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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTATIONAL CONVENTIONS

3GU – Third Generation University

APE – Additional professional education

CLER – Customised life and educational route

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HSE – Higher School of Economics

IKBFU – Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University

ITMO – Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics University

LMS – Learning Management System

NPM – New Public Management

NRU – National Research University

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

R&D – Research and Development

SAS – School of Advanced Studies of UTMN

SLU2000 – Saint Louis University core curriculum program

TSU – Tomsk State University

UNL – University of Nebraska–Lincoln

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

UTMN – University of Tyumen

INTRODUCTION

Some Russian universities have recently implemented a new curriculum core program. This is a relatively new practice for the universities in comparison to the Western ones. At the moment there is no sufficient data about the outcomes of this shift but more and more universities are going in this direction which makes it an interesting area of research. Thus, the relevance of this thesis is based on the lack of similar studies in Russia. The purpose of the thesis is to **identify the key changes that were facilitated by the implementation of the core program on the example of the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University**. The thesis aims to assess the importance of the core program in modern universities during their transformation.

An insider ethnographic method was used in order to obtain the most insightful data. The main assumption of the thesis lies in the theory of organisational change and core curriculum design. It is formulated as follows. **The transformation of the core curriculum inevitably drives structural and organisational changes and provides opportunities for institutional alignment.** In order to examine this statement, a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with the key stakeholders was conducted and revealed that it has had a significant effect on the university. However, some initially stated goals were not achieved at this point which is also discussed. The results showed that the implementation of the core led to structural and organizational changes and presented opportunities for institutional coordination. The paper also describes the main functions performed by the core curriculum at the university.

The thesis is structured as follows. In chapter 1 the thesis discusses the landscape of Russian universities, the main trends in this field as well as the reforms and academic excellence initiatives introduced by the government to enhance the universities capacity. The chapter 2 presents the history of general education and core curriculum in the USA and Russia. It also describes the models of general education and its main characteristics as well as the theory of university generations that allows to explain

changes that occur at the universities globally. Chapter 2 also provides examples of universities in which core curriculum transformation has had a significant impact on the university image and its internal practices. Chapter 3 describes the process of core curriculum implementation in detail and provides information about the research procedure, participants of the study, obtained results and discussion. The conclusion summarises key findings and recommendations for the further research.

CHAPTER 1. THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN RUSSIA

1.1. THE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN RUSSIA

The Russian higher education system is considered to be one of the largest in the world in terms of the proportion of students enrolled, according to international bodies such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the OECD. It is a leading provider of post-secondary education, with a coverage rate of 81.8%, which exceeds the average rate for developed nations [Университеты на перепутье, p. 40].

Over the past decades, the higher education system in Russia has undergone significant transformations. This was mainly due to political and economic changes and a paradigm shift regarding higher education, its goals and values in alignment with government strategy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the diversification of higher education was in demand, because people understood the need for additional or supplementary education in the changing economic environment. This period is characterised as a “pro-educational shift”, which led to the mass character of higher education, the widespread introduction of various programs (including such novelty as part-time programs) and the development of private universities. However, the government was unable to control the quality of new educational institutions, and therefore the value of higher education was questioned [Университеты на перепутье, p. 25].

In the next decade (2000-s), the government decided to invest various resources into the higher education sector in order to achieve the main national goals, in particular for a more balanced spatial development of the country and its remote regions. In this period significant transformations in the field of institutional regulation and structural changes have been carried out. The institutional reform included the introduction of a unified state exam and Russia's accession to the Bologna system, which assumed a division into bachelor's and master's degrees (a two-tiered system) and higher academic mobility among faculty and students. Structural changes were associated with the

creation of a new type of universities (“university complexes"), which were created by merging different educational organizations to enhance their efforts, the quality of education and vocational training as well. Mostly low-performance institutes were included into this process [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 115].

In 2006-2007 the government launched a project “Education”, which aimed at stimulating the innovative development of Russian universities and implementing new educational practices. Kliucharev and Neverov state that this initiative revealed the gaps in the higher educational system, which led to a few structural changes [Kliucharev, Neverov, p. 110]. First of all, a special status was given to federal universities, most of which were created by merging weaker universities into one unit. Federal universities were supposed to attract talented young people and try to keep them in the region. They were also supposed to become "key agents of innovation’s development" in the region and cooperate with local enterprises [Университеты на перепутье, p. 28]. To receive funding, universities had to introduce a 10-year development program, become more accountable, and strive for transparency. It was also a brand-new practice in university management which required them to identify its values, define its identity and start creating projects that would contribute to the long-term goals. Although, in general, federal universities do show positive dynamics in key indicators, there is an ongoing discussion about how to make this model more productive.

Next step of these reforms was the introduction of research universities. Both federal and research universities have a special status that allows them to release educational programs and products based on their own educational standards [Университеты на перепутье, p. 71]. Moreover, the government started financially supporting the collaboration between various universities (which was not the case before) and between universities and industry. Thus, universities become the main stakeholders driving the regional and sectoral development of the economy and the government supports initiatives related to this. At this point, a new ideological transformation of what university is, was implemented as well – now university is

understood as “not only as an educational, but also as a scientific, innovative and entrepreneurial centre” [Kliucharev, Neverov, p. 103].

The government has also introduced a division into a few groups of universities that received a special status and government funding[1] [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 81-84]:

- National research universities (NRUs): there are 29 of them in Russia. The NRU initiative was primarily aimed at promoting fundamental research in Russian universities and integrating specialised academic institutions into the global education and research arena, among other objectives.
- Federal universities: there are 10 of them. These types of institutions (in comparison to the other ones) are allowed to set their own educational standards. They serve as regional development centres by providing training for the local workforce, fostering innovation within the region, and retaining talented young individuals within the area.
- Leading classical universities: In most cases, these are the universities that participated in the 5-100 program (21 universities), NRUs (29 universities), as well as Moscow and St. Petersburg State Universities. They are mostly large institutions with a significant student population. These universities are known for their leadership in the academic community and a higher level of preparation of applicants.
- Anchor universities: there are 33 of them. They are institutions that focus on the growth of specific regions and act as drivers for developing intellectual resources in those areas. The selection process for anchor universities in 2016-17 was based on competition, with the aim of securing government funding for merging multiple HEIs in different Russian regions. The goal of this consolidation is to

[1] it should be noted that some of the universities received more than one status

establish science and education hubs that can support regional economic development and enhance the quality of the workforce in those regions.

There is also a division between private (~30%) and public universities (~70%), however, they do not share the same level of influence. Although private higher education institutions have been present in Russia for almost three decades, they still remain subordinate to the public system which dominates the country's academia [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 15]. There are also specialised institutions, such as medical schools, technical colleges, and art schools.

Smolentseva claims that the expansion of the education sector has led to stratification, with factors such as social competition for status, marketization, and government initiatives to increase vertical differentiation all playing a role Smolentseva, p. 222]. The distribution of universities providing up-to-date and high-quality education is not balanced throughout Russia's regions: “the elite sector… maintains its elite position in a universal system, on the whole serving the most advantaged social groups, benefiting from additional governmental support for participation in excellence programs, and largely protected from the effects of the demographic downturn” [Smolentseva, p. 224]. Moreover, this sector is regionalized, resulting in more migration of young individuals within a region than between regions, creating an imbalance in access to top-tier higher education [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 108].

1.2. A NEW ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN RUSSIA AND THE TRENDS OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT

The modern worldview has largely influenced the current state of academia through “the reinvention of higher education” [Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, p. 10]. As Russia is one of the largest actors in the international higher education’ arena, these global changes have had an inevitable and considerable effect on the policy-making,

governance and management of Russian universities of today. In order to correspond to the global agenda, New Public Management (NPM) policies have been implemented to many universities across the country, which prioritize accountability, transparency, efficiency, and high-quality standards [Block, Khvatova, p. 761]. Critics of NPM argue that it can lead to a focus on short-term results at the expense of long-term goals and values, such as academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. According to the study [Khvatova, Dushina, p. 250], in Russia the reforms reduced the ability for self-regulation, heightened oversight of educational procedures, and resulted in an expansion of bureaucratic mechanisms. Overall, the application of NPM to universities is a complex and controversial issue that requires careful consideration of the benefits and risks involved.

Khvatova and Dushina discuss the reforms in Russian educational and scientific policy, which heavily rely on formal indicators and rankings to measure scientific achievement and conclude that this approach undermines academic reforms and highlights a lack of legitimacy in the actions taken by managers and administrators [Khvatova, Dushina, p. 251]. Their study suggests the need for a wider public sphere that includes more stakeholders in decision-making and emphasizes the role of values and norms that promote trust among administrators and managers. Personal responsibility and participation of faculty should be encouraged, which could remove the main barrier towards legitimizing novelties and restore academic autonomy.

Speaking about the role of higher education institutions in Russia, there has been a noticeable shift in the common perception of their mission and role in society [Smolentseva, p. 216]. On the national level this shift was provoked by the government initiative that introduced a few academic excellence' programs ("Education", 5-100, Priority 2030) that had a significant impact on Russian universities. The funding that the government allocated to universities allows them to choose the most prospective directions of their activity and focus on the integral transformation. These programs

and their influence on the Russian HE landscape will be discussed in detail in section 1.4.

Kuzminov and Yudkevich claim that while practical considerations are the main driving force behind pursuing higher education in Russia, there is also a recognition of the personal and social benefits that come with obtaining a degree [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 151]. These may include increased social status, personal growth and development, and a sense of accomplishment. Overall, the value placed on higher education in Russia is shaped by a combination of practical and non-practical factors, reflecting the complex motivations and aspirations of individuals in the country.

On the global scale and, in comparison to the earlier periods of their existence, universities all over the world received a set of functions posed on them by the government, population, industry and business. Nowadays universities are expected to serve as a catalyst for new economic ventures and actively contribute to the growth of the knowledge economy. In addition to providing education and conducting research, universities are required to adopt a more business-oriented approach, attract investment, and engage in market activities [Wissema, p. 46]. Moreover, universities now should be responsible for engaging local communities addressing social and environmental challenges. For this reason, a lot of universities' strategic projects in Russia are connected to the challenges that their region faces (research impacting the local community). The government supports these projects as they contribute to the even spatial development of the country.

The above expectations constitute what is commonly known as the third mission of university. In short, it refers to the wider societal role of universities beyond teaching and research. It encompasses activities such as knowledge transfer (open lectures and workshops), innovation and entrepreneurship (supporting start-ups and R&D projects), community engagement, and regional development (joint programs with local industry and business). The third mission of universities is crucial for their relevance and impact in today's society. By embracing this mission and matching it with the strategic goals

of university development, universities can enhance their reputation, attract talented students and faculty, foster innovation and strengthen their connections with the local community [Laredo, p. 443]

Among these trends there is also a high demand in additional professional education (APE), in which universities started to invest heavily recently. The main idea behind it is that new competencies, including digital literacy and a wide set of soft skills emerge rapidly and the universities struggle to update their programs with adequate speed. In addition, the concept of life-long learning and individualised education is becoming a priority every year (and is also included into the academic excellence program's requirement), and the APE system allows to effectively develop and implement it. These programs can help bridge the gap between academia and industry, and provide students with opportunities to work on real-world projects and gain relevant experience. The main strategic advantages of the APE are the following: close communication with the end-user; catering to the needs of specific industries and markets; flexibility in the organisation of training; independence from standards and state accreditation.

Another significant trend in the development of higher education in Russia is the desire to create a strong image and brand of the university and attempts to improve the reputation of the university in various ways [Reznik, Yudina, p. 385]. According to the authors, reputation is an assessment made by the public, based on the opinions of stakeholders regarding the university. This evaluation can be categorised as either internal or external, with the former pertaining to the faculty, administrative staff, and students, while the latter pertains to representatives from outside the university. Many Russian universities strive to be recognizable due to a specific reference to the university's background and reliance on historical heritage (Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University, Baltic Federal University etc.), while others, on the contrary, try to attract with their novelty and originality in order to present the university as a place where new practices are constantly being introduced and modernizations are

taking place at various levels: from the content of courses to the infrastructure (ITMO, Tyumen State University etc.).

