

## Artículo de investigación

## Methodological tool development to improve competitiveness of university international activities

Разработка методического инструмента повышения конкурентоспособности международной деятельности университета

Desarrollo de herramientas metodológicas para mejorar la competitividad de las actividades universitarias internacionales.

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### Abstract

The improvement of Russian higher education competitiveness is a strategic task for the country socio-economic development. The higher school trains experts who will have to solve the complex tasks faced by the country economy, and provide a technological breakthrough. At that it should be noted that the modern graduate should have skills in the global economy. The implementation of measures improving the competitiveness of Russian higher education is faced with a number of restrictions caused by the global economic development. One of the main limitations is state funding reduction for universities, which forces them to seek new sources of resources, including the external market. This leads to increased competition between universities for applicants. It should be noted that competition is not limited only to the national market, it acquires an international character. In developed economies, higher education is one of the sources of export earnings. Besides, foreign countries recruit qualified labor through international educational projects. One of the tools to improve the competitiveness of university is its international activity. On this basis, it follows that the development of methodological tools for international activity management in a higher education institution is an urgent task today.

### Аннотация

Повышение конкурентоспособности российского высшего образования является стратегической задачей социально-экономического развития страны. Высшая школа готовит специалистов, которым предстоит решать сложные задачи, стоящие перед экономикой страны, и обеспечивать технологический прорыв. При этом следует отметить, что современный выпускник должен обладать навыками в мировой экономике. Реализация мер по повышению конкурентоспособности российского высшего образования сталкивается с рядом ограничений, обусловленных глобальным экономическим развитием. Одним из основных ограничений является сокращение государственного финансирования университетов, что заставляет их искать новые источники ресурсов, в том числе на внешнем рынке. Это приводит к усилению конкуренции между университетами за абитуриентов. Следует отметить, что конкуренция не ограничивается только национальным рынком, она приобретает международный характер. В развитых экономиках высшее образование является одним из источников экспортных поступлений. Кроме того, зарубежные страны привлекают квалифицированную рабочую силу в рамках международных образовательных проектов. Одним из инструментов повышения конкурентоспособности университета

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**Key Words:** Methodological tools, efficiency, competitiveness, strategy, methodology, mechanism, international activities, image, education, educational services, university.

является его международная деятельность. Исходя из этого, из этого следует, что разработка методологических инструментов управления международной деятельностью в вузе является актуальной задачей на сегодняшний день.

**Ключевые слова:** методологические инструменты, эффективность, конкурентоспособность, стратегия, методология, механизм, международная деятельность, имидж, образование, образовательные услуги, университет.

## Resumen

La mejora de la competitividad de la educación superior rusa es una tarea estratégica para el desarrollo socioeconómico del país. La escuela superior capacita a expertos que tendrán que resolver las complejas tareas que enfrenta la economía del país y proporcionar un avance tecnológico. En eso debe tenerse en cuenta que el graduado moderno debe tener habilidades en la economía global. La implementación de medidas que mejoran la competitividad de la educación superior rusa se enfrenta a una serie de restricciones causadas por el desarrollo económico global. Una de las principales limitaciones es la reducción de fondos estatales para las universidades, lo que las obliga a buscar nuevas fuentes de recursos, incluido el mercado externo. Esto lleva a una mayor competencia entre las universidades por los solicitantes. Cabe señalar que la competencia no se limita solo al mercado nacional, sino que adquiere un carácter internacional. En las economías desarrolladas, la educación superior es una de las fuentes de ingresos de exportación. Además, los países extranjeros reclutan mano de obra calificada a través de proyectos educativos internacionales. Una de las herramientas para mejorar la competitividad de la universidad es su actividad internacional. Sobre esta base, se deduce que el desarrollo de herramientas metodológicas para la gestión de la actividad internacional en una institución de educación superior es una tarea urgente hoy en día.

**Palabras clave:** Herramientas metodológicas, eficiencia, competitividad, estrategia, metodología, mecanismo, actividades internacionales, imagen, educación, servicios educativos, universidad.

## Introduction

Currently, most Russian universities distinguish international educational and scientific activities as priority areas for development. The indicators characterizing the international activities of a university are mandatory to determine the effectiveness of Russian university activities. The analysis of priority strategic goals and university trends showed that they are aimed at different areas of international activity: the development of international educational, scientific activities, or the development of university image and its competitiveness increase in the international market of educational services (Galichin, 2014; Masyuk et al., 2012).

