
Russian Education: Demand among Graduates of Mongolian Schools

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Citation: Badmatsyrenov T.B., Damdinov A.V., Tsetsenbileg Ts., Badaraev D.D. (2024) Russian Education: Demand among Graduates of Mongolian Schools. *Mir Rossii*, vol. 33, no 2, pp. 163–182 (in Russian). DOI: 10.17323/1811-038X-2024-33-2-163-182

Abstract

This study addresses the demand for Russian higher education among Mongolian secondary school graduates. It identifies key aspects of Mongolian graduates' interest in the educational services provided by Russian universities. The relevance of this study stems from the enduring Russian–Mongolian relationship, marked by strong economic, military, political, and cultural, connections over a long period. Following a decline in the 1990s, Mongolia has recently regained prominence in Russian foreign policy. However, the appeal of Russian education has diminished, and Russia faces increasing competition from other educational systems in its “return” to Mongolia. The aim of the article is to reveal resources aspects of exporting Russian educational services, specifically examining the external potential of the educational system in the Republic of Buryatia, which borders Mongolia. This research explores the common

This article was carried out within the state assignment “Russia and Inner Asia: Dynamics of Geopolitical, Socioeconomic, and Intercultural Interaction (17th–21st Centuries)”, No. 121031000243-5.

The article was received in December 2023.

educational strategies of Mongolian secondary students and their perceptions of the Russian education system. Emphasis is placed on analyzing official statistics in conjunction with our empirical data. The findings help to understand shifts in the attitudes of Mongolian youth towards Russian education, providing a foundation for predicting future socio-humanitarian interactions between Russia and Mongolia amid global changes.

Keywords: *Russian education, educational strategies, regional university, Mongolian students, Mongolia, the Republic of Buryatia*

Introduction

The export of Russian education, as an integral part of state policy, is fundamentally linked to national interests and regional development needs. Its effective execution can address critical issues like youth emigration, enhance the quality of human capital, and improve regional socio-economic progress. In Russian foreign policy, education holds a unique position among instruments for bolstering soft power, encompassing a broad spectrum of both political and non-political measures designed to foster a positive image of the state. The deployment of such tools, particularly in exporting educational services, complements traditional diplomatic methods and has become a key component of Russia's foreign policy strategy.

Mongolia, a strategic partner of Russia, remains a consistent focus of Russian foreign policy interests. However, the post-Soviet era has seen some contradictions in the formation and defense of these interests. Historically, Russian–Mongolian relations have been marked by close economic, military, political, and cultural ties. Although these ties weakened in the 1990s, Mongolia has recently regained significance in Russian foreign policy considerations.

Research Methodology and Methods

Our research predominantly employed quantitative data collection methods, utilizing Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). Qualitative methods were also incorporated, including expert interviews (with civil servants and academics), the analysis of statistical data, and the secondary analysis of existing research on related topics.

The combination of CATI and CAWI is both cost-effective and time efficient. These methods offer extensive capabilities for presenting video, audio, and image materials. Key results are instantly accessible to clients through a web interface. They enable surveys of hard-to-reach demographics, such as youth, without significant geographical limitations.

According to 2021 data from the Mongolian National Statistics Office, Mongolia had 848 secondary schools, with 102,525 students in grades 10–12 [Education, Health 2021]. Using the sample calculation formula, we determined the number

of participants for our survey, aiming for a 95 % confidence interval and a sampling error of less than 5 %.

We conducted a simple random sample survey of $n = 1500$ respondents—high school students from grades 10, 11, and 12 across 330 sums of 21 aimags, and 9 districts of Ulaanbaatar. The respondents comprised 94.3 % secondary school students from grades 10–12 and 5.7 % gymnasium or lyceum students. The breakdown by grade was 31.1 % in 10th grade, 33.2 % in 11th grade, and 35.7 % in 12th grade. The gender distribution was 42.9 % male and 57.1 % female.

The data collection was carried out by the Mongolian Marketing Consulting Group in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Theoretical framework of the research

Education holds a significant position in the foreign policy of contemporary states as a key component of soft power. This concept encompasses a broad spectrum of both political and non-political measures designed to cultivate a positive state image [Nye 2004]. The integration of exporting education and traditional diplomatic approaches has emerged as a crucial element in Russia's foreign policy strategy. This focus is intertwined with national economic interests and involves the contributions of educational, humanitarian, and other non-governmental organizations. Our research concentrates on a critical aspect of exporting Russian educational services, specifically examining the external potential of the educational system in the Republic of Buryatia, which borders Mongolia.