It is worth mentioning the digitalization of higher education, which has significantly accelerated due to the pandemic [Goncharova, Daineko, p. 387]. Many universities in Russia have implemented a blended learning program, or have completely converted lectures to an online format. Digitalization has also simplified the process of admission to universities, which is especially important for students from remote regions who seek to enrol in the leading universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Another significant feature is the fact that universities are gradually introducing learning management systems (LMS) as a compulsory element for studying, which allows them to collect a digital footprint, that is, data about students and their activity. Hopefully, in the future, universities will learn how to use this data to improve their programs, but this requires time and specialists who not only know how to analyse this type of data, but also develop a systematic approach based on it.

1.3. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE INITIATIVES IN RUSSIA

Despite the fact that transformational processes in the development of universities are consistently going through the evolution of society and social practices, the government plays a key role in their formation and strengthening. Governments can influence universities in a number of ways, including providing them with funding, regulations or incentives (such as tax breaks, subsidies, or other benefits for start-ups and businesses). However, the most holistic and effective approach in stimulation of HE institutes that is used by many countries is the academic excellence initiatives [Salmi, p.17]. This section will focus on such programs in Russia.

The government initiated a national-level reform for academic excellence twice – first in 2012 (and extended until 2020) and then again in 2021, which is still ongoing. It is important to note that this reform followed previous changes made to the national education system. In 2006-2007, the government launched the "Education" project,

which aimed to encourage innovative development in Russian universities and implement new educational practices [Kliucharev, Neverov, p. 113] To qualify for government funding, universities are required to submit a comprehensive development plan and meet specific selection criteria. Each university is expected to create its own roadmap, outlining strategic goals and milestones for implementation. Priority areas should align with national objectives and promote high-quality education, particularly in underdeveloped regions of Russia. This approach helps to achieve balanced spatial development of higher education and bridge the gap between central and regional universities[2].

The Russian government implemented the 5-100 program, also known as "The Russian Academic Excellence Project", as a major reform to enhance the quality and reputation of at least five universities in Russia and enhance their international rankings. The objective was not only to improve the global competitiveness of these universities but also to boost their research capabilities and attract international students and faculty, thereby promoting at-home internationalization. Key indicators of success included increasing the export of educational services and implementing innovative research practices. The development of human capital, including the recruitment of young specialists and talents, was also emphasized [Kliucharev, Neverov, p. 115].

Talking about the program's result, the administration's strengthened role in university decision-making related to financial resources distribution has led to increased tension between faculty and administration, despite initial plans for cooperation [Губа, Соколов, Цивинская, p. 101]. Additionally, "some institutions had more favourable conditions from the very beginning, and their high performance reflected the advantages of their "family" and geographic location rather than successful leadership", resulting in ambiguous and inconsistent final results of the 5-100 project [Guba, p. 19]. Nevertheless, the government considered the drawbacks of

[2] https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/action/priority2030/

the program and launched another academic excellence initiative – the Priority 2030: “the ultimate goal of the Priority 2030 program is to form more than 100 progressive modern universities by 2030 which become centres of scientific, technological and socio-economic development of the country”[3]. This project aims to encourage universities to drive innovative technological advancements in the regional economy by collaborating with local industries. The project facilitates connections between central and regional universities to share knowledge and implement best practices in teaching and research. It also incentivizes some institutions to restructure their operations by merging with other leading organizations, thereby creating university consortia. Additionally, the program creates opportunities for human resource development and attracts young scholars and experts in higher education [The Russian Excellence Initiative for higher education, p. 1918]. A prerequisite for participation in the new program is the formation of consortia, in which universities should work together with scientific organizations and companies in the real sector of the economy, as well as other universities.

In comparison to the “5-100 project”, the focus is on developing universities as drivers of national development, rather than just improving their international rankings. The success of the “Priority 2030” project will be measured by the impact that universities have on the socio-economic development of the country, as well as their contribution to solving national problems and achieving national goals. Summing up, the “5-100 project” and “Priority 2030” have had a positive impact on the global recognition of Russian universities and the formation of their strategic vision. These initiatives have prompted universities to consider their brand, values, and mission, which was not previously a priority. As a result, universities have transformed their self-perception and role in the community, both locally and globally. Many universities have rebranded, revised their priorities and development strategies, and outlined the

[3] https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/action/priority2030/

characteristics of their applicants and graduates. This has allowed them to better understand stakeholders and adjust their talent attraction strategies. Overall, the reform has been successful in promting universities to rethink their identity and become more competitive both within the country and on the international stage.

1.4. SUMMARY OF THE FIRST CHAPTER

The Russian higher education system is complex and consists of three main types of universities, according to Yudkevich and Kuzminov: research universities or leading universities; vocational training universities; mass universities [Yudkevich, Kuzminov, p. 81]. The share of top-quality universities within the country is not balanced as most of the prospective universities are located in the western part of Russia, in particular, in Moscow and St. Petersburg. To solve this problem, the government decided to support universities by implementing academic excellence programs. The first project "5-100" was mostly focused on international recognition of Russian universities and participation in various rankings, which led to the increase of imitation strategies at universities and was not that successful, according to some experts[4]. Nevertheless, this project still brought a lot of positive changes and allowed universities to formulate their goals for the years ahead and reframe established management and educational practices. After the completion of the "5-100" program, another government initiative "Priority 2030" emerged, which was followed by a considerable shift in the goal setting: from focusing on rankings or metric indicators to the projects contributing to national development. The initiative allows universities to make a transition from the initial stage of their development to a higher level and endeavour new ambitious projects. However, most Russian universities are not able to implement them by simply making changes and adjustments to the existing processes – therefore, a complete transformation of university practices is inevitable.

[4] https://education.forbes.ru/authors/5-100-experts

CHAPTER 2. TRANSFORMATION OF GENERAL EDUCATION AND CORE CURRICULUM IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

The core curriculum refers to a set of courses or subjects that all students are required to take in order to graduate from a particular educational institution or program [Stevens, p. 181]. The term is often confused with the similar conception of "general education", which, in turn, is confused with "liberal education" [Bisesi, p. 210]. General education is defined as "a program that develops students' general knowledge, literacy, skills, and competencies to equip them with the foundation for lifelong learning and advanced academic curricula"[5]. The courses included in the core or general education typically cover fundamental topics in areas such as mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, and the arts. Their main purpose is to ensure that all students receive a well-rounded education and have a common foundation of knowledge and skills as "it provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities" [Wehlburg, p. 3]. Even though the terms "general education" and "core curriculum" may look similar there are some key differences between the two:

1. Scope: Core curriculum tends to be more focused on a specific set of subjects, while general education is broader and may include a wider range of subjects.

2. Depth: Core curriculum courses tend to be more in-depth and rigorous than general education courses, which are designed to provide a basic understanding of a subject.

3. Purpose: The purpose of core curriculum is to ensure that all students have a common foundation of knowledge and skills (universal background), while the purpose of general education is to provide students with a broad range of knowledge and skills that will prepare them for a variety of careers and life situations.

[5] https://research.com/education/what-is-general-education

4. Flexibility: General education requirements are often more flexible than core curriculum requirements, allowing students to choose from a range of courses that meet their interests and goals. Core curriculum requirements are typically more rigid and leave less room for choice or no choice at all.

5. Cohesion: Even though it is not a feature of each core curriculum but integration between its elements is vital and should be clearly articulated.

2.1. BRIEF HISTORY OF GENERAL EDUCATION AND CORE CURRICULUM

General education became a popular movement in many countries during the early 20th century, with many universities adopting a core curriculum that required students to take courses in a variety of subjects outside their major [Stevens, p. 164]. This approach to education was seen as a way to prepare students for citizenship and leadership roles and provide them with a foundation for lifelong learning. Even though these ideas may sound quite modern and be presented as a novelty, they are not the invention of our times.

The “trivium” and “quadrivium” have their roots in ancient Greece, where education was highly valued and seen as a means to develop holistic individuals. The philosopher Plato believed that education should be comprehensive and include physical, moral, and intellectual training. In the Hellenistic period, the trivium and quadrivium were developed as a way to organize and systematize education. The trivium consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, which were considered essential for effective communication and critical thinking. The quadrivium consisted of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, which were necessary for understanding the natural world and the universe's workings [Bugliarello, p. 110].

During the Middle Ages, the trivium and quadrivium became the foundation of education in Europe. They were taught in monasteries and universities, and were considered essential for anyone seeking an education. The trivium was seen as providing the foundation for the study of theology and philosophy, while the

quadrivium was necessary for understanding the natural world and the workings of God. By the 13th century, universities had established a standardized structure, with the trivium forming the fundamental basis of education and the quadrivium leading to a master's degree [Bugliarello, p. 107].

In the Renaissance, there was a renewed interest in classical education, and the trivium and quadrivium were once again emphasized [Charlton, p. 98]. During the Renaissance, the focus of education centred around humanities such as poetry, moral philosophy, rhetoric, and grammar, as well as the study of ancient authors. Humanist scholars believed that a well-rounded education was necessary for developing individuals who could think critically and correspond to the "ideal of the whole man" and good citizens [Schneider, p. 6].

The United States

The debate over general education began in the 19th century and continues to this day. The Yale Report of 1828, which remains influential in higher education today, can be considered the driving force behind the core curriculum debate as it emphasized the importance of providing intellectual enrichment as the ultimate goal of higher education. At that time, students pursued a standardized curriculum to prepare for professions in law, medicine, or the clergy, which included subjects such as Greek, Latin, mathematics, and moral principles [Bourke, Bray, Horton, p. 220].

At the beginning of the 20th century, an American generalist movement "protesting against the specialization involved in the new Germanic-modelled university and the fragmentation of the undergraduate curriculum", revived interest in the trivium and quadrivium as a means of developing individuals who could adapt to changing circumstances and think broadly about complex issues [Stevens, p. 167]. The general education, from their perspective, must provide students with necessary skills such as rhetoric, logic and writing (grammar). Another reason for implementing general education is described as the following: from the early 1920s, American colleges began admitting a significant number of students without specific career aspirations. It led to

the introduction of general education courses to provide them with a range of subjects to study until they determined their vocational path [Bisesi, p. 205].

In the 1930s, Robert Hutchins, who served as president of the University of Chicago, played a significant role in developing the core curriculum. The university introduced "The New Plan" in 1931, which was regarded as "the most thoroughgoing experiment in general education of any college in the United States" [Bell, p. 26]. It involved categorizing university departments into four divisions: Humanities, Social Sciences, Biological Sciences, and Physical Sciences. Students were obligated to take four year-long introductory courses in each of the four divisions, followed by comprehensive exams on each subject. Attendance and letter grades for these courses were not mandatory [Stevens, p. 169]. Even though the core curriculum has been changed dramatically over time, the Chicago University is still following the founding and vital principle behind this idea — "to teach students *how*, not *what*, to think"[6]. Later Hutchins developed a curriculum which is based "on the trivium and quadrivium and conveyed by the study of the Great Books" which model still dominates as the core curriculum at St. John's College [O'Banion, p. 329]. This program was based on the idea that students should read and discuss a set of classic texts from Western civilization in order to develop critical thinking skills, engage in interdisciplinary inquiry, and gain a deeper understanding of the human experience[7]. The Great Books program has been highly influential in shaping liberal arts education in the United States and has inspired similar programs at other colleges and universities.

Hutchins sought to bring order and cohesion to the various fields of knowledge by reorganizing the university and establishing interdisciplinary committees. These committees were designed to facilitate collaboration between individuals from different disciplines and promote a sense of unity in their endeavours [Stevenes, p. 179]. The

[6] https://college.uchicago.edu/academics/core-curriculum
[7] https://www.sjc.edu/academic-programs/undergraduate/great-books-reading-list

role of core curriculum as a tool for organisational change and even transformation of the university will be discussed in section 2.3 more thoroughly.

"The General education in a free society", or the Redbook report released by the Harvard University Committee in 1945 marked another significant milestone for the general education movement. Redbook gained national recognition due to its release at a crucial time when educators were seeking to uphold Western culture and democratic values in the face of fascism and Cold War culture [Stevens, p. 182]. In addition, it aimed to diminish overspecialization and return to the fundamentals of liberal education and the authors made an attempt to raise awareness about the matter of education and question the true purpose of it: "Why is it, then, that education is conceived primarily an intellectual enterprise when, in fact, human nature is so complex?" [Schneider, p. 61]. While Harvard did not fully implement the recommendations, they influenced numerous general education programs.

