

**RPTSS 2018**  
**International Conference on Research Paradigms**  
**Transformation in Social Sciences**

**PROBLEM OF WELFARE OF SOCIETY AND CHALLENGES FOR  
MODERN UNIVERSITY**

A.V. Shutaleva (a)\*, E.A. Putilova (b), E.V. Ivanova (c)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation, E-mail: a.v.shutaleva@urfu.ru

(b) Ural Federal University, Nizhny Tagil, Russian Federation, E-mail: eazhiltsova@mail.ru

(c) Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation, E-mail: ieviev@mail.ru

*Abstract*

This article is devoted to the study of current problems of organizing an open and accessible educational environment of the university as a way to achieve social well-being in the modern world. Modern challenges to the education system are associated with the need to take into account in the organization of the university such principles as openness and accessibility of education, mobility in the educational environment, the variability and individuality of educational programs, the quality of education, multiculturalism. Information and communication technologies are considered as the main means of increasing the efficiency of the education system, increasing its competitiveness in both the domestic and global markets. Appeal to the example of the Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia, B. N. Yeltsin, allowed one to show, first, how the principles of openness and accidents affect the reform of the university system; second, how the integration of Russian universities into the international educational space is realized; third, how multicultural discourse is realized in the modern educational environment.

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**Keywords:** Education, openness, accessibility, academic mobility, multiculturalism.



## 1. Introduction

A prerequisite for ensuring well-being in modern society is the interaction of the educational institution and the society as the accessibility of education and information openness of the university. The development of global communication and information systems and networks leads to the emergence of a global information and communication environment for life, society and production that is called the infosphere. The creation of knowledge societies also has an impact on traditional institutions of education. Changes in educational policy lead to the emergence of challenges for modern educational institutions. Modern challenges to the educational environment require the creation of the educational institution, taking into account the implementation of the following principles: openness and accessibility of education, mobility in the educational environment, the variability and individuality of educational programs, the quality of education, multiculturalism.

Innovation is a key element in the development of knowledge societies, for which learning becomes a key value. The UNESCO Report emphasizes that education is one of the most important tools of the knowledge society (Towards Knowledge Societies. UNESCO WORLD REPORT, 2005). The majority of the world's population is in need of books, schoolbooks, and educational institutions need to expand their teaching staffs. The Internet and computers are one of the channels of knowledge. Moreover, as noted in the report, currently the percentage of the world population that has experience of using the Internet is 11%, of which 90% live in industrialized countries. The modern world is faced with inequality in the field of obtaining information and knowledge. The need to take measures to reduce the «digital» and «cognitive gap» or «knowledge gap» leads to the emergence of a number of challenges that now face the entire modern education system and the higher education system in Russia in particular.

The UNESCO report notes that the dissemination of a standardized technocratic approach to education and the imposition of a unified model of the development of human society is a problem that needs to be overcome, which is very important for identifying the challenges of modern education.

Information technology and innovation accelerate the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Such traditional places of production and concentration of knowledge as libraries, schools, universities are changing, letting in themselves a single virtual data space of a planetary scale that can be accessed from anywhere. New ways of spreading and consuming knowledge transform the world into a global school and library. However, the new global information culture not only opens wide opportunities for self-expression and creativity but also can lead an individual, as well as the society, into the abyss of consumption and entertainment. In 2005, UNESCO, in a special report prepared under the leadership of Françoise Rivière, the Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, proposed a basic concept for the formation of society (Rivière, 2005, pp. 19-23). A general imbalance in the relationship between the natural environment and human development is one of the defining features of the modern world. This imbalance is associated with scientific and technological progress and threatens crises of an axiological nature. The authors of the report, proposing the concept of knowledge societies, note their cultural and linguistic diversity, which corresponds to the need to humanize the process of globalization.

