

**EDU WORLD 2018**  
**The 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference**

**ENTERING A GLOBAL ACADEMIA: IS ENGLISH PROFICIENCY  
ENOUGH?**

Zhanna Anikina (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Research Centre Kairos, Nechevskiy pereulok 30, 634061 Tomsk, Russian Federation, [janeanikina@yandex.ru](mailto:janeanikina@yandex.ru)  
Tomsk State Pedagogical University, Kievskaya ul. 60, 634061 Tomsk, Russian Federation, [janeanikina@yandex.ru](mailto:janeanikina@yandex.ru)

*Abstract*

Globalization brought changes in a variety of areas – political, economic, technological, social and others. Different countries react to them in different ways. Russian Federation is the country with one of the highest globalization indexes. This fact brought new pressures and demands to all spheres of life including higher education. Internationalization of higher education institutions was initiated by the global development of the country with a strong focus on doing research globally. This required taking special measures to enhance Russian academics' research performance to work in an international English-speaking academic context. Courses of English for Academic Purposes were considered the key tool to do it and were offered to Russian academics. However, the results did not meet the expectations, since academics' abilities to carry out research on a global scale were still limited. It was concluded that English proficiency, initially considered the sine qua non for Russian academics as non-native speakers of English, was not the only aspect to be taken into account. The study was carried out to identify what measures were needed. The obtained results allowed to organize additional events. This study is a part of the PhD research started at the University of Sheffield (Sheffield, UK) in 2016 and continued at the University of Westminster (London, UK) in 2017. The research is intended to find professional development opportunities to support Russian academics aimed for global academia.

© 2019 Published by Future Academy [www.FutureAcademy.org.UK](http://www.FutureAcademy.org.UK)

**Keywords:** Globalization, internationalization, global academia, Russian academics, English proficiency, research performance.



## 1. Introduction

During recent years, profound changes in human life can be observed. Among them are dynamics in social, cultural, technological, political, economic and other domains which are often referred to as globalization. In the broadest sense, globalization is defined as the growing interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all aspects of society (Jones, 2010; Mittleman, 2000). According to Koutsoukis (2015), globalization is the level of entanglement between different parts of the world and its activities. Among the more visible manifestations of globalization are the greater international movement of goods and services (Waters, 1995), financial capital, information, and people (Figge & Martins, 2014, pp. 1-2).

All countries pass this process in an individual way. Russian Federation is not an exception. Figge and Martins (2014) claim that the level of globalization can be measured by a number of composite indicators which make the Maastricht Globalization Index. According to this tool, Russian Federation is ranked 39 with a huge increase in globalization processes between 2000-2012. Since that time, globalization processes have slowed down in all countries due to the economic crisis. So, Russian globalization score is 15 with a greater number of points only in Albania (42), Vietnam (22), Mongolia (20), India (18), Armenia (17) and Brazil (16) among 117 countries. This fact brought new pressures and demands to all spheres of life including higher education (HE) sector. Global development of the country stimulated internationalization of higher education as "university sector's answer to the pressures of globalizing societies/economies and of globalizing aspects of academic practice in some fields" (Kalvemark & Van Der Wende, 1997, p. 27).