In the late 1970s, a lack of proficiency in basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills among American students prompted the revival of general education courses, which many universities in the 1980s sought to emulate through Chicago's core curriculum [Hirsch, p. 12]. Nowadays educators have identified four key outcomes and objectives that are essential for students in the modern world: critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, and communication. These skills are not limited to either liberal education or career-oriented education, but rather form a core of integrated learning that is valuable for every student. This highlights the need for a comprehensive and interconnected curriculum that combines essential elements of both types of education, which is the concept of "Essential Education" gaining ground [O'Banion, p. 330] .

Russian Empire, the USSR and modern Russia

It should be noted that by the term "general education" the researchers often understood the implementation of basic education among citizens which makes it hard

to find the relevant information on the issue of the discussion. The term “core curriculum” is, in turn, a relatively new concept in Russian tertiary education.

General education in Russia is strongly related to the establishment of higher education institutions and has a long history dating back to the 18th century. One fascinating example of the implemented general education in Russian Empire was the Cadet Corps established in St. Petersburg in 1731 under the guidance of Field Marshal Burchard C. von Munnich. This institution was exclusively for nobles and its primary goal was to train officers who were competent in military science and had “a broad education and acquaintance with the social graces of nobility. The curriculum included military disciplines, Russian, German, French, Latin, philosophy, jurisprudence, geography, arithmetic, geometry, dancing, fencing, and drawing” [Lipski, p. 208]. During their studies they established a club where they discussed foreign literature and “recited the products of their own creativity” [Lipski, p. 209]. Thus, the officers of the cadet corps received a well-rounded education, which at that time was difficult to obtain. Lipski believes that this institution has significantly contributed to the development of Russian literature.

In 1755, Empress Elizabeth founded the first state university in Moscow, which offered courses in theology, law, and medicine [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 7]. The university was later renamed Moscow State University and became one of the most prestigious universities in Russia. The establishment of the university was an early indication of a key aspect of the country's higher education institutions – their state governance and political influence. Moscow University was established to educate the privileged class and maintain the existing social hierarchy, while also providing opportunities for gifted individuals from lower classes to advance. This recognition of the societal function of higher education has significantly influenced the country's educational policies [Kaplan, p. 47]. However, prior to 1762, individuals from noble families were obligated to serve in the military, making it difficult for them to attend university. People outside of this stratum had limited access to general education,

further hindering their ability to pursue higher education [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 4]. Therefore, in the 18th century the access to education in the Russian Empire was strongly related to social origin and ordinary people, like peasants, could not obtain it. It was only in the 19th century that comprehensive education became available to the middle class and began to spread widely.

In the 19th century, there was a period of educational system development and general education became more accessible. The government was interested in "expanding the educated stratum of the population and providing well-educated officials to the state's governing apparatus" [Kaplan, p. 49]. Notable reforms were established to spread general education to the masses, including Higher Courses for Women and introducing co-educational classes at school. It is widely accepted among the researchers that Göttingen University served as a source of inspiration for the establishment of new universities in Russia, that is most of the new higher education institutions were constructed following the Göttingen model. By implementing this model, Russia adopted an educational approach that prioritized "general knowledge over specialized vocational training" [Kaplan, p. 44]. Interestingly, at the same time Göttingen University itself specialized on law studies and was famous for its law faculty [Miert, p. 395].

During the Soviet era, general education was heavily influenced by Marxist ideology: "a cluster course in Marxism-Leninism was developed and made compulsory in all institutes and universities" [Kaplan, p. 52]. In addition, the government placed a strong emphasis on science and technology, and universities were expected to produce graduates who could contribute to the development of the Soviet economy. At the same time, religion, for obvious reasons, was abolished from all types of educational institutions. University should have followed a utilitarian principle as the country was needed to facilitate industrialization and economic growth. Therefore, the government decided to conduct a policy of "centralization, unification, overwhelming specialization, and rigidly standard curricula" in higher education" [Kaplan, p. 55].

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a shift towards a more liberal education system. Universities were given more autonomy, and students were given more freedom to choose their courses of study. However, the government still played a significant role in funding and regulating higher education.

Today, general education in Russia continues to evolve, acting as a tool for various purposes, including university transformation. When comparing Russian universities to those in other countries, it is evident that the Russian higher education system requires longer periods of study. Undergraduate degrees take 4-5 years to complete and require a higher number of contact hours compared to the international average. This is due to the shorter education period in senior secondary school. Yudkevich and Kuzminov claim that “by the end of their schooling, Russian school students have accumulated an average of three years less time in studies than their contemporaries in OECD countries” [Kuzminov, Yudkevich, p. 20]. Therefore, "general education" subjects such as foreign languages, mathematics, social and economic studies, and philosophy are usually completed during the junior university years. Mostly they are provided with the aim to fill in the knowledge gaps of the former schoolchildren. According to educational policy in Russia, each university may choose its own general subjects and form the core but it is not a widespread practice yet. However, there is a noticeable shift towards universities' conscious effort to create a coherent core curriculum and make it a valuable part of the studying process. The unique core is implemented in a few universities such as ITMO, SAS, TSU, UTMN, IKBFU, HSE etc. Each university relies on different core curriculum models, but they are united by the common strategy to provide their first-year students with fundamental skills and competencies and form an “ideal graduate” that represents their values and mission.

The number of hours for completing general disciplines is usually determined by the Ministry of Education but the content may vary even though it should align with the governmental policies. The common proportion of general education at Russian

universities comprises up to 25% of higher professional education curricula. Starting from 2023, all Russian universities are required to increase the number of hours (with the extension of contact hours) in the history curriculum and introduce a mandatory subject “Fundamentals of Russian Statehood” (72 hours in total). It will consist of five parts: "What is Russia", "The Russian state-civilization", "Russian worldview and values of Russian civilization", "Political structure" and "Challenges of the future and development of the country".[8]

Summing up, despite the fact that general education became available only in the 19th century, it played a significant role in the transformation of Russian society. Education was strongly influenced by the state, which is why general courses included such disciplines as military disciplines, and in the 20th century emphasis was placed on Marxist theory. As in European countries, general education was replaced by over-specialization in the industrial era, but in 1990th the government changed its strategy to a more liberal side. Nowadays the universities are required to teach students essential soft skills, which include the ability to work in a team, creative thinking, communication and the ability to solve complex problems. Since these skills are universal for all majors, the university prefers general education disciplines, which potentially may include the acquisition of these competencies. Hence, there is a noticeable trend towards the creation of a university core that would cover the need to teach a large number of students the necessary skills and form the foundation for their further development within the university.

2.2. GENERAL EDUCATION APPROACHES AND CORE CURRICULUM MODELS

With the development of different disciplines and pedagogical discoveries, general education began its transformation and division into different models. This

[8] https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/press-center/news/novosti-ministerstva/66405/

section will discuss the characteristics of these models, as well as approaches to compiling the core. When drawing up a model of general education courses, each university must independently decide what priorities it sets for itself. According to Newton there are four dominant paradigms that must be considered when planning and designing a general education model:

"• unity versus fragmentation (knowledge),

• breadth versus depth (student learning),

• generalist versus specialist (faculty competence),

• Western culture versus cultural diversity (content)" [Newton, p. 166].

According to each university's values, one or another frame is taken as the basis of general education courses. Newton highlights three main types of core curriculum models in which realisations (and variations within one model) are prevalent in most American universities:

1. the Great Books Model: "The focus of general education becomes not the latest ideas or discoveries of contemporary scholars but an in-depth historical review of the works of pivotal thinkers whose ideas changed human history" [Newton, 2000, p. 170];

2. the Scholarly Discipline Model: "The scholarly disciplines are the storehouses of human knowledge and the ways which humanity has developed over the centuries to understand the world" [Newton, 2000, p. 172];

3. the Effective Citizen Model, which is also called "civic/utilitarian model" in other papers: "Courses are designed to communicate relevant information, to spell out its implications for life in modern society, and to develop the skills and values required for effective citizenship" [Newton, 2000, p. 174]

Each model represents a specific view on education and its aims and has its historical background and various applications. According to the Great Books Model, a historical examination of the most influential works is a better method to promote student development and intellectual breadth, rather than emphasizing the latest research in specific fields. This model requires a rigid training in text analysis and

writing and is quite challenging for the new generation that do not read that much. The Great Books curriculum seems to be the most unusual among Russian modern universities even though some institutions (like the School of Advanced Studies[9] and Tomsk State University[10]) implement features of this model in their programs. In contrast, the Scholarly Discourse Model proposes that a general introduction taken from various disciplines and incorporating the latest thinking within them is the best approach for fostering "intellectual breadth and development" [Bourke, Bray, Horton, p. 223]. This model is most common in Russian universities. However, its main drawback is the widespread inconsistency between courses as they are usually taught independently and do not require interdisciplinary work and collaboration between faculty. Nevertheless, this model still may provide a well-rounded scientific background and include interdisciplinarity.

The Effective Citizen Model emphasises the importance of providing students with intellectual foundations in areas that will be relevant in the 21st century, rather than relying on "nostalgic approaches or disciplinary fragmentation" [Bourke, Bray, Horton, p. 223]. This shift towards active citizenship is seen as a means to foster a sense of responsibility and engagement among students, and to encourage them to take an active role in shaping their communities and society as a whole. It is also seen as a way to promote social cohesion, by bringing people from different backgrounds and perspectives together to work towards common goals [Constructing the Higher Education Student: Perspectives from across Europe, p. 115]

Three models of general education in figure 1 are presented and compared according to a set of characteristics such as the key insight, role of the university, ideal graduate, emphasis, faculty, likely locations etc. It is likely that, although each model

[9] https://sas.utmn.ru/ru/core-courses/#%D1%84%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%84%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B5-%20%D0%BA%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B8

[10] https://www.tsu.ru/education/bacalavr/core_bacalavr.php

represents a unique structure, universities may try to integrate elements of these models to some extent and achieve a more comprehensive approach to general education, the courses of which are open to experimentation and allow decision-makers to choose the best option for each particular institution.

There are plenty of other models to general education that are also worth mentioning. The most widespread ones are the following:

- Distribution Requirements Model, or "core distribution areas". This model requires students to take a set number of courses in different subject areas, such as humanities, social and natural sciences, and mathematics. This model is implemented at Yale College where students are obliged to take at least two course credits in each disciplinary field[11].
- Thematic Model: this model organizes courses around a central theme or topic, such as globalization, sustainability, or justice. Students take courses from different subject areas that all relate to the theme [McNertney, Ferrandino, p. 61].
- Integrated Model: this model integrates different subject areas and disciplines into a cohesive curriculum. Students take courses that are designed to build on each other and provide a comprehensive education [Wehlburg, p. 10]. This model will be discussed in more detail in the next sections.
- Open Curriculum Model: this model allows students to design their own core curriculum by choosing courses that meet certain requirements. Students have more flexibility and autonomy in designing their education [Gosper, p. 55]. This model is implemented at Brown University where it has been used for more than 50 years[12].
- Common Intellectual Experience Model: this model focuses on a

[11] http://catalog.yale.edu/ycps/yale-college/distributional-requirements/
[12] https://www.brown.edu/academics/undergraduate/open-curriculum

shared experience that all students participate in, such as a seminar or project. This experience provides a foundation for critical thinking and analysis that students can build on throughout their education [McNertney, Ferrandino, p. 61].

Table 1. *Three Models of General Education*

	Great Books	Scholarly Discipline	Effective Citizen
Key insight	Focus on the perennial human questions	Disciplines as the accumulated wisdom and ways of understanding the world humankind has developed over the centuries	Education in the service of self-reforming democracy
Role of the university	Handing on the tradition	Vigorous developer/extender of the knowledge and methods of the academic disciplines	Progressive force for democratic change
Substance of curriculum	Pivotal ideas/ authors of Western tradition	Key concepts and methods of inquiry as defined by the disciplines	Knowledge/skills vital to living in and improving modern society
Ideal graduate	Classically educated through encounters with classic works and authors	Beginning practitioner of the disciplines	An effective citizen
Emphasis	Unity	Method	Action
Breadth/ depth	Broad review of the substance of the Western tradition	Sharp introduction to the range of basic disciplines	Comprehensive introduction to current knowledge
Source of coherence	Unified by a historical review of key responses to the perennial questions	The individual student piecing together the mosaic of the disciplines	The focus on preparing graduates with skills/ knowledge for modern society
Faculty	Broadly educated generalists	Disciplinary experts	Instructors committed to educate nonspecialists in their areas of specialty
Likely locations	Liberal arts colleges/special programs in larger universities	Research-oriented universities with strong departments	Institutions with strong client-centered orientation and sense of public mission
Orientation	Looks to past for enduring ideas and values to form and guide students in the present	Instills an understanding of the intellectual treasures and scholarly methods that are society's intellectual heritage	Develops the tools and commitment needed to shape the future
Inspiration/ advocates	Hutchins/ Adler/Bennett Cheney/Bloom	Bruner/Phenix/ professional disciplinary societies	Dewey/Childs

Fig. 1. Three models of general education[13]

- Optional curriculum: this model implies that students should have the option to select from a range of core curriculum options, which he calls an optional curriculum. Under this approach, students would choose a specific area of focus, and their course selections and other educational experiences would be tailored accordingly.