B. Readings notes an important feature of the university in the context of globalization, namely, that the university losing its cultural function, losing its status as a model of society, is experiencing a crisis of the grounds of its idea (Readings, 1996). The changes that have taken place in the representation of values

in social structures and educational space have led to the aggravation of social contradictions and a change in the social picture of the world. In these conditions, the formation of a system of sustainable development presupposes that the role of education is not only in the process of replenishing and disseminating knowledge. For the modern concept of education, it is characteristic to recognize the uniqueness of the educational trajectories included in this process of personality and individuality. Education is a social institution regarded as the main instrument for realizing the concept of sustainable development. This circumstance determines the interrelationship between the concepts of education and the new model of the development of civilization.

In the psychological and pedagogical aspect, it is possible to trace the close relationship of the individual path of human development and the way the process of mastering life environment takes place, which implies the assimilation by mankind of norms, structure and principles of organization of outer space and time. The educational process has a significant impact on the entry of a person into the socio-cultural space, the nature of the relationship of a person with the environment in terms of its value perception, which is important in analyzing the features of the modern educational process.

## 2. Problem Statement

The theoretical and methodological concepts presented in this article are based on the following studies:

- studies of Bergson's (1935) and Popper's (1971, 1962), whose scientific works are devoted to the openness of social systems and the construction of civil society;
- studies of Porat (1977), Masuda (1981), Stonier (1983), Immonen-Aramo and Vanharanta (2009), Katz (1988), McLuhan (1962, 1967), Castells (1996), (Castells, 1997) whose works are devoted to information development of society and social systems;
- studies of Hylén (2006), Yuan, and Powell (2013), Blumberg (2009), Burgstahler (2008), Bezrukov, Ziyatdinova, Sanger, Ivanov and Zoltareva (2018), Strandbrink (2018) whose works are devoted to openness as a key characteristic of the educational system in modern society;
- studies of Luo, Zhang and Qi (2017), Khan (2001), whose works are devoted to information support;
- studies of Penionzhok, Ivanova, Inkizhekova, Mikheyeva, and Rasulova (2017), Gabdrakhmanova, Sagdieva, and Korableva (2017), Gibadullina and Silayeva (2016), Baklashova and Kazakov (2016), Penionzhok, Ivanova, Inkizhekova, Mikheyeva, and Rasulova (2017) whose works are devoted to social and philosophical aspects of the training of foreign students;
- studies of Heylighen, Van der Linden, and Van Steenwinkel (2017), Shutaleva and Putilova (2016) whose works are devoted to of creation of an inclusive educational environment.

## 3. Research Questions

This article analyzes the experience of the Ural Federal University, on the basis of which it is shown how the issues related to modern challenges for a modern university are being solved. Achievement of social welfare in the modern world includes the formation of a new social environment, new rules of

behaviour and influence people's attitudes toward education and the choice of profession. In this regard, the authors of the article set the following tasks. First, let us consider such challenges to modern education as openness and accessibility. Second, one should address the issue of academic mobility and the problem of integration of Russian universities in the international educational space. Third, it is necessary to consider the challenges to the university that arise in connection with the formation and development of a multicultural space in the modern educational environment.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the article is the study of current problems of organizing an open and accessible educational environment of the university as a way to achieve social welfare in the modern world.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Theoretical methods: the analysis of scientific philosophical and pedagogical sources on the problem of work; analysis of legislation, normative and methodological documents at the federal and regional levels in the field of a public and governmental education system. The empirical basis of the research is formed by the direct pedagogical activity of university-employed participants in this study and the analysis of the content and the structure of the Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia, B. N. Yeltsin ((UrFU) website).

#### **6. Findings**

##### **6.1. Openness and accessibility as principles of modern education system creation**

The term “openness” is present in numerous pedagogical concepts aimed at humanizing education, bringing its content closer to real life, improving the flexibility of educational programs, overcoming the closed nature of the educational institution as a social institution. Openness acquires special significance in the sphere of education in connection with the development of the information society (Hysten, 2006). New global needs arise in modern society. They are the need for continuous education throughout life and for creating a high-quality informational and educational environment (Stonier, 1983; McLuhan, 1962; Masuda, 1981).

