Abstract

Education is an indefeasible aspect in the policy of each state. Thanks to the high level of education, the state can improve its internal potential and develop economic indicators. Therewith, in the context of globalization, education can reinforce the international relations. Many countries implement different educational programs from student exchange programs to special scholarships for foreign students. The most important aspect in this strategy is the formation of a common educational space among the neighbouring countries sharing their borders with each other as it gives an opportunity to expand diplomatic and cultural relations. For instance, Russia has been cultivating relations with the post-soviet countries thanks to the sphere of education.

Today the Russian Federation offers a number of educational programs for foreigners, including such widespread project as “Rossoutrudnichestvo”, different olympiads for high school graduates and particular university competitions. According to statistics, 230 000 foreign students nowadays study in Russia and 31% of them study for free. In the case of cooperation with Armenia, the common educational space helps Russia to maintain historical connection and stable relations between countries. As for Georgia, in this case education promotes cultural relations, which were seriously damaged in 2008. However, today the sphere of education needs an appropriate image and its representation highly depends on Mass Media. First of all, the global world is now becoming more interconnected through the social media; secondly, Mass Media has a teaching function. Therewith, Mass Media and education are deeply connected with each other. But the modern media space is transparent and, consequently, pluralistic, so the image of the education in the state can be either positive or negative depending on the disposition of Media. That is why it is especially interesting to analyze the formation of image of Russian Education in Transcaucasia with the aim to conduct not only the comparative analysis, but also to predict the most significant trends of political relations in the region through the education.

Keywords: education, Mass Media, imagology, exchange programs, scholarship.

1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a guarantee of development of each state. Firstly, it increases the internal potential of the state, secondly, at the same time improves cultural and diplomatic relationships with another states. Thus, the development of Russian education, especially the level of exchange programs and programs for foreign students, remains one of the most significant tasks for the state. It becomes especially important in the modern geopolitical conditions and trends of globalization.

The practice of exchange programs for students is widely distributed all over the world. Today the leaders in this sphere are: the USA, Canada, Germany and France. According to the requirements of exchange programs, a student studies at the one of the universities of the host countries one semester or whole year. Another kind of programs for foreign students is an opportunity to study during the whole period of educational program (from two to four years) for free, after the success in local examinations, with the fellowship awards. Surely, all educational programs for foreigners take place in official language of the country. That is why a candidate also must know this language fluently and confirm his (her) level of knowledge through the special examination.

As for Russia, here the term “exchange program” becomes very ramified and complicated because, first of all, Russia has a long-time experience of organizing a process of study for people who even do not know Russian language at all. However, thanks to the special course “Russian language for foreigners” students from more than 100 countries could learn Russian and not only study at Russian universities to get the Bachelor degree, but also continue their education with the help of Master’s and
PhD programs, constantly improving their professional skills and knowledge of language alongside. Moreover, the Russian educational programs offer scholarships and an opportunity to study for free.

Nowadays educational programs in Russia significantly improve diplomatic, business and cultural relationship with neighbouring countries and increase the level of tolerance within state. This phenomenal practice is deeply connected with the historical period when Russia was a part of the Soviet Union. However, the post-Soviet inheritance and problems undoubtedly influence on the formation of image of Russian education. Therefore, the imagology of Russian education is formed differently, in accordance with the official attitude of concrete state towards Russia.

2 EMERGENCE OF RUSSIAN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR FOREIGNERS: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Generally, Russia has a longtime organizational and pedagogical experience of creating educational programs for people with different level of knowledge of Russian language based on features of history, customs and mentality of distinct regions or nationalities.

Speaking about Caucasus region, it is important to highlight that this process started in XVIII century. In 1799, great Georgian writer and thinker Ioane Bagrationi developed a project titled “The Treatise on Regulation of Public Administration”. According to the text of document, Bagrationi saw the perspectives of Georgian development and improvement of standard of living only in education [1].

Another important date once more demonstrates that diplomacy and education are connected with each other. In 1491, Georgia and Russia concluded diplomatic agreement and very soon publishing house in Saint Petersburg started printing books in Georgian language. Later, when Georgia became a new part of Russian Empire, in 1828, Russian government decided to open a newspaper “Tiflis Gazette”, the first edition published in Russian language in Caucasus region. “Tiflis Gazette” described innovations in the fields of public administration, health, commerce and education. In opinion of Russian authorities, newspaper could increase the level of patriotism among the citizens. This fact proves the existence of strong connection between education, policy of the state and media.

Most interestingly, there were several translations of “Tiflis Gazette”. They were: “Tiflisis Utskebani” in Georgian language, an Armenian version for Armenians and translation to Azerbaijani language as well. Moreover, this newspaper consisted of a special edition for Batumi citizens and a literary magazine created with the purpose to increase the educational level of the region and support local writes.

In 1831, the newspaper was reformed and additionally sponsored by baron Rozen. According to his vision, “Tiflis Gazette” would be a sample of bilateral educational progress because it opened up the Caucasus region for foreign readers and, on the other hand, introduced news of European science and technology to Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijani. This moment again brightly illustrates the correlation of Mass Media and education.