[13] Newton, R. R. (2000). Tensions and models in general education planning. *The Journal of General Education, 49(3),* 165-181.

Summing up, over its long history general education has been reflected in various forms that are still being improved. Each model has a large list of both advantages and disadvantages that must be considered. Before implementing the core of the university, it is necessary to perform a number of procedures that will help determine which model will most effectively reflect the values, mission of the university and its view on education and its role in the society.

2.3. WHAT IS TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: THE MODEL OF THE "GENERATIONS OF UNIVERSITIES"

Before diving into the topic of university transformation models it is necessary to differentiate between a few significant notions considering this field: governance, management, an institutional change[14] and finally, transformation itself. All these notions are tightly connected to each other but have distinctive features.

University governance refers to the system and processes through which a university is managed and operates. This includes the structures, policies, and decision-making processes that guide the institution's strategic direction, academic programs, financial management, and other aspects of its operations. The governance of public universities is usually heavily impacted by government policy, with a focus on efficiency [Trakman, p. 67]. University management refers to the administration of a university, which includes overseeing academic programs, research and social initiatives, campus operations and dealing with corporate culture. A strong culture is characterized by a high level of alignment between the values, goals, hierarchical structure, and strategies of the organization's members and can provide support for strategic management and serve as a basis for adaptation during the transformational process [Sporn, p. 48]. In other words, the university administration serves as an

[14] It should not be confused with the organisational change theory that includes various forms of changes

intermediary between the rector and their team and other stakeholders of the university, such as faculty members and students. Currently, the administration has much more power than it used to have and is responsible for strengthening the image of the university and the formation of corporate values.

Institutional change refers to the process of altering the rules, norms, and structures that shape the behaviour of organisations, groups, and individuals within a society or system. Kingston defines this process as “a centralised, collective-choice process in which rules are explicitly specified by a collective political entity, such as the community or the state, and individuals and organisations engage in collective action, conflict, and bargaining to try to change these rules for their own benefit” [Kingston, p. 1153]. According to Brousseau and Raynaud, institutional changes often originate as voluntary, local experiments conducted in private settings. This approach has become extremely common among universities, and many are constantly experimenting to find a unique way to foster their development [Brousseau, Raynaud, p. 71].

Transformation and institutional change are related concepts, but they have different meanings. Transformation refers to a fundamental and radical set of changes in the way an organisation operates, makes decisions, and behaves [Kezar, Eckel, p. 44]. These changes are always interdependent and cannot be implemented separately with the same effect. This process involves a complete overhaul of the organisation's structure, culture, processes, and systems, with the aim of achieving a new vision or strategic goals. In contrast, institutional change refers to a more incremental and evolutionary process of adapting to changing circumstances. It involves modifying existing structures, policies, and practices to improve performance, efficiency, and effectiveness. Institutional change is often driven by internal factors such as feedback from stakeholders, assessment of outcomes, or changes in leadership while transformation is usually driven by external factors such as technological innovation, globalisation, demographic shifts, or economic disruptions [Krasteva, Antonova, p.

348]. To sum up, transformation is a more disruptive form of change that aims to spread a new type of culture on the various levels of operation (often it leads to a reinvention of the vision and strategy), while institutional change is a more gradual and adaptive form of change that aims to improve existing structures and practices.

Every new type of a society requires the evolution and advancement of the higher education model, since its main participants become key actors of the new system and they need to integrate into the existing reality. Flexner defines university as "an expression of the age, as well as an influence operating upon both present and future", so this institution in comparison to the other traditional ones "is not outside but inside the general social fabric of a given era" [Kerr, p. 4]. Therefore, each historical period is characterised by new HE models that reflect its worldview, basic values and practices. Many researchers [Wissema, p. 20; Lapteva, Efimov, p. 2690; Pawlowski, p. 52] use the "generation of universities" model, which largely reflects the stages of development of universities throughout history and describes their distinctive features.

- Traditional HEI 1.0.

HEI 1.0 refers to the traditional model of higher education institutions that have been in existence for centuries. These institutions typically focus on providing classroom-based instruction and rely heavily on textbooks, lectures, and exams as the primary means of evaluating student learning. The emphasis is on knowledge acquisition and retention, rather than on developing critical thinking skills or practical applications of knowledge [Wissema, p. 33]. That is the reason why university of this type may struggle to keep up with rapidly evolving societal changes and address complex issues in a holistic manner, as these topics require "greater openness, dialogue, and interdisciplinary collaboration" [Giesenbauer, Müller-Christ, p.10].

- Modern HEI 2.0

In the 19th century, Wilhelm von Humboldt revolutionised universities in Germany by establishing research universities: "the central principle of what came to be seen as the Humboldtian tradition was the "union of teaching and research"

[Anderson, p. 2]. The author claims that the model of research universities underwent significant changes during its migration to different societies, as it was adapted to suit each society's unique political, social, and cultural values. For instance, the United States combined the German research approach with the English collegiate tradition and the American concept of serving society [Perkin, p. 160]. This new university model was an early manifestation of the modern worldview and emphasized the research process, resulting in greater flexibility and a focus on continuous improvement and process optimization. In the modern understanding, HEI 2.0 represents a shift towards incorporating technology into the traditional model of higher education.

- Postmodern HEI 3.0.

HEI 3.0 or the third-generation (which is also called entrepreneurial) university (3GU) takes the integration of technology even further, with a focus on personalised learning experiences and adaptive learning technologies that can tailor instruction to individual student needs. Clark's concept of the entrepreneurial university highlights the importance of universities in driving economic growth and social development [Clark, p. 105]. According to Clark, entrepreneurial universities are characterised by a focus on innovation, collaboration, and engagement with external stakeholders. In practice, this means that entrepreneurial universities prioritise research and development that has practical applications and can be commercialised.

Wissema defines 3GU as incubators that “actively pursue the exploitation or commercialisation of the knowledge they create, making it their third objective, equal in importance to the objectives of scientific research and education” [Wissema, p. 13]. In postmodern higher education institutions, the focus is shifted away from positivism and objectivism towards the subjective viewpoints of research participants and students [Giesenbauer, Müller-Christ, p. 4]. This model also emphasises the importance of lifelong learning and continuous skill development, with a greater emphasis on competency-based education and alternative credentialing [Rieckmann, p. 131]. Overall, the 3GU model represents a shift towards a more practical and applied

approach to higher education, with a focus on creating tangible economic and social benefits.

- Integrative HEI 4.0.

HEI 4.0 represents the most advanced stage of university evolution, with a focus on cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality and gamification, and close integration with the local society. This model emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation, with a greater emphasis on entrepreneurship and real-world problem-solving. HEI 4.0 also involves a shift towards open education resources and open access publishing, with a greater emphasis on global connectivity and collaboration. Lapteva and Efimov conceptualize a university 4.0 as “an infrastructure platform for a variety of activities (hub)” that will serve to a “cognitive society” or “community of intellectuals” and satisfy its demands in intellectual enhancement [Lapteva, Efimov, p. 2691-2692].

In table 1 all four phases of higher education institution development are summarised and compared according to four main spheres of university activity: “general focus, education, research, governance”. Overall, the theory of university generations generalises the processes that occur during university transformation in a new social setting. However, it is important to note that these terms have been used to describe different stages of technological advancement and innovation in higher education, but they do not necessarily correspond to specific historical or cultural contexts, especially when analysing the situation in developing countries (including Russia). It is significant to approach these models critically and with an understanding of their limitations and potential biases.

Table 1

Four phases of higher education institution (HEI) development[15]

General focus on	Traditional HEI 1.0 input, authority, and hierarchy	Modern HEI 2.0 output, efficiency, and competition	Postmodern HEI 3.0 dialogue with stakeholders and learners	Integrative HEI 4.0 systematic solutions, co-creativity, and sustainability
education	● Teacher-centric; ● The scientist reads his books ● Memorizing standardized knowledge ● Learning for recognition and academic titles	● Test-centric ● Disseminating factual knowledge, analytic strategies, and sound methods ● Modules and projects ● Learning for the test ● Learning as a competitive game for future success	● Learner-centric ● Competencies-oriented transfer of self-reflexive knowledge ● Focus on dialogical seminars and project-based learning ● Blended learning ● Learning as personal growth	● System-centric, holistic ● Whole-person approach ● Dynamic balance between subject matter, group, individual learners and context ● Research-based learning ● Co-creative and mindful learning
research	● Search for absolute truth ● Self-concept: observing universal natural laws ● Focus on strong theories based on both deduction and induction ● Construction of disciplines	● Standardization of research process and peer-review ● Self-concept: testing and applying natural laws ● Competition for grants ● Measurement for success with rankings, impact factors, etc. ● Focus on quantitative methods	● Inter- and transdisciplinarity ● Action research, self-concept: understanding social dynamics ● Dialogical research processes dealing with societal issues ● Integration of qualitative research method	● Transdisciplinarity ● Co-creative research ● Self-concept: co-creating systemic transformation ● Global action university ● Living lab approach ● Focus on real-life solutions ● Idea of open science

[15] Giesenbauer, Müller-Christ, p. 9

Table 1 continued

governance, operations and culture	● Focused on teaching, basic research and technological transfer, building palaces of knowledge: impressive building ● Legitimacy by authority ● One - dimensional approach to sustainability	● Focus on quantitative growth ● Rapid growth in functional buildings with little energy awareness ● Entrepreneurial activity ● Science parks ● Sustainable development as a management task	● HEI is a place for meeting diverse yet like-minded people ● Facilitating community and individual expression, diversity management ● Legitimacy by participation ● Goal of climate neutrality ● Sustainable development as a community task and third mission content	● HEI as a space for encounter, reflection, and inspiration ● Physical and virtual integration of different societal and ecological systems, whole-institution approach to sustainability ● Additional fourth mission: co-creation for sustainability

2.4. CORE CURRICULUM AS A TOOL FOR UNIVERSITY REINVENTION

The last section of the literature review contains an analysis of a few universities' cases that began their transformation with a change in the core curriculum. This will prepare the basis for discussing the case of this paper and expand the general understanding of the transformation processes in the university environment. As the changes regarding general education are happening continuously (which indicates that this field is fertile ground for experimentation), there are plenty of various examples. This sector discusses three of them.

The first one is the case of The University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) where a reform of the core curriculum took place in 2008. The reform initiative at UNL remained concentrated on a singular inquiry, which was the question: "What knowledge or skills should every undergraduate student possess upon completing their education, regardless of their chosen field of study or professional aspirations?". The transparency of UNL's reform process helped maintain a prominent and valuable perception of

general education as a crucial aspect of the university's mission. Taking into account the structural changes that have occurred as a result of the reform, the position of Director of General Education has been introduced to improve interaction with stakeholders. He has established faculty learning communities, promoting interdisciplinary discourse within university. Overall, the reform presented an opportunity for units to showcase their strategic significance, which elevates their status within the institution and makes general education more valuable and meaningful for participants of the process [Mitchell, Scott, p. 13].

Another example of a core curriculum implementation during the university transformation is the case of Tomsk State University (TSU). In 2018 they decided to launch an educational project aimed at forming the identity of a TSU bachelor. Identity encompasses not only specialized professional training but also general student's educational experience, enabling them to identify as a valued member of the university community and embrace its ethos of beliefs and principles. This process contributes to the development of the university community of graduates. The TSU core curriculum project served as a platform for educational innovations that brought together students from four pilot faculties, as well as teachers and structural divisions. All of the participants have undergone advanced training in educational technologies that allow them to design courses included into the core [Осаченко, p. 310].