The informational and educational environment fundamentally modernizes the technological basis of the education system and allows it to move towards open informational and pedagogical teaching technologies (Yuan & Powell, 2013). For modern education system, the use of such technologies as network information technologies, distance learning in its various forms and other information and pedagogical teaching technologies is intrinsic (Khan, 2001; Blumberg, 2009). One of the fruitful experiences of the practical realization of the idea of openness that is realized in three main levels: openness of the education system; openness of the educational institution; openness of the educational process. The formation of an open modern education system is connected both with its orientation towards various social institutions in addressing the issues of the development of education and with the revision of the role of educational institutions and the students themselves in organizing and maintaining the education process (Blumberg, 2009; Burgstahler, 2008). One of the acute problems that arise in connection with the tendency of creating a competitive educational environment is the saturation of education market.

Let us review the challenges facing the open education system. Firstly, the education system must meet the educational needs of people in the 21st century, primarily those related to the availability of education for people from early childhood throughout the life of a person. Secondly, the modern education system faces the problem of ensuring equal access to education for all people at all levels of education. Thirdly, there is a problem of improving the quality of education requires the dynamic development of the education system itself, since the quality of education tends to meet the demands of the developing society. Fourthly, there is a problem of increasing the efficiency and productivity of the educational system.

In the practical field of the educational process, the ideas of openness are implemented by providing educational institutions with certain independence, giving them the ability to determine the basic characteristics of the educational process, in particular methods and technologies, the structure of human resources, sources of funding, and the contingent of students. One of the distinguishing features of truly open education is the change in the role of its participants. The role of the student in organizing their education becomes more significant (Luo, Zhang, Qi, 2017). The open learning process assumes that self-teaching plays a major role in the learning process. So the student chooses their educational trajectory in a detailed educational environment; at high levels of education, the trainee participates in the financial decisions around the learning process.

The UrFU experience shows that a student can develop in any direction, even if it is unrelated to their future profession but meets their personal interests, through implemented scientific programs, grants and opportunities for study abroad. In UrFU the project «Open Education» is being implemented. Additionally, UrFU implements open educational programs, minors and online courses in a wider range of specialties.

Open educational programs are an innovation for UrFU. They offer the students wide opportunities, including the implementation of a completely individual trajectory of mastering the program in accordance with their interests, preferences and needs and taking the results of online learning into account in the main educational program. The catalogue of e-courses is located on the online learning platform of the UrFU. Minors are additional modules of bachelor's education programs. Minors are developed by leading university teachers, are of interest to a wide range of students and are available for mastering by all comers.

Implementation of the new educational policy by UrFU allows the university to ensure a high level of professional training of students in the educational program. What is, perhaps, even more important for the graduates to successfully compete in the information society is the fact that the new educational policy makes it possible to acquire knowledge from other areas that will be useful for a future career and interesting life.

## **6.2. Academic mobility and the problem of integrating Russian universities into the international educational space**

Academic mobility is one of the most important aspects of the integration process that brings Russian universities into the international educational space. The development of academic mobility is necessary for the growth of university competitiveness (Bezrukov, Ziyatdinova, Sanger, Ivanov & Zoltareva, 2018). In 2003, Russia joined the Bologna declaration, but the desire for synergy with European educational systems faced problems of legal, socio-cultural and economic nature. The development of the legal framework necessary for the support of academic mobility takes time and effort of qualified personnel.

It should be noted that the right to apply for academic mobility programs is supported by Russian laws but only on a case-by-case basis rather than en masse.

The academic exchange of students, teachers and administrative personnel in Russian universities have become more important in recent years. By getting involved in the processes of academic mobility, the student obtains the opportunities to get a better education in the chosen area of training, to develop their knowledge in scientific and liberal arts and to gain access to recognized centres of knowledge where the leading scientific schools are formed.

Academic mobility relies on a university cooperating with both Russian and foreign universities, which by itself is a necessary part of its activity. Indicators of academic mobility are present in the reports of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and are treated as important indicators of the effectiveness of higher education institutions.

There is a number of problems affecting the development of academic mobility in Russia: the concept itself is being treated as an afterthought, insufficiency of material and financial support, lack of expert and financial advice, insufficient level of knowledge of a foreign language and many others.

