

Original article

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## World Professional Skills Competitions as a Way of Professional Education Internationalization\*

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**ABSTRACT** This article deals with the development of secondary vocational education and training (SVET) in the context of globalization processes. International cooperation is one of the priorities in the development of the SVET system. Constant updating of the educational content and technologies is necessitated by the professional qualification requirements and international standards. A promising area of professional education internationalization could be arrangement of international competitions and professional skills championships in the WorldSkills format. Far East State Transport University (FESTU) took part in organizing the WorldSkills BRICS Championship in the "Rail transport technologies" competence in 2022 and it is described in this paper. The professional skills competitions enhance the development of professional and expert communities, professional development of scientists, engineers, and workers in Russia and globally. Such competitions can become one of the main forms of vocational education internationalization, which will enhance and improve education quality overall.

**KEYWORDS:** professional education; education internationalization; professional skills competitions

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Научная статья

## Международные конкурсы профессионального мастерства как способ интернационализации профессионального образования

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**АННОТАЦИЯ** Рассматриваются вопросы развития среднего профессионального образования (СПО) в контексте процессов интернационализации. Международное сотрудничество является одним из приоритетных направлений деятельности развития системы СПО. Это обусловлено необходимостью постоянного обновления содержания и технологий профессионального образования в соответствии с актуальными и перспективными требованиями к квалификации работников и международными стандартами. Одним из перспективных направлений интернационализации профессионального образования могут стать международные конкурсы и чемпионаты профессионального мастерства в формате WorldSkills.

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Описан опыт Дальневосточного государственного университета путей сообщения (ДВГУПС) в организации чемпионата WorldSkills BRICS по компетенции «Технологии рельсового транспорта» в 2022 году. ДВГУПС взял на себя функции секретариата при проведении чемпионата WorldSkills BRICS в России по компетенции «Технологии рельсового транспорта». Развитие движения чемпионатов профессионального мастерства влечет за собой развитие профессиональных и экспертных сообществ; повышение квалификации кадров, включая инженерные и рабочие профессии и навыки, в том числе путем организации российских и международных соревнований по профессиональному мастерству. Такие чемпионаты могут стать одной из ведущих форм интернационализации профессионального образования, тем самым значительно повысив его качество.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** профессиональное образование; интернационализация образования; чемпионаты профессионального мастерства

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## INTRODUCTION

Vocational education internationalization is a key aspect of professional development in the era of globalization and knowledgeable society. Internationalized education is also recognized as a crucial means of achieving the goals and objectives of innovative vocational education in terms of its interaction with labour market, effective employability of graduates and the development of lifelong learning.

The process of educational internationalization assumes studying the relations between nations, peoples, cultures, institutions and even political systems [1].

For example, J. Knight analyzed the impact of globalization on different countries. He argued that the globalization process depends on the specific historical development, traditions, culture, and priorities of nations, on the one hand, and on the other hand, higher education internationalization is one of the ways a country responds to globalization while maintaining the uniqueness of its own people [2].

In the current studies of Russian scholars, the concept of “education internationalization” is interpreted “as an integrative process of implementing international educational standards in the educational context of national universities” based on an active, competent, ethical and strategic approaches, thus contributing to improving education quality [3].

However, the internationalization process depends on the economic level of a country. While developed countries are focusing on personnel training to increase their competitiveness, other countries are creating human resource potential for developed economies resulting in a noticeable brain drain from these countries.

All these processes are reflected in the transport universities activities in Russia. In the context of globalization, the world transport system has been increasing its importance in strengthening the produc-

tion and business ties between territories, regions, and continents enhancing the development of the global economic space.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Nowadays, several local and governmental documents map out the internationalization process in transport education such as Federal Project No. 6 “The Development of Export Potential of Russian Education” dated 30.05.2017; Transport Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030; the Interaction Programme between JSC “Russian Railways” and universities for the period up to 2025.

In this context, Russian transport universities have now accumulated considerable experience in international activities. All the transport universities have a great number of partner universities abroad and dozens of coordinated international education programmes (EP).

However, while universities have been successfully developing international cooperation, vocational education and training (VET) institutions and colleges have not participated in the internationalization process, which has had negative implications. The content and technologies of vocational secondary education have not been updated in line with international requirements for professional qualification; the attractiveness of vocational education institutions to foreign applicants has been falling; vocational education programmes have not been included in the international education services market. Thus, Russia is missing out on both economic benefits and political opportunities to exert “soft” power internationally through the dissemination of the Russian language, Russian culture, values, and the achievements of Russian science.

Unfortunately, the conceptual and regulatory documents of the Russian Federation do not offer trans-

port vocational education programmes to foreign customers. Education in transport technical schools of Russia has not been in demand in other countries. The share of foreign students in transport vocational schools has not increased (most technical schools do not have foreign students), nor are foreign teachers attracted to work in these schools.