In addition, for the "Bachelor's Core" program a unique method for recruiting and training teaching staff was developed to teach the module disciplines in a unified approach. This includes a combination of professional development, competition, and methodological support system to ensure an integrated approach. Stolbova claims that the project's educational technologies are highly regarded by the teachers, who also highlight the potential for fostering students' creativity during their participation in the "Bachelor's Core" program. Moreover, a “School of moderators of educational events” was established that functions as a structured program for training senior students to organize group activities for first-year students and serve as teaching assistants

[Столбова, p. 582]. These changes undoubtedly influenced the work of the whole university since it required rethinking old teaching methods and practices, as well as creating new target models in education management and university positioning.

The last core curriculum experiment is the case of UTMN, where the university space was divided into three independent elements: major, electives and a unified core[16]. This separation allowed the university to move to individual educational trajectories that required each student to complete the core modules, and then gradually begin to choose from the various disciplines represented at the university. Thus, the core serves as an auxiliary tool to ensure a smooth transition to an educational space that requires a large number of decisions from students.

[16] https://news.utmn.ru/news/obrazovanie/551446/

CHAPTER 3. ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE CORE CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN IMMANUEL KANT BALTIC FEDERAL UNIVERSITY

In the previous chapters we discussed the main topics related to the higher education landscape in Russia, general education & core curriculum history and development, various types and models of general education, as well as the theory of university generations which is relevant to the present study. This literature serves as a solid background to the main topic of this research, which is related to the project of core curriculum implementation at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (IKBFU) and the further institutional transformations that followed.

3.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Revamping a university's core curriculum is a major transformation that impacts the fundamental aspects of the institution's identity, including leadership, research, teaching, academic programs, and typology. The curriculum serves as the foundation for these essential functions [Hay & Marais, p. 231]. When initiating general education reform, faculty and administrators often mistakenly view it as a straightforward process of restructuring the curriculum. However, such reform entails not only curricular changes but also cultural changes [Awbrey, p. 6] and in many cases requires structural and organisational changes as well. Fisher and Torbert claim that transformation "involves developing commitment to a new vision along with increased trust and capacity for learning" [Fisher and Torbert, p. 141]. The belief that a company's culture significantly affects its long-term performance is backed by several studies, therefore in order to successfully carry out transformational change, it is crucial to comprehend the significance of institutional culture [Kleiner, Corrigan, p. 25].

General education reform can be understood through the lens of organisational change theory, which explores how institutions and organisations adapt to new environments and challenges. In this context, the educational institution is the

organisation undergoing change, and the challenge is to improve the quality and relevance of education and enhance the university's inner processes. Kleiner and Corrigan highlight three types of organisational change:

- Developmental change (correcting existing policies, processes and methods etc.);
- Transitional change (the implementation of a new product, the transition to a new operational system etc.);
- Transformational change [Kleiner, Corrigan, p. 26].

As our case is related to the last type, we will describe it in more detail. As the authors suggest, transformational change is the most "traumatic" for the organisation as it is followed by a series of changes that require significant level of adaptation from the workers:

- "Reformed mission and core values;
- Altered power and status;
- Reorganisation of the processes;
- Revised interaction patterns;
- New executives" [Kleiner, Corrigan, p. 27].

One example of transformational change in universities is the shift towards online learning and digital technologies. This change has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but was already underway before the crisis. By embracing online learning, universities can expand access to education and reach new audiences as well as reduce costs and improve efficiency by leveraging technology to automate administrative processes and streamline operations [Clark, Brammer, p. 453]. However, this shift also requires significant investments in infrastructure and training, as well as changes to pedagogy and curriculum design. It may also raise concerns about the quality and rigour of online education, and require new forms of accreditation and

assessment. Nonetheless, the potential benefits of this transformational change are significant, and many universities are already taking steps to embrace it.

For the current analysis a framework proposed by Eckel in his paper “Assessing Change and Transformation in Higher Education: An Essential Task for Leaders” was taken because it provides a holistic description of what is transformation at university and describes which evidence must occur during its examination [Eckel, p. 80]. By evidence Eckel means changes in policies, budgets, pedagogy or teaching, student learning, the introduction of new departments and institutional structures, as well as new decision-making structures. The author also discusses cultural evidence of transformation, which includes changes in the ways groups or individuals interact with one another, new relationships with stakeholders, and changes in the language the university talks about itself. These topics were a valuable source of inspiration for conducting this research and during the interviews. Moreover, the author discusses the importance of assessing change and transformation in higher education for university leaders. It highlights the challenges of implementing change and transformation, including resistance to change and lack of communication. He developed several useful schemes for identifying evidence of transformation, which were used in this study during in-depth interviews.

Another framework that was taken to analyse the core curriculum design is the approach “five features of effective core courses” developed by Weissman & Boning [Weissman, Boning, p. 157]. The authors were examining the process of core curriculum change at Saint Louis University, which implemented the SLU2000 inquire course program. The evaluation of the program has yielded substantial evidence, indicating its significant impact on students. The program's core courses have fostered proactive and involved learners, resulting in the integration of beginning college students into academic and social settings. The researchers conducted focus groups with over 150 students enrolled in the inquiry courses and engaged in faculty discussions.

After these steps, five key features have emerged as the most indicative of the program's effectiveness. These are:

1. “creating community through collaborative learning;
2. fostering student ownership of learning;
3. connecting academic ideas with other disciplines and with the real world;
4. evaluating student learning through active experiences;
5. and sharing the experience of the discipline” [Weissman, Boning, p. 157].

Overall, for the current analysis a theory of organisational change and the frameworks for core curriculum assessment and university transformation in evidence were used which allowed to present a comprehensive picture of the project realisation and outcomes. In the next section the university context and its main strategic projects are discussed.

3.2. IMMANUEL KANT BALTIC FEDERAL UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

In this section a brief overview of the university's history is provided, highlighting its progress in a relatively short span of time. Initially, IKBFU was a small provincial university primarily focused on teaching and had limited resources and a small student body. The university's main objective was to train professionals in significant fields for the region. Despite having close ties with the city and region, the university did not play a significant role in the area's development due to its lack of resources.

However, the situation started to change in 2011 when the university participated in the Federal Program of Development (5-100), which provided it with a strategic vision and adequate funding. As a result, the university was able to transition to a new phase of development and became a scientific centre with an international agenda. Now it has a large student body – 10000+ students, 11% of which are international students. The university offers a wide range of educational programs: 46 bachelor's degree courses, 38 master's degree courses and 4 specialty programs, 23 postgraduate courses.

Over the past decade, the university has strengthened and expanded its collaborations with both domestic and foreign educational and scientific organisations, which has enabled it to establish partnerships in the Baltic region, Western Europe, and Southeast Asia [Strategic Program of IKBFU]. Consequently, the university has created opportunities for integration into the global educational agenda.

In 2021, to participate in the “Priority 2030” program, the university announced three strategic goals and five projects and received a grant in the track of "Territorial and (or) industry leadership" which implies that it must invest in the projects that will form the fundamental for the region development and strengthen the relationships between the university and local community and business projects. Thus, IKBFU is a region-forming university, it is inseparable in its policies from the Kaliningrad Region terroir and positions itself as a driver of regional development [Strategic Program of IKBFU].

Being a participant of the “Priority 2030”, the university strengthened its position and invested heavily in the organisational and infrastructural changes – from educational and managerial practices to the orientation on R&D projects in the scientific field and construction of a new campus. The strategic goals of IKBFU for the next decade are the following:

1. Create a trans-regional open network holding;
2. Create a "university-terroir";
3. Create a project university oriented on innovations (R&D projects)[17].

These ambitious goals were followed by the implementation of the strategic projects that were designed after the consideration of the following parameters:

1. history and background of the university (achievements of the past years);

[17] https://kantiana.ru/priority2030/

2. development of the Kaliningrad region as an exclave of Russian Federation, consideration of various economic models, instability and geopolitical safety as the main priority;

3. a narrow field of research, with a small number of knowledgeable specialists and the opportunity to attract them to the university;

4. global agenda with equal opportunities for all countries (neuroscience, IT, genetic engineering, ethics of the modern technological world), that is an undeveloped and/or inadequately studied area[18];

All these factors were taken into account when forming the main strategic projects of IKBFU[19]:

I. “The Puzzle” project is aimed at developing and implementing intelligent decision support systems in socio-economic areas.

II. “CLER” (customised life and educational route) or the formation of innovative digital systems applied to individual educational trajectory.

III. The project "Cognitive Longevity" is aimed at creating systems to minimise the risks of neurodegenerative diseases and psychosomatic pathologies.

IV. The business project of the “Baltic Valley Business Centre” implies the creation of a technological platform for the development of the innovative potential of the Kaliningrad region.

V. “The Safety Equation” project, which aims at developing mathematical models for geopolitical analysis and forecasting of external and internal threats.

In addition, the university was making attempts to achieve a high level of internationalisation both at-home (creating conditions for attracting international students) and abroad (network programs) and had a great potential for expanding its influence even further, considering its unique location and well-established networks with a wide range of universities in Baltic region and beyond. However, in 2022, along

[18] This information was taken from the interview with the vice-rector for scientific development
[19] https://kantiana.ru/priority2030/

with the acute geopolitical situation, the university faced unexpected challenges that significantly impacted its direction of development and strategic vision. The loss of territorial partners led to the suspension or termination of joint programs with European countries, forcing the university to enter new educational markets and develop a strategy for maintaining its national and international status.

In 2022, the university ranks 30th in the national ranking of Russian universities by Interfax[20]. Summing up, IKBFU continues to work on gradual transformation and strives to move to the model of an entrepreneurial university, investing in the creation of lasting relationships with the industry of the region and attracting scientists, including from other Russian regions and abroad. In addition, in 2021 the university has opened a new department – "the centre for the transformation of education", which was created to build a new educational policy and strategy for the development of human resources. This centre, in close cooperation with the online learning centre, became the main initiators of the core curriculum project at the university, which will be discussed in the section 3.4.

3.3. CORE CURRICULUM DESIGN AND THE STEPS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The connection of the core curriculum to one of the strategic projects

The main goal of the current educational policy at the university is to create an innovative educational ecosystem that ensures the implementation of project programs that form students' critical object-oriented thinking. Over the next decade, the main focus of educational policy will be the adaptation of education to the individual characteristics of students (customization) in order to develop their unique competencies and meet their specific career opportunities. [Strategic Program of IKBFU, 2022]. The customization will allow to form students' personal competence profile that ensures individual educational trajectory. This process includes the

[20] https://academia.interfax.ru/ru/university/58/?page=ratings

formation of a digital infrastructure and conducting a series of project sessions to identify the potential of students for various types of joint project activities based on various diagnostic tools (cognitive, psychophysiological and personal characteristics). As the development strategy of IKBFU suggests, customization of education is different from the traditional individualization (individual educational trajectory), since it is aimed at integrating not only disciplinary-thematic resources, but also at including such categories as lifelong learning, interdisciplinary projects and impact communities in the educational space.

Overall, this project aims at the formation of thematic communities within the university that carry out research, technological and entrepreneurial projects at the various levels that contribute to regional and national development goals. Being the basis for the creation and development of the educational model of the university, CLER sets requirements for the main policies of the university, primarily for personnel policy (the need to prepare a team of changes capable of retaining and translating the goals and values of the project), for digital transformation, creation of IT systems and customization modules, as well as to youth and research policies.

The construction of the common core for all educational programs is strongly related to the CLER project. In particular, the creation of a decision support system is required for the formation of an individual trajectory of education and personal development of each student. Before making serious decisions about the further trajectory of their educational path, students should receive a set of necessary skills that allow them to navigate more effectively in the educational space of the university. That is why it was decided to form a first-year core curriculum, which, according to the assumptions of the project designers, should help the students with further self-determination.

The design of the project

The first part of the project could be described using Hilda Taba's basic curriculum model represented in figure 2. It includes seven steps that allow to create a

comprehensive core curriculum program. We will describe each step and comment on its realisation during the project sessions that were held in the summer period of 2022.