One of the serious problems of modern Russian education is scepticism towards the diplomas issued by most Russian universities in the international labour market. Russia's accession to the Bologna Process was the reason for the harmonization of Russian educational standards with the European standards. Russian Federation has signed a number of international conventions on the equivalence of Russian and European education. In 2000, Russia ratified the Lisbon Convention of 1997 on the mutual recognition of educational documents by European countries. However, Russian graduates routinely face the fact that their diploma is not treated as equivalent to local educational documents.

Experience of the Ural Federal University shows that the development of academic mobility is an essential component for the development of a university as a scientific, educational and innovation centre aspiring for international recognition. Annually, students and employees of UrFU go abroad for internships and conferences on academic mobility programs. Students of foreign universities come to UrFU under the programs of academic exchange and international schools.

In 2013, a roadmap of measures aimed at “improving the competitive ability of the Ural State University in 2013-2020” had been developed and published with the participation of QS Intelligence Unit and Thomson Reuters Russia. This roadmap postulates the implementation of an integrated approach aimed at achieving its goals. The steps aimed at increasing academic mobility play an important role in the roadmap. The Ural Federal University participates in international networking projects such as BRICS University League, BRICS Network University, CIS University, SCO University, Arctic University, Association of Technical Universities of Russia and China. The total number of its foreign partner universities have recently reached 400.

The roadmap also includes the development of English versions of masters and post-graduate education programs that are popular with foreign students. This proposal led to the creation of a number of English-language masters programs and disciplines in post-graduate education that conform to the international standards of education.

Students who study at UrFU can enter the dual degree program or get an opportunity to acquire a European Diploma Supplement, a document developed according to the standards of the Council of Europe

and UNESCO. The Supplement is filled out in Russian and English and contains a description of the nature, level, content and status of the education received, with additional information on the systems used to evaluate the student. The European Diploma Supplement is recognized by all countries participating in the Bologna process. This appendix to the diploma gives a student an opportunity to continue their education abroad and simplifies the recognition of their educational achievements when applying for jobs with foreign companies in Russia and abroad.

Academic mobility is a way of developing and reinventing the educational process in general as well as programs of higher professional education in Russia. Academic mobility enables the Russian education system to overcome its isolation and increases the competitiveness of Russian educational programs on the international market.

### **6.3. Multicultural discourse in the modern educational environment.**

College years are one of the most important stages in a person's life and the most important stage of preparation for future professional activity. This stage, among other things, encourages a certain mobility, in particular, the preparedness for professional education in foreign colleges and universities. In the modern world, educational contacts between countries are undergoing intensive development and the number of young people wishing to get an education outside their own country is increasing.

In turn, modern universities that hope for global recognition should always strive to foster more international connections. Russian universities are laying the vector of internationalization in their roadmaps of development; the share of foreign students is constantly increasing. This is due to the implementation of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the fields of training specialists of foreign countries and of ensuring the sustainable growth of the contingent of foreign citizens applying to receive education in Russian universities. Foreign students are viewed as “conduits” of Russian culture, educational and scientific technologies to the outside world (Penionzhok, Ivanova, Inkizhekova, Mikheyeva & Rasulova, 2017; Gibadullina, Silayeva, 2016; Baklashova, Kazakov, 2016). They help form positive opinions not only about Russian culture but also about the Russian state as a reliable and serious partner

However, the formal admission of a foreign student to an educational institution is only the first step in receiving a Russian education. The intercultural communications arising in the course of educational process are influenced by factors that need to be taken into account. Let us enumerate and briefly describe these factors. First, the cultural factor. Adaptation of foreign citizens to new socio-cultural conditions begins after their admission to a university or college and becomes a fundamental condition that determines in many cases the effectiveness of the educational process as a whole. Traditions and customs, the rhythm of life, local holidays are special factors that may leave problems of misunderstanding between representatives of different cultures, especially if this is supplemented by the religious identity of the foreign learner (Penionzhok, Ivanova, Inkizhekova, Mikheyeva & Rasulova, 2017; Gabdrakhmanova, Sagdieva, & Korableva, 2017; Gibadullina, Silayeva, 2016; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016). The possibility of dialogue, understanding, tolerance among representatives of various faiths among students is an important educational aspect, given the multi-confessional nature of Russian culture on the one hand, and its secular nature on the other. The problem of interreligious discourse is especially relevant when the visiting students are deeply religious people coming from Muslim countries.