The wrong strategy chosen by a university in international activities leads to the decrease of university competitiveness and the performance indicators of its activities (Belinskaya, 2013).

According to the analysis of international activities of universities, the chosen approaches

do not give them the opportunity to fulfill the tasks set by the Russian Federation Government to increase the competitiveness of Russian education, in particular, to increase the export of education. According to the priority project "The development of the Russian education system export potential", the number of foreign students studying in Russian vocational education organizations should be increased by 3.55 times in 2025, and the income received by the education system should be increased by 5.33 times (The passport of the priority project "The development of the export potential of the Russian education system", 2017).

To get out of this situation, it is necessary to develop the guidelines improving the effectiveness of international activities of universities, taking into account the experience of such countries as China (the analysis was presented by the authors Galina V. Petruk, Yuliya S. Lebedinskaya, Nelly A. Klesheva,

Aleksandr A. Korostelev in the scientific article “Internationalization of higher education of China as the factor of university competitiveness increase”) (Petruk et al., 2018).

**Results**

The international activity of universities is the priority for the development of educational institutions and is reflected in strategic documents.

As a rule, universities plan international activities formally, they do not sufficiently take into account their capabilities during the implementation of international educational projects.

One of the reasons for this is the shortcomings in the methodological support of strategic planning process for international activities of universities. The basis for the development of university international activity strategy is the requirements of the external environment, emanating from the

government or the competitive situation prevailing in the market of educational services on which a university operates.

Currently, government bodies include international performance indicators to assess the performance of universities. In addition to the requirements of the state, international activities can strengthen the position of a university in the market, generate additional income within government funding reduction conditions.

In a scientific article, the authors propose the methodology for international activities (IA) strategy development for universities (Fig. 1).

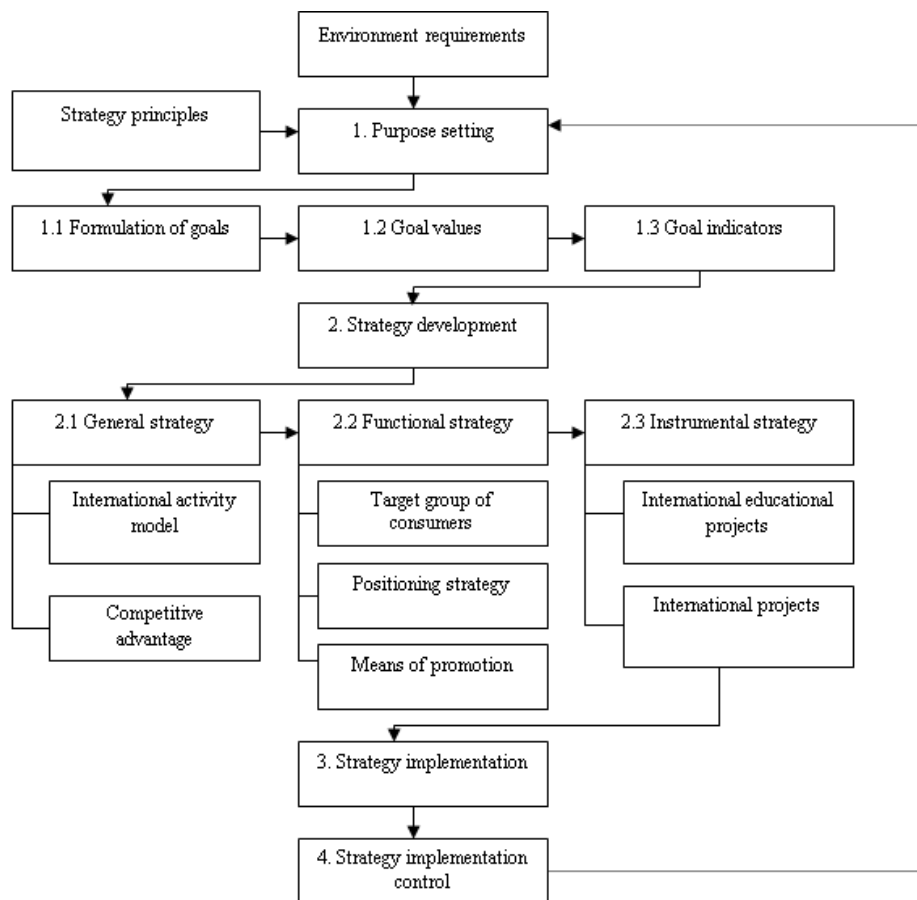


Fig. 1 – The author's methodology for international strategy development in respect of university activities

