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Field of Higher Education Research, Russia



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Synonyms

[Study on higher education](#)

Definition

Scholarship related to the study of higher education in the Russian Federation.

As in most countries, the development of the field of higher education research in Russia has been associated with the massification and expansion of higher education (Teichler 2015). In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), higher education had already reached the mass stage, which is over 15% of age cohort by Trow's classification (1973), in the 1960s. At that time, it included in absolute terms two million of students (Smolentseva 2017a). That called for the collection and analysis of data to be used in social planning and higher education policy-

making. Research on higher education has been developing along with the division of research in the country – between the Academy of Sciences, higher education institutions, and sectoral research under the corresponding ministries. However, current lack of an institutional basis for higher education research reflects the marginal role that the field plays in Russia. This paper is the first endeavor to describe and analyze the development of the field of Russian higher education research. The entry starts with a historical outline of the different branches of scholarship on higher education in Russia since the Soviet time and then addresses current institutional arrangements and thematic scope of higher education research and concludes with reflections on the challenges and perspectives of the field in Russia.

Historical Perspective on Higher Education Studies in Russia

Higher education expanded and gained more prominence in policy in the 1960s, the period which also witnessed the political “thaw” and the revival of Soviet social sciences. Among the first studies of higher studies were the studies of students and social inequality in access, by V. Shubkin and D. Konstantinovskiy (Astafiev

and Shubkin 1998), and studies of life plans of secondary and higher education graduates and the social prestige of professions (Semenova 1998). Those studies developed in the Academy of Sciences, the main research center in the country, within disciplinary-based research and, while not contributing to the institutionalization of higher education research, highlighted the importance of higher education studies in social sciences.

Research units at universities comprised another branch of development of higher education studies. In the late 1960s–1970s, sociological laboratories titled “on communist upbringing of youth” were organized: for example, at the University of Tartu (Estonia) in 1969 (Titma 1973, p. 5) and Lomonosov Moscow State University in 1971 (Letopis’... n.d.). These studies focused on the social composition of the student body; students’ values, motivations, and life plans; and the social prestige of professions. Youth and students’ studies were also conducted by general sociological centers at universities – e.g., Research Institute for Complex Sociological Studies (*NII KSI*) at Leningrad State University (now St. Petersburg State University) (established in 1965). Between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, perestroika led to a new stage of consolidation of sociological research on higher education within the higher education sector. At this time higher education was expected to become a driver of the transformation of Soviet society (Smolentseva 2017b). The Ministry of Education initiated and funded a large-scale research project “public opinion” on reforms of the educational system (Ovsyannikov n.d.; Astafiev and Shubkin 1998). The surveys were conducted regularly from 1987 to 1993 across the entire USSR. The scope of themes in their analysis included topics which could be considered as traditional in higher education research: time budgets of faculty and students, higher education governance, spatial analysis of higher education system (Ovsyannikov and Iudin 1990), and typology of universities (Ovsyannikov and Iudin 1988), among others. An important contribution of the research program was its acknowledgment of the social importance of higher education, including the development and institutionalization of sociological centers at higher educational

institutions throughout the large country. In Russia it included comprehensive universities in Moscow, Leningrad (St. Petersburg), Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod), Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg), Tomsk, and Irkutsk, among many others. There were also centers in Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, and Lithuania (Ovsyannikov n.d.; Astafiev and Shubkin 1998). These centers also established traditions of the type of research on higher education which is internationally called “institutional research”: the collection and analysis of survey and statistical data on various issues in their respective higher educational institutions, to be used for both institutional policy-making and academic publications.

