language learning
system in China. In the 21st century, the diversification of labor market demands in China has a serious impact on the goals, methods, and content of the study of the Russian language. Previously, mostly, teachers and translators were required, but at present, the need has appeared for specialists in various fields with knowledge of the Russian language, who could compete for jobs in transnational corporations on equal terms with graduates from universities in other countries. The “National Standards” are intended to lay the normative framework and provide practical recommendations for ensuring the high quality of teaching Chinese students to the Russian language.

3. Results

The implementation of the “One Belt – One Way” initiative revealed that the traditional model of training specialists with knowledge of the Russian language is outdated, since it is obvious that it is not capable of meeting the real needs of national strategic development [3]. Introduction the “National Standards” is the key to a fundamental change in the system of training specialists for the integrated implementation of the project “One Belt – One Way”.

Among the participants of the project “One Belt – One Way,” there are many countries where they speak Russian. First of all, these are the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, as well as other CIS states. For a long time, they developed within the framework of a single federal state, the Soviet Union, but at present, their regional and national peculiarities are becoming increasingly apparent. The countries of the post-Soviet space are distinguished by traditions, religion and are at different levels of cultural and socio-economic development. Such specificity necessitates the development and application of more internationalized and diversified approaches to teaching specialists in Chinese universities with knowledge of the Russian language so that they can use different communication strategies to solve the problems of China's interaction with these countries.

At the international symposium “Training the Russian-Speaking Specialists in China in the Context of the Silk Road and the Economic Belt,” Deputy Minister of Education of the PRC, President of the Chinese Association of Russian Language Teachers, Professor Liu Limin emphasized, “The implementation of the Silk Road and Economic Belt initiative requires the training of interdisciplinary specialists with metasubject competencies and knowledge of the Russian language” [4]. In October 2018, the “International Scientific Forum of Young Scientists on Russian Studies” was held for the seventh time in Beijing, students from many countries took part in it, including from countries located in the project area “One Belt – One Way”. Chinese participants emphasized the need to expand cross-cultural exchanges between the youth of our countries.

The growing number of specialists of a multidisciplinary type with knowledge of the Russian language sharply raises questions of the criteria for assessing the quality of training, methods and ways to improve students’ knowledge. Teaching foreign languages in higher education institutions should be aimed at comprehensive preparation of students, developing the ability to express their thoughts and defend new ideas. But highly qualified teachers are required for the education and training of such students. The question is acute, how to accumulate pedagogical personnel with versatile, highly professional knowledge, skills and practical experience? The answer to the question is the internationalization of scientific and educational activities, which is a distinctive characteristic of leading universities [5; 9]. For example, the target development indicators of the Lomonosov Moscow State University until 2020 include the following indicators of the degree of internationalization of a leading Russian university:

- The share of joint projects with foreign educational institutions in the total number of educational, scientific, innovative, and socio-cultural projects – 20 percent;
- The share of foreign students in the total number of students – 35 percent;
- The share of scientific and pedagogical workers of Lomonosov Moscow University, teaching in foreign educational institutions, in the total number of scientific and pedagogical workers – 15 percent;
- A number of joint educational programs with foreign educational institutions with the issuance of a double diploma – 50 percent [6].
In many Russian universities, such as the HSE, RANEPA, Novosibirsk University, MGIMO University, Tomsk State University, professors are the research associates of the Russian Academy of Sciences, advisors in government and public organizations and business experts. Conversely, many well-known public figures, politicians, and successful businessmen teach in Russian universities. Such an integration of practical, educational, and scientific activities is laid down in the concept of development of many universities; therefore, the curricula of leading Russian universities involve practicing lawyers, top managers, experienced financial experts and even Duma deputies to develop curricula, give lectures, and assess the quality of graduates training, as a basic condition for highly productive activities of universities. For more than a decade, the “specialization + foreign language” training model is being implemented in the universities of the Russian Federation, which allows one to train international-level specialists in demand on the national and global labor markets.

For a long time, one-sided understanding of the internationalization of educational institutions was in the Chinese society. In particular, it was believed that the more students there are abroad, the higher the degree of internationalization. In fact, the real internationalization is to develop and maintain equitable dialogue with world-class universities and train personnel to meet the best international standards. Our study shows that if the specialty training is not accompanied by qualified scientific guidance, it is impossible to prepare international-class specialists.

Along with the personnel problem, the question of a radical revision of the curriculum is acute. According to Chinese and foreign experts, the content of curricula in many Chinese universities does not meet contemporary professional requirements and international standards [7, 8, 3, 9].