The second factor is an understanding of the political and legal processes that are taking place in Russia. The cultural approach in the legal education of foreign students is focused on the education of the legal culture, the fundamental elements of which are: legal consciousness, lawful behaviour, not violating legislative regulations and an active civic position.

The third factor is psychological, and in assessing this factor, it is worth taking into account the harsh Russian climate, especially if it concerns the education of foreign students from African countries in the Ural and Siberian universities.

The fourth factor is personal. New housing conditions require special adaptation, given that young people live far from their parents, most often in dormitories. To eliminate the risk of this factor making a negative impact, it is necessary to interact with parents (or other relatives) of foreign students, embassies of foreign countries in the Russian Federation on issues of learning and behaviour.

The fifth factor is educational. In many countries, there is a different school curriculum and general education, and adapting to a new set of requirements and rules would require a huge cognitive effort from a foreign student.

How to mitigate the possible negative impact of these factors? To ensure conflict-free interaction between foreign students, teachers and native students, a special coaching or “buddying” system can be instituted. A native student would be able to volunteer as a “buddy” and help ease foreign students into the new learning environment. The “buddying” system is based on informal mentorship and friendly coaching free of “younger/older”, “teacher/student”, “supervisor/intern” and other rigid binary roles. “Buddy” is a special friend, companion and partner that inspires trust (Penionzhek, Ivanova, Inkizhekova, Mikheyeva & Rasulova, 2017, p. 20). Through constant feedback from their buddies, foreign students are getting psychological, social and emotional support; they are also gently encouraged both to adapt to their new environments and to achieve their educational goals, becoming better at coping with their new cultural context. The “buddies” play a pretty important role in this process and should be properly instructed in their responsibilities through standalone training sessions, seminars or even full-blown training courses. To summarize, we must note that in order to mitigate the negative influence of the above-mentioned six factors, it is necessary to create certain conditions of an adaptive nature, the most important of which are the “buddying” system and the use of inclusive educational methods.

## **7. Conclusion**

In recent decades, higher education institutions in Russia have faced institutional transformations that are associated with a number of challenges, the solution of which allows the education system to evolve along with the changing world. Modern information and communication technologies form a new social environment, new rules of behaviour and influence people's attitudes toward education and the choice of profession. The educational sphere must satisfy the demands of the knowledge society, the basis of which is the knowledge economy. The modern paradigm of Russian higher education is personality-oriented. Today, the development of science and technology generates an increasing need for new knowledge and training of professionals ready to upgrade and change their skills.

The development of knowledge societies is necessitated by globalization. The tendency to create a single, international educational space is necessary for the competitiveness of universities. The process of



integration of intellectual resources, educational institutions, the creation of international educational programs, clearly accentuates the socio-cultural characteristics of the worldviews of visiting and local students and teachers, which enriches communication and promotes the formation of intercultural ties.

Universities, faced with a number of challenges of modern education, should build their development upon careful analysis of the competitive advantages that arise when taking into account the principles of openness, accessibility, mobility, variability, individuality, and multiculturalism. The implementation of these principles is a challenge to the university, allowing one to formulate a strategy that will ensure its sustainable and harmonious development in a volatile world.

The basis for the development of the information society is information and communication technologies that become the main means of increasing the efficiency of the education system, strengthening its competitiveness in both the domestic and global markets. It should be noted that for the concept of knowledge as the condition for the formation of society, information and communication technologies are an indispensable basis; however, the concept of knowledge societies implies broader social, ethical and political parameters. Expansion of basic human rights in the information sphere is a necessary condition for the creation of a knowledge society.

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