The third branch of development of higher education studies, this time as an interdisciplinary field, was launched in 1974. The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Vocational Education established the Research Institute for Higher Education (*nauchno-issledovatel’skii institut vysshegoo obrazovaniya*). It became the head organization in the coordination of basic and applied research on higher education and in the provision of relevant research information to higher educational institutions. The list of the Institute’s departments reflects the broad range of issues it dealt with: public policy, economics of higher education, research in higher education institutions, higher education law, comparative analysis of higher education systems, statistics of higher education, content/curriculum of higher education, new technologies in higher education, and others (Issledovatel’skie... 1998). The Institute had a wide range of publishing activity: research reports, analytical reports, thematic reviews, bibliographies, statistical books, and a monthly newsletter *Magistr*. As of 1998 the Institute’s staff is comprised of over 120 people, 75 of which worked in research departments, including 53 with PhDs (candidates and doctors of sciences) (Ibid). In 2005 the Research Institute for Higher Education was merged with other research institutes under the Ministry of Education into the Federal Institute of Educational Development (FIRO) (FIRO. Sozдание n.d.-b), which currently does not have a special department focused on higher education (there is only

the center for professional/vocational education, which in Russia includes both secondary and higher education, and qualifications systems) (FIRO. Nauchnye. . . n.d.-a). Hence, the traditions of multidisciplinary and policy-related research on higher education under one umbrella, developed over three decades, were largely lost.

After the disintegration of the USSR and the related economic and political turbulence that followed, higher education faced severe challenges. Low salaries, lack of research funding, and brain drain changed the conditions of work of academic staff in the higher education sector, Academy of Sciences, and sectoral research, considerably affecting the social sciences. The national policy turn toward higher education in the mid-2000s (Platonova and Semyonov 2016) resulted in a revival of academic and applied research on higher education. The new elements included Russia's engagement with the Bologna process, transition to the new higher education admission system based on unified national testing of secondary school leavers, and most importantly, government policy to encourage stratification (the excellence initiative) and regulation ("optimization") of by then expanded higher education system. All of this stimulated national discussion and research on higher education development. However, research on higher education in Russia, like research and the academic profession in general, faces significant challenges.

Mapping Institutional Boundaries of Higher Education Research in Modern Russia

The institutionalization of the field of higher education research can be considered in relation to its institutional base, researchers' associations, journals, and research funding. In Russia, higher education research is a very small field.

The biggest research center producing research on higher education is the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) under the government of the Russian Federation. But even at this university, there is no major/mid-level unit such as a school, institute, or even

a center specifically focused at higher education research. There is a smaller research unit, a students' laboratory, that was established in 2010; and there is a center for the sociology of higher education that was established in 2015. Other researchers working on higher education, among other themes, are affiliated with different research units at the Institute of Education and the Institute of Institutional Studies. The latter publishes a Russian translation of Boston College's newsletter *International Higher Education* (since 2014) and an English language newsletter *Higher Education in Russia and Beyond* (established 2014) on the transformations in the region, in cooperation with Boston College. HSE also publishes a research journal *Educational Studies (Voprosy obrazovaniya)* which covers all levels of education.

HSE runs a master's program in higher education management aimed at Russian university administrators and an English-language international summer school on higher education research for early career researchers in the field. The university hosted the 2018 conference of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER), Europe's main scholarly body in higher education studies. HSE also became the base for the annual Russian higher education research conference which began in 2010. The conference was organized to consolidate Russian researchers of higher education, integrate them into the global discussion in the field, and develop the Russian Association of Higher Education Researchers. Every year the conference has hosted up to two hundred of national and international participants, but remarkably the national association of higher education researchers has never been fully formally established. By its ninth conference in 2018, the conference was taken under the auspices of the Association of Educational Researchers, newly formally established, which entered the European Educational Research Association. This story might serve an illustration of the marginal role of higher education as a field in Russia.

The other center in Russia is the UNESCO chair in university management and planning (established in 1998) at the Ural Federal University, which conducts research and consultancy on

higher education administration and management and publishes a journal *University Management (Universitetskoe upravlenie)* (established in 1997) aimed mostly at administrators and to a lesser extent at researchers.

Other researchers contributing to higher education research are scattered around other institutions. For them higher education research is a part of the research agenda that is mostly discipline-based in fields such as sociology, economics, or history. The psychology and pedagogy of higher education largely represent a separate area of research.

Following Teichler's classification of higher education experts (Teichler 2005), in Russia there can be found all six types: discipline-based occasional and continuous higher education researchers, theme-based academic higher education researchers, applied higher educational researchers of two kinds (policy researchers, institutional researchers), consultants, and reflective practitioners. But with the probable exception of reflective practitioners, the number of researchers in each of these groups does not correspond to the scale of higher education system.