1844 became a year of renovations for Tbilisi. New viceroy of the Caucasus, Russian Emperor’s Governor in Tbilisi Mikhail Vorontsov was a very educated person and a polyglot. He knew several languages, learnt Georgian and paid special attention to the Russian education in the region. He often noticed that positive conversion in the region was possible only through the development of science and culture. Vorontsov established the first public library in Tiflis, sponsored schools for girls and founded a magazine named “Tsiskari”. The editor-in-chief of this magazine was famous Georgian writer Giorgi Eristavi [2].

By the end of the XIX century all members of Georgian gentry and Armenian and Azerbaijani aristocracy had chosen the education at Moscow or Saint Peters burg universities for their children. According to the amount of advertising of good teachers who prepare children for the exams of Russian universities in Georgian newspapers, we can conclude that there was a vast demand for Russian universities in the region.

The formation of the Soviet Union had united Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and provided them and other republics with the equal educational conditions. Education process was primarily organized in Russian language. Although students could choose a course in their mother language, Russian was a language of communication between different nationalities inhabited the state. Also the USSR initiated a support program for foreign students from the Arabic countries, countries of Latin America and Asia. In 1960, the government of the state founded a new university in Moscow called Patrice
Lumumba People’s Friendship University. This university was established with the purpose to give a qualification to young people from Asia, Africa and Latin America in Russian language.

In 1965 the first students from 47 countries successfully graduated the university with good knowledge of Russian. Thus, in the period of the 30s-80-s the Soviet Union was the world leader in the educational sphere and demonstrated the highest rates of literacy, intelligence, international involvement and equal accessibility of education. Russia achieved a unified educational system for everyone and Mass Media widely discussed its experience and development. RUDN University is one of the leading Russian highest schools implementing the newest trends of education including training the highly qualified specialists in the sphere of Mass Media [10].

At the current time this process is still continuing, but the changes in the world policy and technical progress had transformed the cooperation of Mass Media and education in Russia. We offer to analyze this process in the following part of this article.

3 MODERN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS IN RUSSIA AND THEIR IMAGOLOGY IN MASS MEDIA

To discuss the correlation between education, Mass Media and imagology, it is important to explain the definition of this term. According to the definition by project Imagologica, this is a discipline which studies how temperamental features are stereotypically associated with certain nationalities, very often without any empirical basis. Anyway, these associations do a serious influence in how people accept the world around them.

The nationalistic prejudice can be either positive or negative, but anyway, it affects to the image of the state and its aspects, such as: lifestyle, behavior and education. The greatest example of this case can be famous British education because thanks to the literature the United Kingdom is stereotypically perceived as an atmosphere of private school, good manners, castles and gentry. Another example is Japan, famous for its model of teaching children since kindergarten. Technical achievement of this state is usually imputed to the education.

As modern Mass Media are inclined to scale the stereotypes because of a new short form of materials, adapted for the clip thinking, which means lack of analysis, nowadays the process of imagology goes faster. As for Russian education, unfortunately, it still has not a concrete strategy of presenting its educational field. Analyzing the current situation of the image of education in Russia for foreigners, we should answer the following questions.

3.1 How does Russian education for foreigners develop today?

In this case it is important to keep in mind that Russia has diplomatic relationships not with all former Soviet republics, and it makes sense in the process of advertising and image of Russian education in each country. Speaking about Georgia, we should highlight that events of 2008 negatively influenced on the relationships between Russia and Georgia. There are no diplomatic relationships between states; bilateral cultural projects are not strongly developed. Also the massive Russian schools closure led to the decreasing a number of Russian speaking youth in Georgia. That is why a perspective to get education in Russia is not so popular in Georgia as in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

What about Azerbaijan, here the situation is better. Russian education is in demand in the state. In 2009, Moscow State University opened its branch in the capital of Azerbaijan Baku. There are six faculties at the Azerbaijani branch. University in Baku offers two programs: Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. Also there are a big campus, several laboratories and a library with 50 000 books in the territory of branch. The university attracts students with an opportunity to study for free, different exchange programs and master classes of famous lecturers (by the beginning of 2019 more than 1500 famous Russian professors has visited the branch office in Baku with trainings, lectures and master-classes). Also within the framework of the university’s concept Russia and Azerbaijan implement a project which helps to identify talented youth in Azerbaijani regions [7].

Armenia expresses the same interest towards Russian education and it can be explained, firstly, with common historical past, stable presence of Russian language in the life of Armenia and a big number of ethnic Armenians who live in Russia. There is a large number of universities offering programs in Russian language in Armenia. They are: State Medical University, State Linguistic University, Slavic University of Armenia and a branch of Moscow State University in Armenia which was founded in 2015 [8].
Also students from the Caucasus region may participate in the governmental program “Russia Study” included to the project “Rossotrudnichestvo”, promoting Russian education abroad. According to the program, every year the government of Russian Federation organized a competition and after it allocates 15 000 places for foreigners to study for free. Also Russia organizes cultural programs with some countries according to which students also can study for free. According to statistics, nowadays 230 000 foreigners study in Russia and 31% of them study without any payment. Speaking about RUDN university, there are 31 000 students from 155 countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and 1/3 of these student studies on a budgetary basis [9].