Generally speaking, internationalization is defined as "a process, integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research and service), and delivery of HE at the institutional and national levels" (Knight, 2008, p. xi). The benefits of internationalization in HE has been widely explored. Among them are improving access to information resources; increasing research cooperation; using the cultural and academic benefits of student and staff exchanges; the economic benefits of attracting international payments, etc. (Albrow, 1996; Fujikane, 2003; Telegina & Schwengel, 2012). Along with that, "internationalization can be thought of as the way in which universities have expanded their activities beyond traditional home-based courses of study to increasingly include activities and programmes that consider international perspectives, and aim at developing understanding in areas such as intercultural communication, languages and global perspectives" (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 3). At the national level, transformations refer to the goals set by Russian universities - to raise their competitiveness on a global scale. However, it is not only the educational system as a whole which is impacted by the changes. The consequences relate to individual level as well - particular shifts can be observed in academic work with a strong focus on doing research globally and largely in the English language. Russian universities are responding by implementing a number of policies aimed at reaching the goals. Although some shifts have taken place, there is still much work to do. This paper is not intended to explore institutional level transformations but raises the questions about what measures could be taken to enhance Russian academics' research performance on a global scale.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Among the factors hindering Russian academics' research performance at an international level, the English language could be considered a crucial one. "Unless foreign language proficiency is improved across the whole HE sectors, participation in the whole range of international activities and the benefits that are derived from them must remain limited" (Frumina & West, 2012, p. 53). Until recently, English language teaching and learning in Russian higher education institutions (HEIs) involved two main strands - General English among junior (1-, 2-year) undergraduate students and English for Specific Purposes among senior undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students. Nowadays, there is one more area of language teaching and learning which initiated a new distribution of courses - English for Academic Purposes (EAP) among PhD students and academics. This direction is developing fast due to the new and constantly evolving requirements. However, the abilities of Russian academics to function successfully in an international English-speaking academic context are still limited. This fact has recently been mentioned by several authorities during relevant public meetings - President of the Russian Federation V. Putin, Head of the Russian Academy of Sciences A. Sergeev, Minister of Science and Higher Education M. Kotyukov. Practical work carried out during the period 2014 – present allowed to conclude that English proficiency, initially considered the sine qua non for Russian academics as non-native speakers of English, is not the only aspect to be taken into account in the development of Russian academics aimed for global academia.

## **3. Research Questions**

The present study aims to respond to the following question from Russian academics' perspective:

How can Russian academics be supported to enhance their research performance to work in an international English-speaking academic context?

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

The author plans to examine Russian academics' experience in professional development gained to enhance their work in an English-speaking academic context. Analysis of their perceptions will allow to get an overall picture of the gap(s) between what is being delivered through training and what is sought. This will enable the author to figure out core aspects of the professional development opportunities needed for this peculiar context.

## **5. Research Methods**

For this study, qualitative approach has been chosen as the most useful to get a complete and detailed description of reality perceptions (Bryman, 2008). The participants were selected from various research areas (life sciences, medicine, physical sciences, social sciences and humanities). The study started at Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU). Currently, the work is carried out in Research Centre Kairos (Kairos, non-governmental organization) and at Tomsk State Pedagogical University (TSPU). In order to investigate the academics' perceptions, a combination of methods was involved - reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. The results were obtained in a variety of situations as a part of EAP courses during the period 2014 – 2017. Reflective journals were collected at the final stage of each course. Interviews were organized during Questions & Answers online sessions and face-to-face meetings. The participants were

informed about the study in progress to follow ethical issues. The combination of these methods allowed to obtain the results which were further analyzed.

## 6. Findings

The study started in TPU as a representative of the leading universities group and, consequently, HEI seeking the ways to improve competitiveness of academic staff. During recent years, TPU academics were required to enrich the scope of their research activities in a wider context, namely international one. This implied the ability to: 1) make and develop research contacts with overseas colleagues; 2) apply for international grants; 3) participate in international conferences, deliver presentations; 4) publish research papers in international journals. EAP courses were considered the tool to satisfy the requirements. Initially, each course was delivered as a short-term course of professional development by the team of English instructors. 2014 – 2017 a wide range of participants aged 25 – 75 were engaged. At the same time, requests on participation in EAP courses from the academics beyond TPU were submitted to the team and it became obvious that such work was necessary for a wider context. In autumn 2016, similar work among academics from diverse Russian universities was launched in Kairos.

Analysis of 388 reflective journals and 344 interviews gave the following results. The majority of respondents (82% / 86%) stated that participation in EAP courses enhanced their research performance. Improvements related to language skills (writing 34%, speaking 28%, reading 20%, listening 18%) and language aspects (vocabulary 42%, grammar 34%, pronunciation 24%). The biggest language challenges mentioned by the participants were scientific writing (42%) and interaction with academic colleagues (35%). A special concern was given to writing academic documents in English (23%). Unexpectedly, academics mentioned the need to learn the ways to develop such characteristics as personal effectiveness (30%), knowledge of the standards and requirements in research area (29%), techniques to do research (22%), and skills for wider research impact (19%). The main reason for this opinion was that lack of such knowledge and skills considerably held back Russian academics from more successful research performance on a global scale. In addition, the participants argued that the format of short intensive events (not courses) would be helpful.