International strategy is developed taking into account the following principles:

- The principle of unity - the strategy of international activities should not contradict the general strategy of a university;
  - The principle of participation - all stakeholders are involved in the development of the strategy;
  - The principle of flexibility - the strategy of international activities should contain reserves for its adjustment due to external environment changes;
  - The principle of resource security - the strategy should be provided with financial, labor, information and material resources;
  - The principle of project management - the strategy of international activities is implemented through the development and implementation of international projects;
  - The principle of staff motivation - the developed strategy of university international activities should contain the tools for university staff motivation;
  - The principle of urgency - the strategy is developed for a certain long-term period, after which a university should strengthen its position in the external market of educational services.
- Internal internationalization assumes the involvement of foreign students for higher education at all levels (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, advanced training programs) in full-time, part-time and distant studies on the territory of the Russian Federation exclusively;
  - Joint educational programs - the educational programs of higher education, which are implemented by two or more educational organizations (Russian and foreign), based on the results of their successful mastering two (or more) educational documents are issued for a student;
  - Institutional presence of Russian educational organizations abroad - consists in Russian educational organization presence expansion in various forms abroad (opening of foreign branches, establishment of educational organizations abroad (Slavic universities, Russian schools, etc.);
  - Online training - training by the use of information and communication technologies;
  - Network universities - the development of incoming and outgoing mobility of students, the implementation of cross-border education programs (franchising, validation, etc.) in the Russian Federation, pre-university training on the basis of partner universities, the organization and conduct of teaching Russian as a foreign language at partner universities.

Based on the requirements of the external environment, the objectives of university international activities are determined, which should be measurable, achievable, and comparable.

The main requirements for goals is their measurability. For this, they determine indicators and their indicative value.

Based on the goals, a strategy is developed for the international activities of a university, which includes a general, functional and instrumental strategy. General strategy is the field of international activities based on the existing competitive advantages of a university.

They determine the model of university international activities in the overall strategy, which is the way to develop the university international activities. It includes the model for educational service export. The Government of the Russian Federation has developed several models of educational service export:

You can choose several models of university international activities. In order to implement the chosen model of international activities, it is necessary to have the potential that determines the competitive advantage of a university. There is internal and external competitive advantage (Fatkhutdinov, 2006; Mokhnachev, 2008).

Internal competitive advantage is conditioned by the ability of a university to provide educational services at costs less than competitors, which provides a price advantage. At that, the price reduction should not negatively affect the quality of provided service. Cost reduction is conditioned by the effect of scale, staff development, the access to cheap resources, and the introduction of innovations into the educational process. The advantage of lower costs protects a university from existing and potential competitors, creating a barrier to the

market entry (Korzhevina et al., 2016; Kheirabadi & Mirzaei, 2019).

External competitive advantage lies in the ability of a university to give the distinctive properties to implemented educational programs, that are significant for consumers, and for which they are willing to pay a price higher than the average on the market - to differentiate educational services (Kosharny & Naidenova, 2013).

The distinctive features of an educational service are provided by the prestige of design or brand, the use of unique educational technologies, the quality of educational process implementation and other areas. Differentiation protects from competitors, as it creates consumer loyalty to a brand, thereby reducing price sensitivity. This creates a barrier to entry into the market for new competitors. Functional strategy determines the target market, positioning strategy and university promotion means in the target market. It is difficult to cover the entire international market of educational services. Therefore, it is necessary to produce market segmentation.

A market segment is a group of consumers similarly reacting to a university proposal. The segmentation of the international market of educational services is possible on the following grounds:

- 1) Geographical feature: APR countries (China, South Korea, Japan, India, etc.), CIS countries (Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, etc.), the countries of the Middle East and Africa (United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others), the countries of continental Europe (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Hungary, etc.), English-speaking countries (USA, Canada, Australia, etc.), the countries of Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia, etc.);
- 2) Educational service type: basic educational programs, additional educational programs;
- 3) Education field: economics and management, education, computer science and information technology, engineering, etc.;
- 4) The source of educational service financing: the student's own funds, the funds of a foreign country and companies, the national budget funds;

- 5) The reason for education obtaining: education as the way of social normality assertion, education as the way of its competitiveness increase in the labor market.