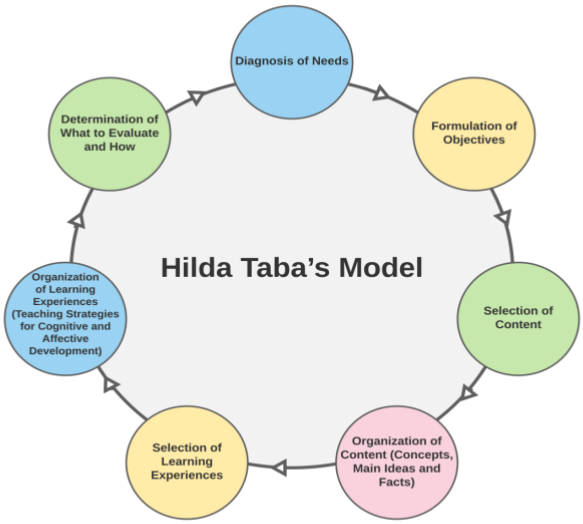

Fig. 2. Hilda Taba's Model of core curriculum design

1. **Diagnosis of needs**: this involves identifying the individual characteristics of students, such as their learning styles, interests, and abilities. At this step it was important to identify both students' and university needs and to connect the core curriculum with the strategic goals and mission of the university as well as with the CLER project.

2. **Formulation of objectives**: based on the diagnosis of the needs, objectives are formulated that are specific, measurable, and achievable. In our case the main objective was to include the following competencies into the core:

- the ability to search, critically analyse and synthesise information, apply a systematic approach to solving tasks;
- the ability to determine the range of tasks within the set goal and choose the best ways to solve them;
- the ability to build and implement a trajectory of self-development based on the

principles of lifelong education.

It was also important to foster interdisciplinarity and the creation of the thematic communities as well as to test a few new teaching formats:

- intensive course;
- choosing a course within one discipline;
- flipped classroom;
- mixed learning format.

Therefore, in this case the project team should have kept in mind a set of desirable requirements for the course format and adapt chosen subjects to them.

3. **Selection of content**: In the Taba's model, the curriculum content is selected based on the goals and needs of the students. However, in this case, the content should also be based on the subjects in which the university has a significant experience, since it was assumed that the core curriculum was a pilot project with a further expansion of the range of disciplines. Thus, among the subjects that were to form the core, such traditional disciplines as "History" and "Philosophy" were chosen, and the course "Critical Thinking" was chosen to be held in an intensive format, since it can be taught in a more informal setting. The project was named "Trivium" because it includes three interrelated disciplines. These courses form the competencies necessary for the subsequent selection of educational trajectories in the block of professional disciplines.

4. **Organization of content**: the content is organized in a way that promotes interdisciplinary learning and combines different subject areas. The integrated model of core curriculum design was chosen at this step. Fogarty and Pete claim that "the integrated model views the curriculum through a kaleidoscope: interdisciplinary topics are rearranged around overlapping concepts" [Fogarty, Pete, p. 64]. This definition of the core curriculum reflects the idea that the project team wanted to implement this year. The main concept revolved around such notions as "critical thinking" and "soft

skills". According to VanTassel-Baska and Wood, this approach has three main advantages:

- "Emphasising advanced content knowledge that frames disciplines of study;
- Providing higher-order thinking and processing;
- Organising learning experiences around major issues, themes, and ideas that define understanding of a discipline and provide connections across disciplines" [VanTassel-Baska, Wood, p. 345-346].

5. **Selection of learning experiences**: Learning experiences are selected that support the objectives and meet the needs and interests of the learners. One of the aims that the university has set recently is to provide its students with various learning experiences and support open discussions and interdisciplinary group work in the classrooms. Considering the university context, all new teaching formats of the chosen disciplines may contribute to learning experiences:

• Firstly, students need to make a choice between eleven courses of "Philosophy", which have a unique central concept and different points of view on what philosophy is. The course content is organized by the author, and all materials are adapted for this particular course. Choice can be part of the learning experience, as students are involved in building their own educational trajectory. In addition, during this process, students need to analyse the online profile of the course and watch a short trailer in which the teacher presents his course. It also helps students to be more involved in the learning process, as they choose a course that they are more interested in.

• Secondly, a mixed learning format is also one of the learning experiences, since students get the opportunity to study the material both online and in the classroom, as well as learn how to manage their learning style in different conditions. In the original project, flipped classroom was also supposed to be part of the core curriculum, but our analysis revealed that the teachers need more experience in organizing classes of this type.

• And thirdly, the intensive course is a new experience for first-year students, as they immerse in one subject for three days, which gives a unique opportunity to be focused and involved throughout the entire period. It also allows students to break out of the routine and take a fresh look at studying at the university. In addition, it may form extra motivation for the further project activities and teamwork, since the main method for course realisation is group work.

6. Organization of learning experiences: To organize educational activities, a detailed plan was developed, according to which philosophy teachers had to send a syllabus of the course with a program for all classes and participate in the creation of a trailer for their landing page on the website. This was followed by posting detailed information about the course on the university platform (Figure 3). History teachers developed their course separately from the philosophy teachers. The main emphasis was placed on the diversity of historical sources and an attempt to explain historical events through the prism of everyday life. A separate project seminar was held for the critical thinking course, during which participants discussed which types of tasks would most effectively contribute to the stated goals. After that, a training seminar was held for all teachers, at which methodological recommendations for conducting the course were discussed.

Fig. 3. The landing page of the project on the university website

7. **Evaluation**: Evaluation is an ongoing process that involves assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting the objectives and the needs of the learners. This step was made with a set of online questionnaires (Figure 4) on the LMS platform that involved the attitude towards the format and content of the core curriculum and provided feedback from students about their experience of taking these courses and their reflection on the competencies they acquired. Students might share their opinions in this questionnaire or write a detailed review on the same platform. Feedback was also available for each philosophy lecture. Moreover, after all courses had been finished, a group of the main stakeholders were interviewed to assess their engagement and the effect these courses had on their work or study.

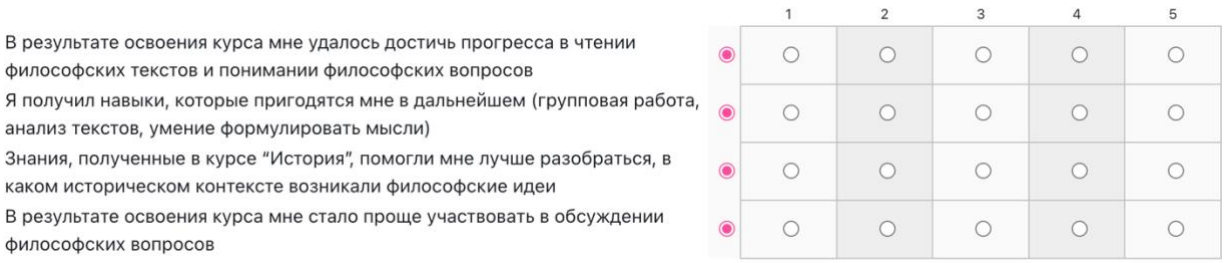

Fig. 4. The example of the course evaluation on LMS

Summing up, the design of the core curriculum was heavily influenced by the strategic goals of the university, formulated in the "Priority 2030" program. As a result of the project sessions, it was decided to form a core of three interrelated disciplines - History, Philosophy, Critical Thinking (Figure 5). Each of them was supposed to contribute to obtaining the main competencies for first-year students: the ability to analyse and critically comprehend information from different sources, as well as the ability to formulate and argumentatively express their opinions.

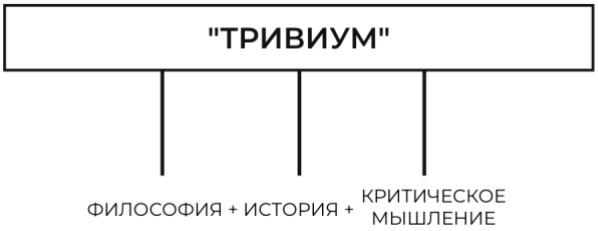

Fig. 5. The model of the core curriculum for 2022-2023

Table 2 summarises the key characteristics of the basic model of the curriculum this year. As can be seen from the table, all three disciplines use different approaches to teaching and offer a new type of organisation of the educational process, different from what was used earlier. The competencies formed in these disciplines are related, but do not repeat each other.

Table 2

The concept of IKBFU core curriculum

Discipline	**Format of organisation**	**Key competencies**
Philosophy	11 individual courses from which students must choose	● Know the categories and principles of ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, cultural characteristics of various social groups ● Use the acquired knowledge to form their own position on an issue ● Use methods and techniques of logical analysis and is able to work with different type of scientific texts

History	Blended learning (online course on LMS and live seminars, problem-oriented lectures)	● Use the conceptual apparatus of historical science, principles and algorithms of scientific historical research ● Understand the features of the historical process at the global, regional and local levels ● Able to work critically with historical sources and scientific texts
Critical Thinking	Intensive for 3 days, immersion into practical-oriented learning (educational event)	● Demonstrate the ability to search, select, verify and evaluate sources of information ● Demonstrate the ability and readiness for intellectual self-defence ● Demonstrate the ability to constructive interpersonal interaction in a group with varied opinions

3.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as an insider ethnographic study which is a research method used in social sciences that involves observing and interacting with people in their natural settings to gain an in-depth understanding of their culture, behaviour, and social interactions [Aarnikoivu, p. 50]. As the author suggests, “insider ethnography is conducting research on a group the researcher already is a member of; in an environment that they have a “natural access” to” [Aarnikoivu, p. 48]. The main difference between outsider and insider research is that “insiders have unique, intimate, and regular access to everyday conversations that those who are foreign to the research setting do not” [Angotti, Sennott, p. 438]. It also involves the collection of qualitative data through participant observation, interviews, and other forms of data collection (in this case – analysing internal and external documents on the issue). The goal of ethnographic study is to provide a detailed description and interpretation of the social phenomena being studied from the perspective of the participants themselves. This study is focused on core curriculum changes as a catalysator for university transformation. This type of research was chosen, according to the given setting: the researcher was not a part of the curriculum designer group and joined the project team after the initial design was approved.

There are some general advantages and disadvantages related to this type of research [Insider and outsider perspective in ethnographic research] that are represented in Table 3.

During the research, the author tried to minimise the disadvantages of the chosen method, primarily through establishing the necessary contacts, expanding internal connections and trying to find parallels with the experience of other universities. Moreover, the author was given ample opportunities to communicate with university staff and students, as well as enough time to study the university environment with its specific features.

Table 3

Advantages and disadvantages of the insider ethnographic research

Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Provides a detailed understanding of the social phenomena being studied. 2. Allows for the collection of rich and nuanced data. 3. Provides an opportunity to study social phenomena in their natural setting. 4. Can reveal unexpected findings and insights. 5. Can be used to generate hypotheses for further research.	1. Can be time-consuming and expensive. 2. May be difficult to generalize findings to other populations or settings. 3. Can be subject to researcher bias. 4. May not be suitable for studying sensitive or private topics. 5. Can be challenging to gain access to certain populations or settings.

Thus, an insider ethnographic study is a suitable method for obtaining the most reliable and insightful data from the university community. This method was chosen because it met the main criteria that were important to include in the study: a greater access to the content and various participants of the conducted experiment, an opportunity to become familiar with the university context and built trust with the project group. It was much easier to navigate the institution and build relationships with key informants. In addition, it led to more open and honest discussions and a better understanding of the university's operations. To sum up, an insider ethnographer is in a unique position to reflect on researchers' own experiences and biases. It leads to a more nuanced understanding of the university's operations and significantly enhances the quality of the research.

3.5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants

The method of in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting 30-60 minutes was chosen for the study. The interviews were held offline at the university, transcribed verbatim and then analysed for occurring themes. The main focus was made on the participants' attitude towards core curriculum implementation and its influence on their activity. Thirty-one participants took part in this study: 11 of them are faculty members and their assistants (8:3 ratio), 6 are administrative staff who were deeply involved in the implementation of the project, and 15 are first-year students from different majors: from linguistics to physical education and radio physics. The average age of the students is 18 years old. The gender ratio was balanced in each category, except for the teaching staff (only two women), but this factor cannot be changed due to the fact that most of the teachers of the project are men. These four types of the respondents were marked as F (faculty member), A (administrator), AS (assistant) and S (student), so it was easier to differentiate between the attitudes of the project stakeholders in this paper.

The main research question that should be answered after the analyses of the interviews is the following: "how does core curriculum drive internal changes within university?" Therefore, most of the questions were related to revealing specific ways of the core curriculum's influence. The analysis of the data obtained during the interview allows us to identify four different categories of how the main curriculum has affected university life during this year. They may be defined as core curriculum functions:

1. the core as a platform for experiments and introduction of new practices;
2. the core as an instrument for enhancing university positioning;
3. the core as a unique learning experience and educational event at the university;
4. the core as an instrument for integrating disciplines and interdisciplinary collaboration.