3.2 How do Mass Media form the image of Russian education in different states?

The imagology of Russian education in this case directly depends on the official attitude of the certain country towards Russia. For instance, Russia keeps good neighborly relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, thus educational cooperation of Russia and Armenia or Russia and Azerbaijan is a natural component of development of the relation between states. As this practice has been existing for many years, this subject is widely publicized in Mass Media of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Here it is necessary to say about a significant psychological role of a connotation.

Connotation is an emotional associational caused with the word or phrase and it can be positive or negative in accordance with the emotional connection of the certain word. For instance, the word “freedom” always sounds positively and, on the contrary, the word “prison” is definitely displeasing. It goes without saying, a word combination “Russian education” also has its own connotation and exactly the connotation influence on the image because association is a basis of imagology.

Analyzing Mass Media of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the period of 2018 – beginning of 2019, we can conclude that in these state Russian education has either positive connotation or good image. The main associations with Russian education in Armenia are:

- prestige, connected with the historical past and opening the branch of Moscow State University which is in the list of the best universities in Europe (7 publications from 50);
- intelligence, poetry, talent and art, connected with a big literary heritage of Russia (5 publications from 50);
- culture (3 publications from 50) [4].

It is difficult to definite one edition which tells about education in Russia because many materials are presented in the genre of routine news and are made by different news agencies, sites, newspapers and magazines.

The almost the same situation is in Armenia. However, Armenian Mass Media, presented by Sputnik Armenia News Agency, JAM magazine, news.am, note another points, such as:

- common historical past and co-belligerency (5 publications from 50);
- a big amount of successful Armenians who live and work in Russia (5 publications from 50);
- an opportunity to study for free (4 publications from 50).

Moreover, there are many official sites of universities or scientific institutions with the special sections titled “How the citizen of Armenia can become a student of Russian university”. These articles are detailed instructions, clear for everyone. That is why we can say that Armenian audience knows much about possibilities to study in Russia and perceive it mostly positively.

The contrary atmosphere is in Georgia. It is well known that Georgia and Russia have no diplomatic relations and that is why we should discuss this case separately. The connotation and image of Russian education is mostly negative because even as the president of the country Salome Zurabishvili says: “It is not time to be friends with Russia yet”. 40 publications connected with Russia in the main news agency of Georgia “News Georgia” contain a word “occupation”. There is even a special section of the Soviet occupation at National museum of Georgia in Tbilisi.

This strategy undoubtedly led to the trend of decreasing Russian-speaking population in the state. That is why Russian education is not very popular in Georgian and associations with Russian education basically are:

- occupation (40 publications from 50);
As we see, official Mass Media, especially TV channels which are still more popular than the Internet in Georgia, such as Imedi and Rustavi Ori discuss Russia only in negative way. There is just one edition spreading positive information about Russia and education in Russia – news agency Sputnik Georgia. It publishes separated articles with the detailed explanation how Georgian young people can become students of Russian universities and real perspectives of this education: “Russian diploma is accepted in 80 states” or “Russia offers Georgian youth 659 programs free of charge”. Analyzing the current state of image of Russian education in Georgia, it is real to say that situation changes, but faces a number of problems in social media [6].

3.3 What are the main problems of promoting Russian education in Georgia?

“Sputnik Georgia” tries to find unordinary ways to tell about Russian education – videos, interviews and info graphics, however, this practice is not absolutely successful because these programs are oriented on young generation and Sputnik does not find any opinion leader close to them. The ambassador of Russian education in Georgia is Nikolay Sventitsky, the head of Griboedov Russian Drama theatre in Tbilisi, whom young audience, especially from the category of Georgian-speaking youth, does not know well. Also there is a lack of success stories of young Georgians who graduated Russian universities [5].

It is also important to discuss the problem of social media, because Russian educational programs have not a special account for Georgians, the Russian groups like “Russian world in Tbilisi” are morally obsolete, while anti-Russian online magazine “Sova” only increases its popularity on Facebook and very often creates deceitfully negative image of Russia, using psychological manipulation: “Russia is an occupant”, “Russia occupied Georgia”, “Free Europe”, “Democratic Western world” and etc.

4 CONCLUSION

How is possible to create a positive image of Russian education abroad? The monitoring describes in this issue helps to find an answer. The programs of education in Russia need more advertising. First of all, we need to expand the presence of information about Russian education in social media. At the same time, it is necessary to find appropriate ambassadors of Russian education in each country who can share an objective information and facts about Russian university, their own experience and inspire their peers. This process must be long and complicated, but otherwise we can observe a promotion which is unproductive in attendance because it does not reach its audience.

Strictly speaking, the image of education in Russia in the Caucasus region needs many reforms, creating new associations, friendly available community and storytelling. On the basis of this approach Russia will be able not only develop national educational potential, but also to improve cultural, diplomatic and business relations with another countries and rise them to a new level. Thus, it is possible to generally conclude that the development of education and its prestige directly depend on its image which can demonstrate the reality and struggle with negative stereotypes.

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