Research rationale

Mongolia, as a strategic Russian partner, remains a focal area of Russia's foreign policy interests. However, the post-Soviet period has highlighted notable contradictions in the development and maintenance of these interests. Currently, Mongolia is witnessing growing competition among global and national educational models, notably Russian, Chinese, and, to a certain extent, Western. In this context, political and economic factors are increasingly influential [Rodionov 2018, p. 94].

This situation underscores the necessity for Russia to develop a more effective strategy for exporting education to Mongolia. Such a strategy should encompass a comprehensive array of methods and tools. Presently, Russia, including the Republic of Buryatia, has not fully tapped into the potential of its scientific and educational influence, particularly in integrating it into major economic projects and political decisions. Conducting a focused sociological study to gauge the attitudes of Mongolian high-school graduates enables a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the influence of Russia's educational soft power. Our survey was specifically designed to ascertain the primary characteristics of Mongolian school graduates' demand for educational services at universities in Buryatia.

Historical overview of the Russian–Mongolian partnership in education

The foundation of secular education in Mongolia was built on the system of spiritual education which emerged with the spread of Lamaism in the 16th and 17th centuries. Lamaist schools were operational in nearly every monastery, with education structured into three levels. The initial level spanned 7–8 years, followed by a second stage lasting 10 years. The highest level of study extended for 20 years. The most talented students pursued further specialization in various theological and Buddhist philosophical fields. Separate Tsanite schools specialized in training doctors of theology, philosophy, logic, astronomy, and other disciplines.

Secular education in Mongolia emerged in the early 20th century, initiated by the Manchus who started training clerical officials from the local population in Urga. By the end of the Qing Empire's reign, similar schools had been established in Kobdo, Ulyasutai, and other *khoshuns* (administrative units in Mongolia). The education in these schools was primarily focused on training clerks to serve in the administrative system of Mongolia under the Qing Empire [Bazarov, *Khishigjargal* 2016, p. 166].

Russian–Mongolian interaction in the realm of education and training dates back to 1725 with the establishment of the first “Munggal” school for translators in Irkutsk. In 1851, the Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society was organized here, elevating the Mongolia study of to a new level. The Urga school for interpreters and translators was founded in 1864, operating for 56 years and producing over 100 specialists. The restoration of Mongolia's national statehood in 1911, under the leadership of Bogdo Gegen VIII, marked a reorganizing of the education system and the creation of the first secular school for 50 students in Urga in March 1912. This initiative was driven by the need to modernize the state apparatus and the rise of individual industrial enterprises in Mongolia. In 1912, a specialized school was opened to train officials and clerical workers. An elementary school for children of various nationalities, including Russians, Mongols, Buryats, Tatars, and others, was inaugurated in Urga in November 1913. Despite these reforms, monasteries continued to be the primary educational centers. However, all the newly established schools during the period of autonomy (1911–1919) were shut down during the Chinese military dictatorship [Filin, *Dugarjav* 2014, p. 269].

Before the 1921 revolution, only 1 % of the Mongolian population was semi-literate. In the context of Mongolia's backwardness, the opening of the first Soviet school marked the beginning of Russia's assistance in developing the Mongolian education system. The Soviet model of education was adopted for organizing the school system and educating *arat* (pastoral nomad) children. Numerous Soviet specialists, including many from Soviet Buryatia in the initial phase, worked in Mongolia's educational system. Buryat teachers, in particular, played a pivotal role in introducing and promoting Russian culture among the Mongolian populace. Soviet Russia was instrumental in training Mongolia's national teaching staff. Short-term courses were organized in Ulaanbaatar in 1921, followed by the opening of a two-year teacher training school in February 1922. The same year saw the establishment of the Mongolian Scientific Committee, later known as the Academy of Sciences of Mongolia. In 1924, the Mongolian Ministry of Education was formed, underpinned by the Soviet education system. A pedagogical college opened in Ulaanbaatar in 1925, staffed by over 50 teachers from the USSR

throughout its history. By 1940, with the USSR's full support, Mongolia had developed a national education system. During World War II, in October 1942, the USSR assisted in establishing Mongolia's first university, the National University of Mongolia (NUM). In its early years, Soviet teachers comprised 85 % of the university's faculty. In 1942, Mongolia adopted the Cyrillic alphabet, based on the Russian alphabet, for its unified written language. By 1950, illiteracy had been eradicated [Filin, Dugarjav 2014, p. 273]. From 11 Soviet schools in the Mongolian People's Republic in 1926, the number grew to 27 by the late 1980s. In these schools, Mongolian children learned Russian as their native language.