Back in the 90s of the 20th century, for accelerating the integration of the European educational space, the Council of Europe approved the “Common European Framework of Reference”, which formed the basis of many national standards, including the “Language Portfolio” developed by the specialists form the Lomonosov Moscow State Linguistic University (MSLU) for Russia [10,11]. The “Language portfolio” not only helps to clearly formulate the goals and objectives of learning, select the appropriate teaching methods, standardize the scale of foreign language proficiency, but also allows students to objectively evaluate their knowledge and skills, consciously increase their motivation to learn. The “Language portfolio” includes 3 parts: (1) a language passport, which indicates which languages and at what level its holder owns; (2) a language biography containing sheets of student self-esteem in the form of an answer to the questions “I can ...”; “I understand ...”; (3) a dossier with reports on the practice, coursework, final works, projects and other types of educational and scientific activities of the student. As one can see, the “Language portfolio” includes the content that would allow the graduate to become competitive when applying for a job anywhere in the country [12]. This is the format of transnational students’ language training that needs to be introduced into Chinese universities, Chinese experts say. Steps in this direction are already being taken by individual universities. As an example, one could consider the experience of the reorganization of education at the Guangdong University of Foreign Languages and Foreign Trade (hereinafter: Guangwai University).

The “Foreign language + specialization” training model is gradually gaining ground in teaching bachelors at the Guangwai University. This is not only a new trend in the training of specialists with knowledge of the Russian language in modern conditions, but also the result of the reform of the traditional Russian language teaching model in the direction of meeting the requirements of the “National Standard” to form a “solid base, extensive knowledge, professional skills and innovative approaches to teaching students” [1]. Since September 2015, in the educational process of the Guangwai University, the emphasis from mastering purely language skills has shifted to ensuring effective interaction between the linguistic and socio-cultural components of learning. In other words, the integration of general humanitarian and regional knowledge with theoretical linguistic knowledge and skills of foreign language communication is carried out.

As a professor of Russian Language at the University of the Guangwai University, Xiao Jingyu states, the essence of the reform is as follows: at the basic level of study (first and second year), students master compulsory disciplines that are the same for all students, regardless of their specialization. But already at this stage, in the textbooks on reading and listening, adapted and authentic materials covering the social realities, culture and life of the regions, in which Russian is the state language or the language of international communication, are used. At the completion of the basic stage, a credit-modular system of education is offered at the senior courses (3rd and 4th courses) of the Bachelor of Studies, which allows students to...
choose their disciplines purposefully, taking into account their specialization and personal interests. The program of senior courses consists of 3 blocks: (1) Russian literature – this unit is aimed at those students who are focused on the in-depth study of the Russian language and literature; (2) practical Russian language, including modules for business communication and interpretation in various fields of international communication; (3) regional studies/Russian studies – this unit focuses on the task of training both researchers and practitioners specializing in different areas of international relations. 7–8 disciplines of choice with equal laboriousness (2 credits) are contained in each unit. Students have the right to independently choose subjects in order to gain the required number of credits in the semester. Thus, they can more consciously approach the issue of shaping their future career and professional success. A distinctive feature of all elective courses is that the courses are developed with the participation of Russian professors, which allows to join the main educational program, implemented at the Guangwai University, with internship programs in various Russian universities. The conjugacy of the curriculum of the Guangwai University with the staffing requirements of the project “One Belt – One Way” is the second important feature.

Like any other innovation, reforming the curriculum and the process of teaching foreign language communication are faced with objective and subjective difficulties. First of all, they arise in the field of providing the program with relevant pedagogical resources. The University of Guangwai lacks teachers who could conduct interdisciplinary courses in Russian and would be able to develop courses that provide individual needs and educational trajectories for teaching students of language and non-language specialties to foreign languages. This is an objective reality, which is a consequence of the weakness of future teachers with metasubject knowledge in Chinese pedagogical universities. The subjective difficulty lies in the unwillingness of many teachers of the Guangwai University to introduce into the practice of teaching the principles of intercultural education, to operate with the criteria of transnational standards.

In our opinion, this challenge needs to be addressed, first of all, by improving the system of professional training and advanced training of current teachers. Successfully implemented at the faculty of pedagogical education of the Lomonosov Moscow State University, the professional retraining program “Higher School Teacher” can serve as a good example for organizing advanced training courses for current teachers in any classical university. Also, the study of the experience and achievements of the Institute of Russian Language and Culture of the Lomonosov Moscow State University (IRLC MSU), the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, the “Kitaygorodskaya School” Scientific and Educational Center deserve attention. These educational organizations enjoy a well-deserved high reputation of research centers for studying Russian as a foreign language, teaching foreign languages, training and advanced training for Russian teachers. The methodical systems for the development of intercultural communicative competence developed by them make it possible to combine student-centered learning with solving professional tasks.

4. Conclusion

Thus, summing up, we can conclude that in order to successfully reform the system of training students studying Russian as a foreign language, special attention must be paid to the interdisciplinary training of teachers and the introduction of innovative ideas and methods into the educational process; to simultaneously concentrate efforts on developing students’ ability to think critically, to overestimate their social experience, as well as the ability to support both written and verbal communication on professional topics; to develop skills in working with foreign language sources, the ability to analyze their content, to interpret and process them; to independently compose foreign texts on professional topics; to be able to lead discussions and publicly make presentations, reports, reviews on various professional topics.

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References