Thus, it was concluded that EAP courses were not enough for Russian academics to do their research and additional measures were of high value. For that reason, in 2018 the following additional events were organized:

- 1) Lectures
  - World leaders in research: where the secret lies
  - Research Ethics and Integrity
  - Key competences of a researcher and ways to evaluate them
  - Productive researcher: myth or reality?
- 2) Workshops on personal development
  - Understanding your identity
  - Time-management
  - Designing work-life balance
- 3) Workshops on EAP

- Academic portfolio

- Public speaking

- Publishing a paper

4) Individual and group consultations (face-to-face, online) on writing a scientific paper in English.

Since autumn 2018, the biggest part of work has been carried out in Kairos. By the present moment, academics from over 50 Russian HEIs have been supported by Kairos specialists. Along with that, TSPU became an experimental platform for research where EAP courses among senior undergraduate and postgraduate students were implemented. Currently, the opportunities to organize a meeting point for intensive professional development sessions for Russian academics as well as online events are being discussed. The results of the work done so far are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 01.** Description of work 2014 – present

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>CPD scheme</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>Location</i>
<b>2013/14</b> (spring semester)	EAP	38	TPU
<b>2014/15</b> (autumn semester)	EAP	61	TPU
<b>2015/16</b> (all academic year)	EAP	118	TPU
<b>2016/17</b> (all academic year)	EAP	81 55	TPU Kairos
<b>2017/18</b> (all academic year)	EAP  Additional events  Consultations on scientific writing	191  138	TPU  Kairos
<b>2018/2019</b> (autumn semester)	Additional events  Consultations on scientific writing  EAP	166   19	Kairos   TSPU
<b>Total</b>		867	

## 7. Conclusion

The research focus described in the paper is of direct relevance to the academic context in Russia. Originally, the research was aimed to explore the development of a curriculum for the teaching of English to TPU academics, with a focus on the specific needs of both the participants and the University in the changing context of Russian HE. However, further on it became clear that English proficiency is only the tip of iceberg and it was decided to adopt a slightly different focus and look not only at the linguistic demands made upon Russian academics and their implications for the curriculum designed to prepare them, but to take a broader look at professional development opportunities which could be offered. This study will become a part of a bigger research which is intended to find the ways of more effective support for

Russian academics in their research and as such to make not only a strong contribution within a certain Russian HEI, but also to have broader implications on a national level and possibly for other countries which find themselves needing to engage with academic colleagues through the medium of English.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Prof. Terry Lamb (University of Westminster, London, UK) for his valuable suggestions and comments. I am also grateful to Russian academics for agreeing to participate in this study.

## References

- Albrow, M. (1996). *The golden age: State and society beyond modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of studies in international education*, 11(3-4), 290-305.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Figge, L., & Martens, P. (2014). Globalisation Continues: The Maastricht Globalisation Index Revisited and Updated. *Globalizations*, 11(6), 875-893.
- Frumina, E., & West, R. (2012). *Internationalisation of Russian Higher Education: the English language dimension*. Moscow: British Council.
- Fujikane, H. (2003). Approaches to global education in the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan. In M. Bray (Ed.) *Comparative Education* (pp. 133-152). Netherlands: Springer.
- Jones, A. (2010). *Globalization: Key thinkers*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Knight, J. (2008). Higher education in turmoil: the changing world of internationalization. In P. Altbach (Ed.) *Global Perspectives on Higher Education* (pp. 5-19). Amsterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Koutsoukis, N. (2015). Global political economy clusters: the world as perceived through black-box data analysis of proxy country rankings and indicators. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 33, 18-45.
- Kalvemark, T., & Van Der Wende, M. (1997). *National Policies for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Europe*. Stockholm: National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket).
- Mittleman, J. H. (2000). *The globalization syndrome: Transformation and resistance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Telegina, G., & Schwengel, H. (2012). The Bologna Process: perspectives and implications for the Russian university. *European Journal of Education*, 47(1), 36-49.
- Waters, M. (1995). *Globalisation: Key ideas*. London: Routledge.