With the establishment of Mongolia's education system, there was a surge in the training of Mongolian specialists in Soviet Russia and the USSR. From 1921 to 1936, 229 Mongolian citizens graduated from the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow. In the 1930s, Moscow, Leningrad, and Irkutsk became key centers for training Mongolian specialists. The Ulan-Ude Worker's Faculty, operational from 1930 to 1940, played a significant role in preparing personnel for the Mongolian People's Republic. Mongolian students, after their second year, were sent to Soviet technical schools and, on completing a four-year program, proceeded to universities. In September 1940, the Mongol Workers' Faculty merged with the Mongolian department of the Kyakhta pedagogical college, and in July 1941, it further merged with the Ulaanbaatar pedagogical college. During the peak in the 1980s, 1,300 Mongolian students annually enrolled in Soviet universities and colleges, and over 1,000 entered vocational technical schools. Over 10,000 Mongolian citizens were educated in 107 cities across the USSR, with more than 2,000 trained at Soviet enterprises. According to Dugarjav "over more than 90 years (from the 1920s to the mid-2010s) in the Soviet Union and later in Russia, nearly 60,000 higher education specialists, including doctors and candidates of sciences, were trained. Including vocational education graduates and those who enhanced their skills in Russian and USSR institutions, the total number of Mongolian graduates exceeded 150,000 people. This significant contribution from the USSR enabled [Mongolia] to overcome centuries of backwardness, establish an economic foundation, and further develop it" [Dugarjav 2010, p. 84].

Education was a major achievement for Mongolia during the socialist era. Before 1989, the gross enrollment ratios were 98% in primary schools, 85% in secondary schools, and 17% in higher education [Evaluation Study 2008, p. 7], largely due to support from the Soviet Union and the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance. The USSR's collapse profoundly impacted the Soviet–Mongolian education system and the status of the Russian language in Mongolia; it was no longer mandatory. From 2002, English was declared the primary compulsory foreign language. This shift led to a reorientation of Mongolian youth towards education standards of European countries, the US, and Japan, with an increase in the number of top global universities offering educational services in Mongolia. In the early 21st century, about 6,000 Mongolian students were educated in Russian in 16 schools, including 9 in Ulaanbaatar. Russian ranked sixth in foreign language popularity in Mongolia, after English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Turkish [Filin, Dugarjav 2014, p. 292]. A key step in educational cooperation was the May 2003 intergovernmental agreement on mutual recognition of educational documents, degrees, and titles between Russia and Mongolia. Despite these efforts, statistical data show that Russia's educational influence in Mongolia has been waning since the turn of the century.

Current state of the Mongolian higher education market

The Mongolian higher education market, though relatively small due to a population of 3.45 million as of December 31, 2023 [Mongolian Statistical Information Service 2023], presents promising opportunities due to favorable demographics and a high demand for higher education.

Mongolia is a youth-dominated country; the average age in 2020 was 27.9—half of the population is younger than this age [Population and Housing 2021, p. 46]. Education is highly valued in Mongolia, which led to a larger number of higher education institutions in the early 21st century, peaking at 184 in 2004. The 2020 Mongolia Population and Housing Census revealed that 26.5 % of the population aged 10 and above has higher education, with an increase of 8.2 percentage points over the past decade [Population and Housing 2021, p. 93].

The Higher Education Law, passed in 1995 and then amended several times, steered the educational system towards a Western, four-level structure (diploma, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate). As per this law, educational institutes are categorized as universities, higher education institutes, colleges, or technical colleges [National Report: Mongolia 2022, p. 6].

Since the 2000s, higher education in Mongolia has seen rapid enrollment growth. A report estimated that 80 % of secondary school graduates pursue postsecondary education [Evaluation Study 2008, p. 8]. In 1994, the government required public higher education institutions to self-fund academic staff salaries, leading to a proliferation of providers and a decline in education standards.

To address these challenges, the Mongolian government adopted various measures, including the “Master Plan for the Development of Mongolian Education in 2006–2015”, focusing on sustainable development and higher education [National Program 2018].

The number of higher education institutions, which peaked at 184 in 2004, has now almost halved due to government policies aimed at improving quality and closing low-quality institutions. In 2016, Mongolia had a significantly higher density of educational organizations per 100,000 people than Russia, Japan, or Turkey. The Global Competitiveness Report 2016–2017 ranked Mongolia 38th out of 138 countries in higher education and 40th in the quality of mathematics and science education [Country Background Report 2019, p. 153].

Most new higher education students are recent secondary school graduates. From 2006 to 2018, the average percentage of such students was about 81% [Country Background Report 2019, p. 154]. The total number of students, however, is expected to decrease in the coming years due to demographic trends.

Statistics from the Mongolian Ministry of Education and Science indicate that in the 2022–2023 academic year, there were 69 universities in Mongolia, with diverse ownership structures and most located in Ulaanbaatar. The total student population has seen a slight decrease from the previous year [Higher Education Statistics 2023].