Market segmentation can be done on several grounds. The selected segment should have the potential for profitability in the long run.

University positioning is carried out through the implementation of one of the basic strategies (Porter, 2007; Lazarev et al., 2018a; Varkulevich et al., 2018; Nedoluzhko et al., 2019; Lazarev et al., 2018b; Shelomentsev et al., 2018):

- 1) Cost leadership strategy - based on internal competitive advantage;
- 2) Differentiation strategy - based on external competitive advantage;
- 3) Focusing strategy - an exclusive offer development for a specific market niche determination.

Positioning is provided by means of promotion:

- Commodity - educational program;
- Price - a foreign student expenses for education;
- Educational program promotion channels - the attraction of students through international recruitment agencies, diplomatic organizations, the Internet, etc.;
- The ways of promotion - participation in international educational exhibitions and fairs, posting of information about educational programs on the websites of universities and the national portal "Education in Russia", on commercial educational portals, as well as through interaction with international recruitment agencies, distribution of information about educational programs implemented by Russian universities, through the system of Russian embassies and representative offices of Russian state structures abroad, etc.

The instrumental strategy includes international educational projects and other international projects (scientific, exhibition, etc.), by which they implement the strategy of university international activities. The implementation of international activity strategy for a university includes the definition of the structural units

responsible for the implementation of the strategy, the allocation of the necessary resources (financial, material, human, informational), the development of motivation system for strategy implementation.

The success of the strategy implementation is determined by the control system.

Control of university international activity strategy includes:

- Preliminary control - carried out in the process of a strategy development;
- Current control - carried out in the process of a strategy implementation;
- Final control - carried out at the end of the strategy.

The toolkit for university international activity strategy is represented by international educational projects by which educational products are developed and introduced into the practice of a university, which are demanded on the external market of educational services.

The development and implementation of international educational projects are carried out through the project management mechanism, the development of which is a key task of the university strategic management.

In the scientific article, the authors propose the management mechanism for university international activity project (Fig. 2).