The Department of International Affairs of Far Eastern State Transport University (FESTU) has carried out a rapid analysis of the vocational education indicators in the area of international activities in 2020 (see the table below).

For the rapid analysis of VET indicators in the field of international activities, open sources data of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation was gathered. A number of vocational and technical schools were chosen, among them:

- Khabarovsk Technical School of Railway Transport (KSRT, a branch of Far East State Transport University);
- the Amur Institute of Railway Transport (AIRT, a branch of Far East State Transport University located in Svobodny, Amur Region);
- the Baikal-Amur Institute of Railway Transport (BAIRT, a branch of Far East State Transport University located in Tynda, Amur Region);
- Primorsky Institute of Railway Transport (PrimIRT, a branch of Far East State Transport University located in Ussuriysk, Primorsky Region);
- Krasnoyarsk Institute of Railway Transport (KIRT, a branch of Irkutsk State Transport University);
- Siberian College of Transport and Construction (SCTC, a branch of Irkutsk State Transport University);

- Omsk College of Railway Transport (OCRT, a branch of Omsk State Transport University);
- Trans-Baikal Institute of Railway Transport (TBIRT, a branch of Irkutsk State Transport University);
- Khabarovsk College of Transport Technologies named after Hero of the Soviet Union A.S. Panov (KCTT).

According to the results of the VET rapid analysis, none of the professional institutions mentioned above fulfilled two of the four indicators. One indicator is Russian students' internship abroad and the second indicator is foreign students' internship at Russian educational institutions. Furthermore, indicators number 2 and 3 coincide because all foreign students studying in professional education programmes are citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The median indicators for the number of foreign students show that only two out of eight educational organizations mentioned meet the international programme requirements.

The analysis confirms that this is a general tendency for all institutions implementing vocational education programmes including FESTU.

The following issues have been identified:

- why leading universities actively implementing international programmes do not promote them in their branches and technical colleges;
- how the accumulated experience of the leading universities can help develop international activities in their branches;
- what forms of education internationalization programmes are appropriate;
- to what extent SVET institutions want to develop international activities.

Table

Rapid analysis of professional education indicators in the aspect of international activities in 2020

No.	Indicator description	Median value, %, foreign students to the given	KSRT	AIRT	BAIRT	PrimIRT	KIRT	SCTC	OCRT	ZabIRT	KCTT
1	Number of students enrolled in SVET institutions who have completed at least one month of training (internship/apprenticeship) abroad or in foreign companies located in Russia, %	0.72	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2	Number of international students enrolled in SVET institutions, %		0.59	0.01	0.05	0.55	0.20	0.53	2.91	0.07	0.49
3	Number of foreign students from CIS countries enrolled in SVET institutions, %		0.59	0.01	0.05	0.55	0.20	0.53	2.85	0.07	0.49
4	Number of foreign students (except CIS countries) enrolled in SVET institutions, %		0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

## RESEARCH RESULTS

In the context of the issues mentioned above, attention needs to be drawn to such a form of education internationalization at the VET level as international professional skills championships. At present, the Autonomous non-profit organization “Professional Skills Development Agency (Worldskills Russia)” that is the functional successor of the Union “Young Professionals (Worldskills Russia)” is working in this direction. However, given a difficult political situation in the world and the high demand in new formats of interaction, one cannot ignore cooperation within the BRICS college alliance (BRICS includes five countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

At the XIII BRICS summit in September 2021, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed establishing a BRICS VET union and suggested organising international competitions for confirming the professional competencies of future professionals.

The BRICS member states began hosting WorldSkills competitions in 2017. They are called WorldSkills BRICS competitions. The first competition took place in China. Russia entered the competition in 2018. The WorldSkills BRICS championship is aimed at identifying and developing potential talents and competences, building global network cooperation among partner countries in the field of education and technology development. Its main goal is to train professionals for high-tech production in the context of the transforming economy.

The “Rail Transport Technology” competence was included in the WorldSkills competition in 2022, and students of technical schools, vocational colleges and railway colleges took part in it for the first time. Far Eastern State Transport University functioned as the secretariat for the WorldSkills BRICS championship in Russia in the “Railway Transport Technology” competence. One hundred and fifty two participants and 76 teams from BRICS countries took part in the international championship.

## CONCLUSION

The WorldSkills BRICS competition in the competence of “Rail Transport Technology” has provided a unique opportunity for VET institutions to integrate into the international process. Participation in the WorldSkills BRICS competition has been a new experience, but there is every reason to believe that it will be a good start off for the implementation of other international projects. Professional skills competitions enhance the development of professional and expert communities, professional education including engineering and working professions and skills through promoting professional skills competitions in Russia and internationally. They can become one of the leading forms of internationalization of vocational education, thus significantly improving its quality.

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