About 34.4 % of all 2017–2018 graduates found employment immediately after graduation, with higher employment rates among doctoral and master's graduates compared to bachelor's graduates. This could be due to incomplete employment data from institutions or graduates not securing jobs immediately after graduation [Country Background Report 2019, p. 161].

While there is a high demand for quality higher education, the domestic market struggles to meet this need, leaving room for foreign institutions and study abroad opportunities. The Mongolian government supports professionals abroad through various programs and scholarships. *Table 1* shows the number of Mongolian students studying abroad, which reflects this trend [Batbileg 2013, p. 51].

Table 1. The number of students studying abroad from Mongolia, 2010

The country to study	OECD member states	Non OECD states	Russia*	China	Total
Total	7588	22**	1740	3448	12798
Bachelor degree with government scholarship	660	732	723	982	3097
Ph.D., Master's degree with government scholarship	230	64	159	895	1348
Ph.D., Master's degree with governmental loan from Learning Support fund	337	1	61		399
Personal expenses and other scholarships	6361	0	22	1571	7954

Source: OECD Report 2012, Statistics of the Ministry of Education and Science 2012.

* This data does not include the number of students studying in private institutes in Russia.

** There is a discrepancy in the data, attributable to the fact that some non-OECD countries do not provide comprehensive data.

Out of the 12,798 Mongolian students studying abroad in 2010, 7,954 (76.4 %) chose to study in five countries: Japan (9 %), South Korea (17.1 %), the US (9.79 %), Russia (13.6 %), and China (26.9 %). The remaining 4,844 students (23.6 %) pursued their education in 36 other countries. A significant proportion of students at the bachelor's (66 %) and master's or doctoral (89.4 %) levels received government support for their studies. Additionally, 68.9 % of students funded through other means also opted for higher education in these five countries [Batbileg 2013, p. 51].

Russian Education in Mongolia: The Current State

Several joint Russian–Mongolian collaborations in education and science are currently underway in Mongolia. These include the development of humanitarian projects focused on enhancing the teaching of the Russian language and general studies in Russian. These projects facilitate the employment of Russian teachers and education coordinators in relevant organizations. Since 2017, the Russian Ministry of Education has been implementing the “Russian Teacher Abroad” humanitarian project. On December 16, 2021, the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the Mongolian Ministry of Education and Science signed a cooperation agreement for the period 2022–2024 [Russia and Mongolia 2021].

Annually, Rossotrudnichestvo allocates federally funded education scholarships for Mongolian students to study at higher education institutions in Russia, including universities under the Ministry of Defense [Aktamov, Grigorieva 2022, p. 74].

Currently, approximately 3,500 Mongolian citizens are studying at higher educational institutions in Russia, on scholarships or self-funded. Mongolia ranks fourth among non-CIS countries in this respect, following China, India, and Vietnam. Mongolia also receives one of the largest scholarship quotas among non-CIS countries for studying at Russian universities. Table 2 shows the number of Mongolian students who studied at Russian universities.

Table 2. The number of Mongolian citizens who studied at Russian universities in the 2006/2007 – 2018/2019 academic years

Mongolia	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019
Number of university students	1768	2164	2569	2593	2998	3048	3084	3200	3058	2870	2989	3198	3565

Compiled from: Export of Russian Educational Services: Statistical Collection (2019). Issue 9, The Russian Ministry of Education and Science, Moscow: Social Forecasts and Marketing Center, p. 536

The allocation of educational scholarships for Mongolian citizens to study in Russia has been increasing annually: 620 places were allocated for the 2023/2024 academic year for Bachelor’s, Master’s, and postgraduate programs, compared to 600 in 2022/2023, 515 in 2021/2022, and 450 in 2017/2018 [Russian Higher Education 2022].

The majority of Mongolian students in Russia are enrolled at the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia; followed by HSE University; Emperor Alexander I St. Petersburg State Transport University; Russian University of Transport; Kutafin Moscow State Law University; the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation.

Several Russian universities have established Mongolian branches, including Buryat State University, Moscow Power Engineering Institute, Kemerovo State University, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, and East-Siberian State Technological University. Russian teachers working in these Mongolian branches—as well as Russian students studying there—help to transmit Russian language and culture to Mongolian students. After their second year, students have the option to continue their education and earn degrees from leading universities in Russia. However, currently only the branch of Plekhanov Russian Economic University remains open, as other branches have closed due to funding cutbacks, staff shortages, and decreased demand for Russian education amidst competition from other universities [Filin, Dugarjav 2014, pp. 304–305].

In recent years, there has been a slight increase in the engagement of Russian universities and academic institutions in Mongolia. Several universities in Russia and Mongolia have signed cooperation agreements and conduct joint scientific and educational activities.