1. The core as a platform for experiments and introduction of new practices

The transformation of the university, like any other large organisation, requires significant changes in the field of management and changes in strategy. The core can serve as a platform for conducting educational experiments and testing a wide range of technologies and methods of both teaching and management. First of all, this is due to the fact that all first-year students must pass through the core (in this case, it is almost two thousand people), and a large number of administrative staff from various departments should be involved in its management and implementation. This includes the educational department, the university transformation centre (if there is one), all cluster departments, and the core curriculum management centre itself. The inclusion of such a large number of people in new practices, of course, cannot go unnoticed and affects many processes taking place inside the university.

Building a core allows us to identify existing problems and vulnerabilities in the organisation of the educational process and develop ways to optimise it. In addition, the core is a common platform that has an integrating effect, the potential to form a single foundation for humanitarian and methodological training of students of all majors, which corresponds to the holistic orientation of the post–non-classical model of science (F_History)

In my opinion, the core enables the university to evaluate their educational and administrative resources, to test new educational models and to transform educational processes and potentially improve their quality (A)

These comments emphasise that the core curriculum is an effective tool for identifying non-obvious gaps in the work of the university, as well as processes that need to be adjusted. Moreover, core management implies significant organisational changes that are gradually spreading to other departments of the university, which radically alters the decision-making system.

It [the core curriculum implementation] breaks the schedule system, the management system, the load distribution system. As soon as the number of tasks

increases (including disciplines in the core), they cannot be managed in a familiar way. That is why the idea was to involve large numbers [of people and staff] and implement new rules in such a way that they could not be managed the old-fashioned way. It wouldn't have worked on small groups, because everything would have been done in manual mode, in our case - it was simply impossible (A)

In accordance with the setting set by the rector, "Trivium" should contribute to the achievement of the university's goals, in particular, the creation of a project university, among other things, through the broad involvement of students in joint activity not only within the narrow framework of teaching and professorial activities. It partially solves this problem (F_Philosophy)

To what extent the project really solves the issues related to the creation of a project university will be determined in more detail in the Discussion section.

Now such a turning point has come for the university. It is in the phase of determining [of a new image], and is trying to get used to the transformation. Logistics, the relationships between the faculty and the administration are changing, it needs to be somehow formalized at the administrative and substantive level (A)

Thus, the introduction of core requires a number of major changes at the managerial level, which allows university managers to identify existing gaps and challenges and bring management and corporate culture to a new level corresponding to the new values of the university.

In turn, new management decisions (which are discussed with the main stakeholders) lead to changes in the typical practices of the university and affect how employees perceive their work and their role in contribution to the university transformation.

2. The core as an instrument for enhancing university positioning and building students' identity

For many universities, the core serves as a positioning tool, since it contains the fundamental values that the university wants to broadcast into the world. That is why many universities begin their transformation with a change or the introduction of core - this makes it possible to clearly highlight the mission of the university and convey the brand values to their students. In addition, each core curriculum model implies its own special philosophy, which unites universities and allows them to be classified. For example, a university may position itself as socially-oriented and include in the core curriculum courses that are dedicated to service learning or use this model in the core course design. This makes it clear to external stakeholders that the university is really invested in ensuring that students receive skills that correspond to the university's value program. Moreover, the internal policies of the university should also reflect these principles, and their inclusion in the core program allows even more people to become carriers of these values.

By transferring the basic values of the university, the core forms the unique identity of its student, because by implementing certain competencies and educational experience, the student receives distinctive characteristics that may potentially influence their identity and transform them as a person. In this particular case, the university wanted to emphasize the importance of critical thinking and philosophical perspective on the world combined with the knowledge of historical background for its graduates. It was especially important to take this into account, since the university strives to preserve the heritage of the region and firmly link its positioning with the figure of Immanuel Kant.

Trivium was designed as a unique program that distinguishes IKBFU from other Russian universities and is designed to become its "business card" in the organisation of the educational process. The main value of the project lies in this and it significantly contributes to the enhancement of the university reputation (F_Philosophy)

The idea was to create such a complex of disciplines through which students would form a unified self-consciousness and at the same time, so that it would be a feature of the university. Critical thinking is responsible for this, it is such a unique component that nowhere else is implemented in a similar way (F_ Philosophy)

The core provides a general educational level, with a set of basic questions and topics that shape a person's life position and worldview. It harmonises the level of education of applicants, fixes the status of these disciplines in the university, which is an important thing for the university identity. The core is forming an image of the university, trying to attract students from other regions. It is a thing that the university can boast of (F_History).

Considering that we are talking about the university that was named after Immanuel Kant, it was quite logical to integrate exactly these disciplines [History, Philosophy, Critical Thinking]. It serves as an element of the attractiveness of the university and adds an element of uniqueness, Kant's university and these are Kant's values (F_ Philosophy)

At the design stage, the core was considered as an interconnected complex of three disciplines with "synergetic potential" and setting the vector of development of the student as a creative person with a broad knowledge of the historical and cultural context. It was important to us because we want our graduates to become decent citizens in the future (6F_ History)

Thus, the core is an effective tool for building the reputation of the university and the formation of student identity. The concepts and skills formed at the core level help the student to develop more effectively in their further educational trajectory, therefore it is important for the university to pay special attention to it. Forming the core, the university puts in it certain values that can be assimilated by students and become part of their lives. Thus, students become carriers of university values, and this directly affects how it is perceived in society. In order to be effective, the design of the core

must necessarily have a well-developed concept that correlates with the mission and strategy of the university.

3. The core as a unique learning experience and educational event at the university

An educational event is a fairly new concept in university discourse (especially in Russia), and therefore there is no clear definition of what this event is. Generally, an educational event is an organized gathering or activity designed to provide knowledge, skills, and information to participants in a specific setting. According to Frolova and Ilaltdinova highlight the following main characteristics of the educational event:

- "exceeding the conventional approach of an educational institution;
- the multifaceted nature of the educational event, due to the combination of diverse range of activities, interactions, and communication strategies;
- the possibility and relevance of improvisation, the generation of new meanings, in this regard game, dialogue, group work, project method, educational journey, immersion are used;
- an educational event becomes a source of new projects, a number of subsequent events" [Frolova & Ilaltdinova, p. 4].

It was important for the university to create an educational event for all first-year students and include as much interactive communication between participants as possible. The course on critical thinking was chosen to achieve this goal. It was held in an intensive format during 3 days for each academic stream, thus for the students it was an immersion in isolation from other classes. The groups had an upper limit of 20 people. In addition to the teachers of philosophy and history, as well as some other invited lecturers, a big number of young specialists - masters and postgraduates - was involved in conducting seminars. The course had a practical orientation, and therefore it focused on group work and common discussion on a given topic. This was an

experimental course, and nothing like this had ever been conducted at the university on such a scale before.

From the analysis of the interview, it can be concluded that for the majority of the participants (including students), the course really had a significant impact and was perceived as a unique educational experience.

It's great that such a thing [the course] appears. The course and the core curriculum are about the development of thinking, first of all. I think it changes students and their routine at university. The focus is shifting to students, and we, as teachers, are interested in them and want to know their opinions (AS).

I think that critical thinking is a boost for the development of student agency. We tried to conduct a final reflection, to teach students how to make sense of their experience. It was really interesting to be involved in such a project (AS).

We talked a lot about basic things in life. The topic of cognitive biases, for example, was a discovery for the students and it sparked their interest. We also considered the university from the position of critical thinkers. We tried to be critical of our own stereotypes about the university. At this stage, it is clear that the students have not yet learned to reflect on their beliefs, but I want to believe that the course has helped them to take a fresh look at them (F_History).

For the students, the most vivid impression of the course was the discussion of cognitive biases and their impact on everyday life. 85% of the students surveyed noted this topic as the most useful and applicable to life.

I would like to make this course a little longer, as it was very interesting to me, and three days flew by really quickly. It allowed our group to get closer, and we learned the opinions of other students on interesting controversial topics. This helped me to make sure that I would like to get one more degree [phycology] - our teacher turned out to be a psychologist and therefore the course was aimed, among other things, at developing empathy, we learned a lot about ourselves (S).

It was interesting for me to attend these classes - the most memorable thing - cognitive biases. I realized that I have often not used critical thinking in my life, and now I am trying to apply this knowledge more often (S).

It was a very cool course, we were not afraid to express our opinion - no one demanded memorized answers from us, it was a cool switch from the usual classes. Even if you don't know anything, you can still say something and develop a conversation with the group and the teacher (S).

Returning to the teachers, many noted that the course aroused genuine interest in them, as something radically new both in content and in the format of teaching. Many said that they would like to get additional qualifications and expand their knowledge in order to conduct the course more efficiently. This shows that teachers care about how and what to teach students, which is definitely a significant step forward.

We had a rather lengthy discussion in our classes, students actively put forward their own theses, and in general the sessions were very dynamic. I am glad that I got such an unusual teaching experience (F_History).

This experience allowed me to realize that I need to deepen my knowledge in this field, get more advanced training. I demand from myself a deeper immersion in the subject in order to feel more confident with the students. I have yet to do that (F_Philosophy).

The teachers were very encouraged and excited by this, a lot of information is still to be processed, so I would call this an Alzheimer's prevention [laugh]. Speaking about the students, I can say that they were also involved and did not remain indifferent - I often heard the continuation of discussions outside the classroom, and this is always an indicator of general interest in the topic. They reacted very well to teamwork; it was clear that they lacked this in regular classes (F_Philosophy).

As can be seen from the answers received, it can be concluded that the course of critical thinking has definitely become an educational event in the lives of students and even teachers, allowing them to take a fresh look at everyday things and rethink already

familiar topics. For faculty, the course allowed them to gain additional knowledge and revise the material that was not used in their regular classes. It was also a novelty for many of them to conduct such classes with students and organize group work, engage in an open dialogue and allow students to express their opinions without relying on specific material. Teachers also gained experience working together with an assistant and some even tried to lead classes together, which increased the effectiveness of the lesson, according to their reviews.

For students, the intensive has become an opportunity for more open communication in a less hierarchical and directive format, which has already become a norm to them in the regular classes. This allowed them to feel that it is possible to express their opinion at the university, especially if it is reasoned and contributes to a fruitful discussion. In addition, the students got acquainted with a new format of practice-oriented learning, which has not yet been implemented in other disciplines (especially in the first year). This gave them a fresh look at the opportunities offered by the university and rethink its role in their professional and personal development.

The “Critical thinking” course was supposed to be a platform for the selection of the most successful and interested students. In the future the project should be continued at the “School of Critical Thinking”, which will unite students of different majors for common projects dedicated to the development of the philosophical and scientific community.

4. **The core as an instrument for integrating disciplines and interdisciplinary collaboration**

Initially, the idea of creating a common core was to establish integration between disciplines and make learning more meaningful and applicable from the student's point of view. Fogarty claims that “the focus on standards-based curricula begins the conversation about what students need to know and be able to do. The concept of integrated curricula continues the conversation with practical ways to transform that learning into real-life experiences” [Fogarty, p. 92]. Thus, it can be concluded that by

intentionally designing and integrating disciplines of the core curriculum, the university invests in a more meaningful education that is not separated from reality.

In addition to this function, the core also serves to unite teachers of different disciplines into a single university community. Its main goal is to create conditions for the development of pedagogical and scientific practices for more effective work with students. This community also helps faculty to share experiences, involve young colleagues and try new experimental formats.

It is very good that new courses and framing of old themes and plots have appeared. This is especially noticeable among the teachers, because such a scale of discussion at meetings was not seen before. In previous courses, I do not remember that there was anything like this. It seems to me that this is important for the university, such a story about revival and meaningfulness. Author's courses are a story about self-study, questions to each other and interest in the other [experience, work], and asking oneself "what can I take from this"? This is very fruitful (F_Philosophy).

Unlike the other topics considered, where the majority of respondents had similar opinions on the issues, this one turned out to be the most discordant. While one part of the respondents agreed that the attempt to make the core integrated and link all the disciplines together was successful, the other part expressed the opposite opinion.

Faculty took into account the "critical thinking" course when they were designing their [other] courses, it laid the foundation for further work at the intensive. In my opinion, there was an organic connection between the disciplines, and not a single course looked alien (F_Philosophy).

In my opinion, critical thinking is closely related to both history and philosophy, because if we consider critical thinking as a skill, then it underlies both philosophical and historical thinking. In my opinion, the connection is direct (F_History).