Along with *Educational Studies* and *University Management*, there are three other journals aimed at researchers, faculty, administrators, and professionals in higher education: *Higher Education in Russia (Vysshee obrazovanie v Rossii)* (established in 1992), *Alma Mater* (established in 1940), and *Higher Education Today (Vysshee obrazovanie segodnya)*. These journals publish papers on policy, sociology, and philosophy in higher education, but teaching, learning, and pedagogy seem to be their biggest area of coverage. A comparison of the above journals can be made using 5-year impact factor in Russian Science Citation Index. Russian Science Citation Index (RSCI) is a national bibliographic database of scientific publications. The system was developed in order to embrace and analyze Russian language publications of which only a minor share (10%) is included in international databases such as Web of Science and Scopus (Russian Science Citation Index n.d.). It is used here in order to address the development of the field within Russia. The analysis of 2016 data

shows that *Educational Studies* (1.582) and *Higher Education in Russia* (1.282) are more popular than *University Management* (0.776), which is more narrowly focused, *Alma Mater* (0.452), and *Higher Education Today* (0.404).

Overall, the visible institutional basis of higher education research in Russia is rather weak. It appears that the financial base of higher education research is derived from institutional funding, as a search for funded projects on higher education in national research funding bodies (Russian Humanities Foundation and Russian Basic Research Foundation) did not produce any results. The dispersion of higher education researchers across institutions, and their formal disintegration, might mean that higher education research as a field of study is at an early stage in Russia, despite the clear need for analysis and policy ideas for Russia's high participation in higher education system.

Themes and Issues in Russian Higher Education Research

Despite lack of financial and institutional support and a limited interaction with the external world, there are numerous publications on higher education in Russia. However, being written in Russian, they are mostly invisible internationally.

Considering books as more substantial contributions, we can look at the book citations in Russian Science Citation Index. They might provide only a partial understanding of the field. Book citations are dependent on time: higher-cited books are more than 10 years old, and that is why they are more cited. Despite those limitations, the book citation patterns reveal some major thematic strands in Russian higher education research (the similar thematic strands can be found if to look at the citations of journal articles). It shows that the most popular area of work on higher education is teaching, learning, and pedagogy. The second most cited area is that of books addressing issues in the implementation of changes under the Bologna process (e.g., Baidenko 2004, 318 citations; Baidenko 2006, 231 citations). In other areas there are very few

books which have as many as 100–200 citations. These include books on economics, management, and organization of higher education. However, only applied works are among the most cited – those on competitiveness of a higher educational institution, the marketing of educational services, and management (e.g., Lazarev and Mokhnachev 2003, 202 citations; Lukashenko 2003, 168 citations; Filippov 2005, 154 citations).

This group might also include more scholarly books, such as a Russian translation of Burton Clark's *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities* (2011), with 123 citations (which is one of the few key books in international field of higher education research translated into Russian). A book outlining the concept of project-oriented university, based on Clark's entrepreneurial university model and developed on the basis of experience of a major regional comprehensive university, has reached a higher level of attention, with 209 citations (Grudzinskiy 2004).

A few books with a notable number of citations focus on students – their lifestyle, work and study balance, and other issues (Medik and Osipov 2003, 152 citations; Konstantinovskiy et al. 2002, 114 citations). There are few books on the history of Russian higher education, but those that exist are read and used (e.g., Andreev 2009, 175 citations; Ivanov 2004, 109 citations).

Themes in higher education research have changed along with changing social realities and policy shifts. During the 1990s, the period of weak governmental steering or “the policy of non-policy” (Kwiek 2008), the focus of study moved to higher education in the market of educational services, which was expected to be the means of survival and autonomy, and the theme of rapid massification. In the 2000s, more studies addressed the implementation of Bologna and internationalization, as Russia joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2002. Since the late 2000s, when government policy announced the intention of developing groupings of elite universities (national research universities, federal universities, universities in 5/100 excellence program aimed at getting into global rankings) and the tighter performance-based regulation of higher

education, corresponding new themes emerged in the literature.