The higher education market in Mongolia is experiencing significant international competition. According to UNESCO, in 2019, 10,598 Mongolian students went abroad

for education, with 2,707 studying in South Korea, 1,438 in Japan, and 1,335 in the US [Dorzhieva, Tsyrempilova 2021, p. 49].

Despite this competition, Russia maintains a positive image in Mongolian society (Table 3). Long-term research by the Sant Maral Foundation indicates that Mongolians view Russia as Mongolia’s best partner, and Russians are perceived as the most cooperative people [Politbarometer 2022].

Table 3. Which country is the best partner for Mongolia?, %

Years	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Russia	53.3	59.0	61.1	66.6	69.8	70.0	67.8	73.0	70.1
China	1.2	1.3	1.6	0.6	0.8	2.4	5.8	5.3	4.8
South Korea	1.9	0.7	1.6	0.9	2.4	4.0	3.9	2.8	3.3
The US	7.6	6.5	6.8	6.5	6.3	5.6	4.6	2.7	4.8
Japan	4.8	7.0	6.3	7.3	5.9	7.3	6.1	5.2	7.8
The EU and the UK	2.8	2.3	4.0	1.6	1.3	4.6	2.3	1.7	4.4

Source: Politbarometer. Sant Maral Foundation (2014–2022). Available at: <https://www.santmaral.org/publications>

In 2020, as part of the research project “Soft Power in Russian–Mongolian Relations: A Comparative Analysis”, a survey was conducted involving 44 Russian and 49 Mongolian experts, including representatives from government agencies, science, education, and the media.

The survey revealed a current weakening in educational cooperation between Russia and Mongolia. This decline is attributed to the reduced political, military, trade, economic, and cultural ties between the two states since the 1990s, coupled with the growing influence of other countries, notably China. According to the survey, 36.7 % of Mongolian and 40.9 % of Russian experts acknowledged that Soviet–Mongolian cooperation in education was strong. However, in the context of contemporary Russian–Mongolian relations, only 12.2 % of Mongolian and 6.8 % of Russian experts view the current cooperation in the field of education as dynamic [Rodionov, Nyamdoljin 2022].

Despite the noted decline in interest in Russian education, Mongolian experts still consider Russia as a preferred destination for education among Mongolians, ranking it alongside the US at the top. However, there is a divergence in the perceptions of Russian and Mongolian experts. The majority of Russian experts think that Mongolian citizens prefer to be educated in China and the US over Russia. This contrast in views reflects the differing perspectives on the appeal of Russian education in the current educational landscape (Table 4).

The demand for Russian education among Mongolians can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the existing Soviet/Russian infrastructure in Mongolia necessitates specialists trained in Russia for the maintenance and operation of various facilities. Secondly, the close ties in science and education established during the Soviet era continue to be relevant. Thirdly, Russian education is perceived as more affordable in terms of the quality–price ratio compared to other countries. The interest in Russian universities

is further bolstered by the allocation of state-funded quotas for foreign citizens. For instance, in the 2017/2018 academic year, 1,810 (56.6 %) of the 3,198 Mongolian students at Russian universities state-funded [Rodionov 2020, p. 288].

Table 4. Distribution of experts’ answers to the question “Which countries are preferable for Mongolian citizens to receive education?”, multiple options

Countries	Russian experts	Mongolian experts
Russia	38.6	61.2
China	72.7	34.7
Japan	38.6	44.9
South Korea	34.1	2.0
The US	63.6	61.2
The UK	4.5	14.3
Germany	31.8	49.0
No data	2.3	2.0

Source: [Rodionov, Nyamdoljinn 2022, p. 95].

In 2021–2022, a survey of 122 Mongolian students and postgraduates at universities in the Republic of Buryatia, Irkutsk Oblast, and the Republic of Tuva was conducted. Responding to the open question “What do you think needs to be done to popularize Russian education and Russian culture in Mongolia?”, participants suggested intensifying awareness efforts at all levels, increasing educational quotas and scholarships, and improving the quality of language training. They also recommended introducing Mongolian secondary school graduates to Russian universities to showcase the diversity and prospects of Russian education. Highlighting the success stories of Russian university graduates in their chosen fields and promoting the Russian language extensively, not just in the capital but also in remote areas, were also suggested [Kombaev, Davyd 2022, p. 219].

Choice of specialty and educational institution

The findings of our study shed light on the educational strategies of Mongolian secondary students. When asked about their plans after graduation, the majority of respondents (54.3 %) expressed the intention of pursuing higher education at Mongolian universities and 32 % are considering universities outside of Mongolia. Almost 12 % of students were undecided about their post-graduation plans (Table 5).