There is some kind of consistency [within the core], we pursued the same goals (argumentation, critical and logical thinking) so that students would not be afraid of discussions and put forward theses and proposals. In my opinion, this complex of

disciplines works in one paradigm, to achieve a common goal - that the students should be able to competently formulate and express their thoughts (F_History).

The following answers indicate that there was an inconsistency in the work on the core, which affected the overall integration of the courses and their perception as a whole. However, the respondents also pointed out that the courses were not related in terms of content, but more in terms of approaches and methodology.

Some attempts of interaction were met by well-echeloned defence. In my opinion, the core in the end was not particularly established: there are two courses [Philosophy and Critical Thinking] in which there is a connection and they take into account each other, and "History" appears to be here by default. In this sense, it did not become part of the core, but remained the same. In my opinion, this is a fundamentally untapped opportunity, because in the format of a narrative about the past, the course maintains a stable stereotype about the ideological function of this discipline, which, of course, deprives it of attractiveness in the eyes of students, especially of non-humanitarian majors (F_Philosophy).

[When I was leading seminars of "Critical Thinking"] I haven't heard much about "History" from students; it seemed that it had not resonated with them. However, I do think that it fits in very well, but so far, the connection is very weak. The themes mostly intersect with philosophy (AS).

The following explanation of why the integration was not completed completely seems to be the most appropriate in these circumstances. However, it is still necessary to clearly formulate the relationship between the disciplines so that the students understand their coherence and consistency.

History provides insights into historical facts, and Philosophy can explain their regularity, reveal cause-and-effect relationship. It seems to me that these disciplines are interrelated not in terms of content, but rather in terms of methodology (A).

There is also an opinion that the sequence of courses was not chosen quite tactically correctly, which ultimately affected the quality of the courses.

[These courses] perfectly correspond to each other! However, it seems to me that it would be appropriate to conduct this course [critical thinking] at the very beginning of the academic year so that students can use its potential in philosophy and history classes (F_History).

On the part of most students, however, it can be noticed that for them the disciplines were not in close conjunction, and there was no interaction between them.

There was a different focus on these disciplines, on philosophy we studied the main philosophical concepts and ideas, and on history we worked more with historical sources and key events. Since radically different time intervals were studied, and that is why these disciplines did not look coherent (S).

Probably, it is necessary to establish this connection more firmly so that it becomes noticeable during studying. It was clear that the teachers did not coordinate the material with each other, so these disciplines turned out to be very different and did not overlap with each other. Although the connection is obvious to me — certain philosophical ideas arose in different historical periods, the courses were not tailored to this topic (S).

Also, most of the interviewed teachers, answering the question about the relationship between the courses of "History" and "Philosophy" in relation to "Critical Thinking", usually began their answer with the words: *"I don't know exactly how my colleagues from [philosophy / history]" or "I cannot speak for my colleagues"*, which makes it clear that at the moment the courses are far from being integrated, at least from the most teachers' perspective. However, in addition to possible difficulties with interaction, this can also be explained by the fact that initially the "Trivium model" implied the introduction of author's courses in a sufficiently big number (11). It is not very clear how history teachers should have built their course taking into account such content diversity. Perhaps a deeper acquaintance with the methodology of history and philosophy, which has much in common, could serve as a solution to such a problem. It might also be a good idea to hold a lesson dedicated to finding parallels between the

historical context and the emergence of philological ideas, so that students have an understanding of how different sources can complement the overall picture when analysing historical events or philosophical ideas.

In conclusion, this year the core served as a point of unification of teachers, especially if we consider the community of philosophers, in which, according to the teachers, there was a significant collaboration, revival and enthusiasm. However, it is quite difficult to talk about the full integration of three disciplines, because most of the participants agreed that the connection needs to be strengthened to make it more explicit. The core also allowed for significant changes to the content of the courses, to make them unique and attractive for the students. The opportunity to conduct their own author's course, undoubtedly, increased the motivation of teachers and their status at the university, since the implementation of the "Trivium" was one of the priorities in educational policy. Returning to the main question of the study, how the core curriculum stimulates internal changes at the university, we can conclude that it potentially[21] contributed (according to the respondents' opinions) to the following:

- strengthening networking in the teaching community and among the students, since they get the opportunity to learn in the mixed groups;
- introduction of methodological seminars for professors, including project sessions with experts and external specialists;
- establishing new type of communication with students;
- enhancing the reputation and recognition of the university on the national level;
- building the identity of students and their key competencies;
- reorganisation of the educational process (mixed groups, intensive format, blended learning, author's courses, digitalisation);
- changing the perception of general education disciplines among the university community and by students.

[21] since the core curriculum was established just a year ago, there is not much data

In addition, at the end of the studying year, the university decided to allocate a separate control centre for the implementation and expansion of the core curriculum. The project itself has officially received **experimental status**, which makes it possible to organise additional events and test other disciplines and educational modules within the framework of this platform.

Thus, according to the conclusions of Eckel's article on the transformation of the university, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it can be concluded that IKBFU is indeed undergoing transformational changes and one of their main driving forces is core curriculum and experiments that were provoked by its implementation. The project revealed many gaps at the level of basic operation of the university: from the lack of databases to difficulties with internal communication. Moreover, the core curriculum at the initial stage responded to the main challenges that the university needed to overcome and became a platform for launching new educational and managerial practices. This project also had a special significance and made a contribution to the overall movement of the university towards a more innovative model of development — from a mediocre regional university to a region-forming entrepreneurial one. Much remains to be done and the core curriculum will play a key role in achieving the IKBFU strategic goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous section, it was discussed in detail what changes the core program made to the work of the university and how it affected the process of its transformation. In addition, the main advantages of implementing a core curriculum at the university were analysed. In this section, the main difficulties that were associated with its implementation and suggest possible ways to overcome them in the future are discussed. Here the problems related to basic processes, such as logistics, load distribution and a schedule system for mixed groups are not included, since they must be solved in accordance with the overall strategy of the organisation on these issues. Moreover, at the moment, the university already has ready-made solutions for their regulation. Instead, the focus is on a few problems that were revealed during the interviews with the key stakeholders presented in table 4. In general, these problems can be divided into four types of interaction levels (some of them may get into two categories):

1. administration – faculty;
2. administration – students;
3. faculty – students;
4. administration – the head of the educational program

Newton argues that “the general education program is a reflection of a college faculty’s perceptions, interests and ambitions” [Newton, p. 168]. Indeed, the attitude to general education disciplines represents the attitude of the university community to education as a whole. Thus, if the university does not invest resources in the formation of these disciplines and improving the level of their teaching, it loses great opportunities for the development of a close university community with the same background and values. The knowledge and skills acquired at this level may have a significant impact for the students. For instance, Wehlburg claims that they “may be able to bring critical-thinking or problem-solving skills gained from their general education core into their major courses” [Wehlburg, p. 10].

Table 4

Problems with the implementation of core curriculum and possible solutions

Problem	**Level of interaction**	**Possible solutions**
authority and functions of the reflexive leader[22] are not clearly determined	administration – faculty, administration – the head of the educational program	authority and functions of the leader need to be clarified and fixed so all the participants involved understand the area of their responsibility
lack of knowledge about the strategic projects (including the "CLER" project, which is based on the core curriculum);	administration – faculty	arrange common meetings, explaining the key characteristics, aims and values of the projects, their correlation with the development strategy of the university and the role of teachers in this process
partial integration of courses due to the lack of coordination;	administration – faculty	organise meetings at which a common decision should be made on how the courses fundamentally relate to each other: what common points are found, what changes need to be made for their better integration, then evaluate the level of integration using developed metrics
inability to reflect on the learning experience and assess personal achievements	administration – students, faculty – students	conduct a series of seminars on why reflection is necessary in the educational process and how to apply it to fix and improve the learning experience

[22] a person who would hold the whole concept of the core curriculum and would be able to monitor the implementation of agreements in the general framework

Table 4 continued

lack of a clear strategy for promoting the core curriculum in the university environment;	administration – students	conduct benchmarking and analyse which strategies are used in other universities; arrange events where students will learn more about the project; conduct a series of lectures based on the disciplines, e.g. "why we need philosophy in the 21st century", or workshops, e.g. "how to apply critical thinking in everyday life"
lack of experience of how to organise flipped classroom and project-based learning;	administration – faculty	arrange methodological seminars with external experts, invite teachers in the classes that use these methods, arrange common discussion on the pros and cons of these methods
unwillingness of students to use corporate mail and LMS;	administration – students, faculty – students	clearly indicate the value of use LMS (digitalisation and transparency of the learning process), conduct a workshop on how to use LMS for faculty and then for students, track the process of using LMS and help to solve any issues related to this
lack of a culture of evaluating courses;	administration – students, faculty – students	develop a course assessment system using a competency-based approach, articulate the importance of course evaluation, send at least three reminders to students to evaluate the course
poor communication with the heads of educational programs	administration – the head of the educational program	gather a common meeting with the heads of educational programs and hold a presentation of the project for them, identify the main goals and objectives, articulate their role in the process as the main intermediary between the administration and students

Moreover, the networking that students develop during this experience may develop into close cooperation in the future. Therefore, all the actors involved in the project should perceive the main curriculum as an important part of education, affecting the entire learning process at the university. The concept of core curriculum is rather new for Russian universities, but incorporating it into the overall educational curriculum can have a transformative effect on how students perceive their study at university [Wehlburg, p. 5].

In the case of IKBFU, the core curriculum was designed to serve as the main driver of intellectual communities' development that are engaged in interdisciplinary projects. However, based on the data obtained from the interview, as well as analysing the programs of the three core disciplines, it becomes clear that at this stage the core does not fully correspond to the aims of the strategic project "CLER".

Last but not least, referring to the target model of the university – namely, the creation of a project university, it can be noticed that the students after completing the core courses are still not ready for project activities and meaningful interdisciplinary teamwork. In order to work more effectively in a variety of projects at the senior courses of the university, students should get a solid knowledge base and skills. That is why it was decided to expand the core curriculum and add a course "The Basics of Project Management" to it, which will allow students to gain basic knowledge and tools for planning and implementing real projects in a team, as well as introduce them to the roles significant for any innovative projects. The first year is planned to make the course an elective and look at the results obtained. In this combination, the core receives another important complementary element that serves to provide a more holistic set of basic competencies. In the future, these competencies will be necessary to build a customised educational route for each individual student.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, a project of the core curriculum implementation at IKBFU was presented. This year it included three courses: history, philosophy and critical thinking, which were supposed to integrate into a unified core model. However, according to the data received, the integration process should be continued to coordinate the main courses and articulate to the students their alignment with each other. Moreover, the project lacks a clear articulation of a leader' powers. They need to be introduced to the other participants so this person may supervise the work on core curriculum in multiple directions. These are the main issues that should be resolved in the nearest future.

Answering the research question about core curriculum as a driving force for university transformation, the following findings were revealed. The project may serve as: 1) a platform for experiments and introduction of new practices; 2) an instrument for enhancing university positioning; 3) a uniting learning experience and educational event at the university; 4) an instrument for integrating disciplines and interdisciplinary collaboration. All of these functions contribute to organisational and cultural changes at the university and serve as tools for gradually enhancing its work. The process of transformation is not smooth and requires time to adapt employees and to adjust inner practices to the new norms. The leader needs to constantly align the actions of the team with the values of the project so they become values-in-use.

The results also show that the system developed within the framework of "Trivium" set a new standard for educational activities at the university. For students, the project created an environment for building an individual educational route through a number of philosophy courses to choose from, the "critical thinking" course aimed at developing soft skills, studying in mixed groups, closer contact with the teacher, accessible feedback, and a blended learning format. For the faculty, this provided an opportunity for a non-standard approach to the subject taught (author's courses), the creation of interdisciplinary student research groups. A transparent management system

was created for the administration, end-to-end analytics of the educational process was provided, and the foundations for the scientific and educational communities formation was laid. To sum up, the project of core curriculum implementation revealed many significant gaps in the work of the university and influenced its further development in these areas. It was decided to expand the core program, as well as make this project experimental. Further study can be focused on a longitudinal research and analysis of the results of the project implementation in terms of how it affected students and their professional and personal development. It would also be possible to analyse whether IKBFU would be perceived as a university with a strong intellectual potential influencing the quality of its graduates and would it gain the reputation of a project university with impact communities.

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