Reflections over the restructuring of the expanded higher education system resulted in a number of studies on the classification of higher educational institutions and on the institutional landscape (Knyazev and Drantusova 2014; Froumin et al. 2014; Abankina et al. 2016; Platonova and Semyonov 2018). The national assessment of performance of higher educational institutions started in 2012 by the Ministry of Education and availability of its database have created new research themes in relation to evaluation of the performance of higher educational institutions. The transformations of the external environment have produced discussion on university strategies (e.g., Titova 2008a, b) or the lack of them (e.g., Sokolov 2017). The pressures of global competitiveness fostered the discussion of global position of Russian universities (Froumin and Salmi 2007).

Some studies focused on the changes in the academic profession (e.g., Smolentseva 2003; Efendiev and Reshetnikova 2008; Sivak and Yudkevich 2017).

Overall, at present, one might find in Russia some research in many of the traditional higher education research areas. As in Europe (see, e.g., Kehm 2015; Teichler 2015), there are studies of the higher education system (e.g., abovementioned studies on institutional landscape; Efimov 2012; Froumin and Leshukov 2015; Froumin and Lisutkin 2015); access and inequality (e.g., Yudkevich and Prakhov 2018); the research mission and knowledge transfer (e.g., Smolentseva 2015); student experiences (e.g., Petrova 2000; Maloshonok and Terentev 2017); the academic profession; internationalization and mobility; economics, funding, and management; university rankings; and others.

The themes in research arise both from current national policy issues and also global referencing, relating the national system and its institutions to international models, which has become a significant driver for strategic development of higher education in many countries (Marginson and van der Wende 2009). However, Russia's engagement with international higher education research has been relatively low historically (similar

situation is in Japan – see Yonezawa 2015). The English language has been another barrier. Opportunities to learn from and contribute to international discussion have been limited. The national higher education discussion has developed relatively independently, and relied primarily on materials translated into Russian or introduced in Russian, that made them accessible to a wider community.

One of the first visible attempts to engage with international research in the field has been participation in the International Academic Profession project headed by Philip Altbach (Altbach 1996), where the Russian case was coordinated by the Institute for Higher Education Research under the Ministry of Education. This and other singular engagements in international projects provided Russian higher education research with some international presence but did not have a noticeable impact on national discussion. Only over the last decade, following the limited institutionalization of higher education studies at HSE, and the production of a number of research publications in Russian and English, has there been some impact on the national scholarly discussion and some international visibility.

Challenges and Prospects

Higher education research has been a very small field. It has developed unevenly in time and space within Russia. Despite having a wide thematic range, the physical size of the field is small in terms of the number of researchers. That creates a serious challenge for development: there are a small number of researchers in the senior generation, very few in the middle generation (due to brain drain from the academic profession since the 1990s), and hopefully there are growing numbers among the junior scholars. The institutional platform of the field is relatively weak, with most of the funding dependent on internal institutional arrangements. The establishment of a professional association is a long-term goal.

Another challenge is a need for some comprehensive reflection over the major transformations which Russian higher education has experienced in Soviet and post-Soviet periods, as well as

current changes, but the size of the field and discipline-based model of research virtually means that many studies on higher education address only some narrow, particular issues or aspects of higher education. One of the aspects of the issue is the lack of research on the historical legacies of the Soviet time and the early post-Soviet period, which would enable present-day scholars and practitioners to better understand the present state of higher education (e.g., see Froumin et al. 2014; Kuraev 2014, 2016; Smolentseva 2017b; Huisman et al. 2018). The lack of data presents another barrier, but this problem is gradually being overcome as new databases become available to researchers.

The early stage of development of the field might serve as an advance, though the emerging generation of researchers works to overcome weaknesses in the international field and attempts to build research on the basis of improvements in the theoretical and conceptual base, as well as moving forward with stronger and more imaginative methods. The history of this field, if not of social science as a whole, shows that the main developments occur when new theories and concepts are developed which take us closer to social reality and guide stronger empirical work.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Higher Education Conferences](#)
- ▶ [Higher Education Journals](#)
- ▶ [Higher Education Research in Eastern Europe](#)
- ▶ [Higher Education Systems and Institutions: Russia](#)
- ▶ [University Traditions: Russia](#)

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