The most attractive fields of study for Mongolian students are healthcare (12.5 %), information technology and software (9.3 %), and security agencies, army, and law enforcement (8.2 %). Fields such as humanities, manufacturing industry, mining, power engineering, construction, transport, communication lines, economics, accounting,

and business show average interest (ranging from 6.8 % to 5.5 %). Sectors such as tourism, natural sciences, agriculture, sports, education, and trade are less appealing (below 4.5 %). The choice of a major appears to be significantly influenced by the gender and class of respondents.

Table 5. Plans after secondary school

	Number of respondents	Share of respondents, %
To obtain higher education at a university in Mongolia	815	54.3
To obtain higher education at a university outside Mongolia	480	32.0
To receive education at secondary technical school	13	0.9
I'm going to work	13	0.9
I haven't decided yet	167	11.1
I don't know	12	0.8
Total	1500	100.0

Table 6. What attracts you most to a university?, multiple options

	Number of respondents	Share of respondents, %
High quality of education	1160	77.3
Good job prospects	651	43.4
The reputation of the university	459	30.6
Tuition costs	404	26.9
My relatives studied there	249	16.6
Geographic proximity	178	11.9
Other	53	3.5

When considering the attributes of an educational institution, the majority of respondents prioritized high quality of education (77.3 %). Other significant factors included good job prospects (43.4 %), the reputation of the university (30.6 %), and tuition costs (26.9 %). Geographic proximity and the opinions of relatives who have pursued higher education were less influential in the decision-making process for choosing a university (Table 6).

When asked about their preferred country for studying abroad, the majority of respondents favored South Korea (31.0 %), the US (24.2 %), or Japan (19.3 %). The proportion of those who chose Russia and Germany was almost identical, at 6.5 % and 6.1 % respectively. Only 3.4 % of respondents expressed a desire to study in China (Table 7). Other countries mentioned by a significant number of respondents included Australia, Canada, and Turkey. Among those who opted for Russia, a higher preference

was observed among students from Ulaanbaatar (24.5 %), followed by Khovsgol aimag (10.2 %) and Selenge aimag (8.2 %).

The inclination towards studying or working in foreign countries can be further understood from a 2017 survey. When asked “If you decided to study or work in another country, which would you choose?”, 36.8 % of respondents indicated a preference for the US, 21.1 % for South Korea, and 15.3 % for Russia [Dagbaev, Aktamov 2017, p. 78].

Table 7. If you decided to study in another country, which would you choose?

	Number of respondents	Share of respondents, %
South Korea	465	31.0
The US	363	24.2
Japan	290	19.3
Other	142	9.5
Russia	98	6.5
Germany	91	6.1
China	51	3.4
Total	1500	100.0

Table 8. Why you have chosen this country to study?, up to 3 options

	Number of respondents	Share of respondents, %
I like this country	698	46.5
I would like to live and work in this country in the future	599	39.9
I have chosen the particular country because I can receive free education	458	30.5
my and relatives studied lived there	359	23.9
I know this country well	263	17.5
I know the language of this country well	227	15.1
Other	97	6.5

In our survey, when asked “Why have you chosen this country to study?”, nearly half of the respondents (46.5 %) stated their liking for the country, and 39.9 % expressed a desire to live and work there in the future. Only about a third mentioned the availability of a scholarship as a deciding factor. Lesser popular reasons such as “my relatives studied or lived there”, “I am familiar with this country”, and “I am proficient in the language of this country” suggest that respondents tend to make independent choices, rather than relying solely on familial or linguistic familiarity (Table 8).

When directly asked about their interest in studying at Russian universities, the majority of respondents (53.4 %) indicated a positive response. Among these, a significant portion (46.4 %) showed a preference for universities in the central regions of Russia, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. Interest in Siberian universities was expressed by only 3.7 % of respondents, while a mere 2.7 % were inclined towards universities in the Far East. Females demonstrated a slightly higher interest in universities located in the central regions, whereas males were more inclined towards institutions in Siberia and the Far East. 38.4 % of respondents were not interested in studying in Russia, and 8.2 % remained undecided (*Table 9*). The highest proportions of disinterest were found among high school students in the Bayankhongor (55.9 %), Darkhan-Uul (47.1 %), and Umnugov (46.2 %) aimags, and in the cities of Sukhbaatar (46.2 %) and Ulaanbaatar (42.9 %).

Table 9. Are you interested in studying at Russian universities? If yes, in which regions?