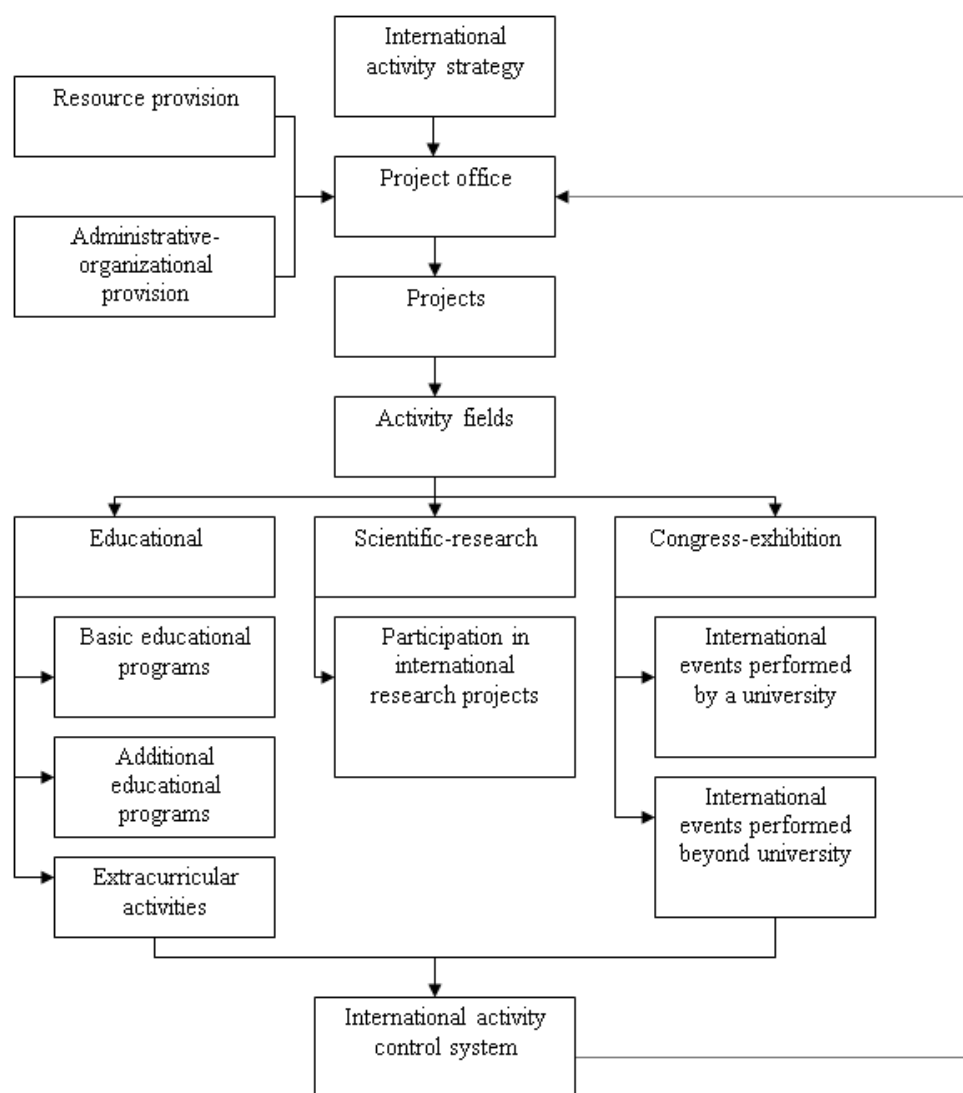


Fig. 2 - The author's mechanism of project management for international university activities



In order to implement the strategy of the university international activities they create a project office. The main functions of the project office are:

- The development of a list of international projects;
- The assistance to educational, scientific and other departments in the development and implementation of international projects;
- Resource support of international educational, scientific and other projects;
- Administrative, legal, communication support of project activities at a university;
- Examination of international university projects;
- Control over the implementation of international projects at a university.

The project office is headed by the head, whose status should not be lower than the university vice-rector deputy. The project office includes the university rector, vice-rectors, and heads of departments responsible for international activities at the university.

The form of work of the project office is a meeting at which projects of international activities of the university are approved, the implementation of projects is monitored, and the key problems arising in the process of project implementation are resolved.

The algorithm of the project office is the following one:

- 1) They identify international projects that need to be implemented in order to achieve the goals of international activity strategy;
- 2) Working groups are formed from the employees of educational, scientific and other departments of the university which will develop international projects;
- 3) Working groups develop projects and present them at a meeting of the project office, where the project is in the process of approval;
- 4) The approved project is submitted for approval to the economic and legal services of the university, after passing through which, it is approved by the

administrative document of the university rector;

- 5) A project manager is appointed who organizes the implementation of planned project activities, controls the progress of the project implementation, and reports to the project office;
- 6) A project leader makes a report periodically to the project office on the implementation of the international project;
- 7) Upon completion of the project, the project manager makes a final report, which is assessed by the project office. The completion of the project is confirmed by the administrative document of the university head.

The projects approved by the project office and by the head of the university are being implemented in the areas of the university activities: educational, research, congress and exhibition. The effectiveness of international project activities at the university is assessed using a control system. Thus, the methods of international activity strategy development and the mechanism of project management proposed in the scientific article by the authors should increase the effectiveness of the university international activities.

### Conclusions

The authors of the article found that international activities and international educational projects as the tool for international activity implementation do not contribute to university competitiveness improvement, but rather waste valuable resources. In order to increase the effectiveness of international activity implementation, they developed the methodology for the formation of an international activity strategy based on the comparison of the resources available to the university with the opportunities in the external market.

In order to implement the strategy of international activities of the university, they proposed the mechanism for project management of university international activities, the main element of which is the creation of a project office. The functions of the project office include the formation of a list of international projects, the assistance to educational, scientific and other departments in the development and

implementation of international projects, resource support for international educational, scientific and other projects, administrative, legal, communication support for project activities at the university, examination of international university projects, and control over the implementation of international university projects. The creation of a project office should make it possible to increase the efficiency of international educational project implementation.

Summing up, it should be noted that the obtained results will be useful in the development of university international activity strategy.

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