	Number of respondents	Share of respondents, %
Central – Moscow, St. Petersburg, etc.	696	46.4
Far Eastern – Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Buryatia	41	2.7
Siberian – Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Altai, etc.	55	3.7
Other	9	0.6
I'm not interested	576	38.4
I don't know	123	8.2
Total	1500	100.0

The responses to questions about educational scholarships provided by Russia for foreign students revealed a general lack of awareness among Mongolian secondary school students regarding Rossotrudnichestvo's programs. Only 4.1 % of the respondents were well-informed about these quotas, while 38.9 % had superficial knowledge. Over half of the students were unaware of this opportunity, with the least informed being from the Darkhan-Uul (68.6 %), Khentii (65.6 %), Khovsgol (66.7 %), and Middle Gobi (62.5 %) aimags. In Ulaanbaatar, 59.6 % of the surveyed students were uninformed.

Despite this, a significant majority (67.5 %) expressed interest in participating in the Russian Government Scholarship competition, with 20.9 % showing a high level of interest. The greatest interest was shown by students from the Central (43.8 %), Middle Gobi (31.2 %), Ovorkhangai (30.8 %), and Khovsgol (50.7 %) aimags. In Ulaanbaatar, 17.3 % of respondents were interested in the competition. Interestingly, students from aimags with the lowest awareness of educational scholarships in Russia also showed interest.

Only a small fraction of respondents (13.4 %) were not considering participating in the competition, and 4.2 % were undecided.

Regarding universities in Buryatia, the survey revealed that the majority of respondents (74.3 %) were unaware of any universities in the region. About a quarter

(26.5 %) had some knowledge, with 9.5 % aware of Buryat State University, 5.9 % familiar with East Siberian State University of Technology and Management, 5.6 % with East Siberian State Institute of Culture, and 5.5 % with Buryat State Agricultural Academy (Table 10). Notably, females were more informed about Buryatian universities than males. These findings suggest that Mongolian graduates' opinions about universities in Buryatia are not yet fully formed and contain some contradictions. However, targeted information marketing could potentially generate stable demand for educational services in Buryatia.

Table 10. Which universities in Buryatia do you know?, multiple options

	Number of respondents, %	Share of respondents, %
I don't know any	1114	74.3
Buryat State University	143	9.5
East Siberian State University of Technology and Management	89	5.9
East Siberian State Institute of Culture	84	5.6
Buryat State Agricultural Academy	82	5.5
Other	16	1.1

As of September 6, 2022, the Buryatian Ministry of Education and Science reported that 134 students from Mongolia were enrolled in universities and vocational institutions in Buryatia. This included 59 students at universities in Buryatia (East Siberian State Institute of Culture, Phillipov Buryat State Agricultural Academy, East Siberian State University of Technology and Management, and Dorzhi Banzarov Buryat State University) and 78 students in colleges. Seven students received education scholarships from Rossotrudnichestvo.

The promotion of the Russian language could be a key resource in exporting Russian education to Mongolia. However, in recent years, there has been a notable decline in the number of Mongolian citizens proficient in Russian. In the early 1990s, the status of the Russian language diminished with the introduction of compulsory English, replacing Russian, in schools. Languages such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, French, and German have also gained popularity. This shift has led to a generation of young Mongolians who do not speak Russian and are more aligned with Western values and attitudes. The study revealed that only 2.1 % of Mongolian secondary school students are fluent in Russian, while 72.5 % have poor Russian language skills, and 23.9 % do not know Russian at all (Table 11).

Regarding the willingness to pay for education at a Russian university, a notable portion of respondents (35.27 %) indicated they are not willing to pay for education. A smaller fraction, 8.8 %, are willing to pay no more than 1,000 USD per year, while 6.07 % would pay up to 2,000 USD. Only 2.13 % of respondents are prepared to spend up to 3,000 USD, and an even smaller group, 1.2 %, would pay up to 4,000 USD. For 27.8% of the respondents, the cost of education was not a deciding factor.

Table 11. Do you know Russian language?

	Number of respondents	Share of respondents, %
I do not know Russian	359	23.9
I know Russian poorly	1087	72.5
I am fluent in Russian	31	2.1
Difficult to say	23	1.5
Total	1500	100.0

This distribution of responses is particularly intriguing given that Mongolia does not offer state-subsidized higher education. The range of answers suggests varying perceptions of value and affordability among Mongolian students when it comes to investing in foreign education, specifically in Russian universities. This aspect warrants further exploration to better understand the financial considerations influencing Mongolian students' educational choices.

Conclusion

The Mongolian education market is experiencing growing competition between global and national educational models, notably Russian, Chinese, and, to a certain extent, Western, where political and economic factors are increasingly influential. Post-Soviet Russian education has seen a significant decline in attractiveness, facing stiff competition from other educational systems as Russia attempts to reestablish its presence in Mongolia.

Despite these challenges, Russian universities in Mongolia possess significant potential to strengthen their impact. Key to this is the geographical, historical, and cultural proximity between Russia and Mongolia. Mongolian students often highlight the closeness of Russian culture and mentality to their own.

Students' perceptions are greatly influenced by the attractive images of countries, often linked with popular culture and ideas. These perceptions, although sometimes lacking specific content, can significantly impact real-world decisions, including educational choices.

Our research indicates a relatively low interest among Mongolian students in universities located in the Russian Far East, including Buryatia. Factors contributing to this include limited awareness about Russian universities, heightened competition from other countries, and the diminishing appeal of Russia among the youth. The research identifies legal, bureaucratic, and language barriers, and a lack of information about Russian universities as significant hurdles.

In recent years, Russian universities have begun to take measures to attract Mongolian applicants, participate in scholarship programs, and enhance interaction with Mongolia. However, the unique features of Mongolia's educational market pose challenges for marketing efforts, even for prominent universities, necessitating coordinated efforts.

The study also reveals interest in Russian educational scholarships among Mongolian students, despite a general lack of awareness. This suggests substantial

potential for expanding the export of Russian higher and possibly secondary vocational education, buoyed by Russia's continued positive image in Mongolian public opinion.

Universities in the Republic of Buryatia, despite the overall low appeal of Russian education, are recognized significantly more among Mongolian secondary school graduates. They offer educational opportunities in popular fields like healthcare, information technology, and software. Consequently, initiatives such as an interuniversity campus for students from Mongolia, China, Korea, and other Asian countries could transform the region into a major educational hub for exporting Russian education.

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Российское образование: востребованность среди выпускников монгольских школ

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Статья выполнена в рамках государственного задания «Россия и Внутренняя Азия: динамика геополитического, социально-экономического и межкультурного взаимодействия (XVII–XXI вв.)», № 121031000243-5

Статья поступила в редакцию в декабре 2023 г.

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Цитирование: Бадмацыренов Т.Б., Дамдинов А.В., Цэцэнбилэг Ц., Бадараев Д.Д. (2024) Российское образование: востребованность среди выпускников монгольских школ // Мир России. Т. 33. № 2. С. 163–182. DOI: 10.17323/1811-038X-2024-33-2-163-182

Аннотация

Образование занимает особое место во внешнеполитической практике России среди инструментов гуманитарного влияния, направленных на формирование на международной арене привлекательного образа государства. Основная цель представленной статьи – раскрыть ресурсные аспекты экспорта российских образовательных услуг, в частности, рассмотреть внешний потенциал системы образования Республики Бурятия, граничащей с Монголией. Исследование направлено на выявление основных характеристик спроса старшеклассников Монголии на образовательные услуги российских вузов.

Актуальность этой темы определяется устойчивостью российско-монгольских отношений в течение длительного времени, которые характеризовались тесными экономическими, военно-политическими, культурными и иными связями. После отхода от социалистической модели в 1990-е гг. на современном этапе монгольское направление становится все более актуальным для российской внешней политики. Вместе с тем привлекательность российского образования существенно снизилась и «возвращение» России в Монголию сталкивается с конкуренцией со стороны других образовательных систем. Для выравнивания ситуации требуются проведение информационной работы на всех уровнях, увеличение образовательных квот, повышение стипендии, улучшение качества языковой подготовки, рекламирование русского языка не только в столице, но и в отдаленных местностях и т. д. Несмотря на сложившуюся непростую ситуацию по востребованности российского образования в Монголии, многолетние исследования фонда «Сант Марал» показывают, что Россия лидирует в общественном мнении монгольского общества как лучший партнер.

Социологическое исследование, проведенное в Монголии в мае – июне 2023 г., было посвящено проблеме востребованности российского образования среди выпускников средних школ. Задачи исследования – рассмотрение наиболее характерных особенностей образовательных стратегий монгольских старшеклассников, выявление их отношения к российской системе профессионального образования. Особое внимание в исследовании уделяется анализу данных официальной статистики в сопоставлении с эмпирическими данными авторов. Согласно исследованию, налицо низкая информированность школьников Монголии о программах Россотрудничества в области экспорта российского образования, о вузах приграничных регионов. Исследованием подтверждается низкий статус русского языка в Монголии, но в то же время населению очень близка российская культура и менталитет. Возникает необходимость создания межвузовских кампусов на приграничных территориях для экспорта российского образования.

Полученные результаты позволяют определить тенденции дальнейшего изменения отношения подрастающего поколения монголов к российской системе образования, что может послужить основой для определения сценариев прогнозного развития социально-гуманитарных связей между Россией и Монголией в условиях глобальных изменений.

Ключевые слова: *российское образование, образовательные стратегии, региональный вуз, монгольские школьники, Монголия, Республика Бурятия*

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