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## **PARTICIPATION OF BREST STATE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS AS AN ELEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY**

Rapid globalization gives rise not only to new economic dynamics but also to formation of a new model of relationships in the society, and that these in turn have consequences for national education system in many countries. Open nature of educational services market means for belarusian universities ample opportunities associated, for example, with wide academic mobility and the establishment of uniform quality management systems, and also the need for effective functioning in a new highly competitive educational environment [1].

The international activities of universities have undergone significant changes over the last years. It is currently being implemented in very diverse and rather complex forms and variations. The concept and strategy that is now known as the *internationalization of higher education* is a relatively recent phenomenon, less than 30 years old [2-3]. Knight (1993) defined the internationalization of higher education as the integration of intercultural and international elements into university teaching and research processes [4]. Today, the concept of

internationalization of higher education has expanded significantly. First of all, it means the construction of a genuinely international higher education community, increased quality and attractiveness, export of expertise, support for a multicultural society and the promotion of global responsibility [5].

At Brest State Technical University (BrSTU), the internationalization of education is seen as an integral part of the overall development strategy of the university. The basic principles of the development of the international activity of the university, its goals and objectives are represented in two basic documents:

- 1) Development Program of Brest State Technical University for 2020 (reviewed and approved by the University Council);
- 2) Development strategy of the Brest State Technical University for the period 2020–2025 (approved by the rector of the university).

According to these documents, the internationalization of education at the university includes the following:

- Positioning of BrSTU on the global educational services market as a significant regional university providing quality education in the field of civil engineering, architecture, engineering systems, mechanical engineering, electronics, information technology, economics and environmental protection;
- Providing a high level of education for the international students at BrSTU in order to increase the international prestige of the Belarusian higher school due to the possibility of building an individual study plan for each student as well as the widespread use of modern pedagogical technologies and methods of distance learning;
- An increase in the number of foreign students at BrSTU due to the active advertising campaign including participation in educational exhibitions abroad, expansion of the university's presence in global and regional rankings, the functioning of a multilingual version of the site, targeted work in social networks, preparation of advertising and information materials;

- Development of double educational programs on the first and second stage of higher education (bachelor and master degrees);
- Participation of the university in international educational projects (including Erasmus+ projects) for the development of academic mobility of students and teachers as well as for the implementation of institutional changes at the university in order to adapt the best pedagogical practices, rationalize the management structure and increase student satisfaction with the quality of education.

It should be noted that the university takes an active part in international project activities. From 2013 to the present, BrSTU has participated in 11 Tempus and Erasmus+ projects (Table 1).

**Table 1** — *List of projects of Tempus and Erasmus programs in which Brest State Technical University took part*

Title of the Project	Reference number
Be-Safe — Belarusian Road Safety Network	544181-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-IT-TEMPUS-JPCR
CERES — Centers of Excellence for young REsearchers	544137-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-SK-TEMPUS-JPHES
RETHINK — Reform of Education Thru International Knowledge exchange	544178-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-PT-TEMPUS-JPCR
LNSS — Library Network Support Services: Modernizing libraries in Armenia, Moldova and Belarus through library staff development and reforming library services	561633-EPP-1-2015-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
InnoCENS — Enhancing Innovation Competences and Entrepreneurial Skills in engineering education	573965-EPP-1-2016-1-SE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
BELL — Enhancement of Lifelong Learning in Belarus	586278-EPP-1-2017-1-LV-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

PRINTeL — Change in Classroom: Promoting Innovative Teaching & Learning to Enhance Student Learning Experience in Eastern Partnership Countries	585760-EPP-1-2017-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
MaCICT — Modernisation of Master Curriculum in ICT for Enhancing Student Employability	598330-EPP-1-2018-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
UniTeLE — University Teaching and Learning Enhancement	598816-EPP-1-2018-1-SE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
DUAL — Promoting Development of Dual Study in Belarusian Higher Education	618513-EPP-1-2020-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP
TACEESM — Transforming Architectural and Civil Engineering Education towards a Sustainable Model	618883-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

It is of interest to consider how the BELL Erasmus+ project is being implemented at BrSTU focusing on the changes that have taken place at the university thanks to it.

The BELL project (586278-EPP-1-2017-1-LV-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP) involves the development of training courses on the basis of advanced training institutes from six participating regional universities including BrSTU, located in five regions of the Republic of Belarus, which will increase the level of citizens' knowledge in various popular aspects of social life and the economy. Developed online or mixed courses of continuing education for the population of the regions will contribute to the expansion of the availability and effectiveness of additional education for young people and adults in accordance with the state policy of the Republic of Belarus [6].

The project aims to expand the interaction of universities and regional communities in the field of lifelong education providing a wide range of educational programs using a variety of learning technologies including distance learning. The project coordinator is the Continuing Education Center in Rezekne Technological Academy, Rezekne (Latvia).

The implementation of the BELL project at the university took place in several stages. At the first stage, teachers were trained in EU partner universities in new pedagogical technologies (gamification of education, use of interactive methods, principles of training courses' design, features of the functioning of the Moodle platform, etc.). Then, the gained experience was disseminated at the university during workshops among all interested teachers. At the next stage, working groups were formed to develop educational content and methods for assessing the knowledge of students. BrSTU headed the development of the course “Information Security”. In addition, the university teachers took part in the working groups of the courses “English Language”, “Economic literacy and entrepreneurship”, “Energy saving in everyday life”. At the same time, equipment for the computer class at BrSTU (interactive whiteboard, PCs, laptops) was purchased at the expense of the project (photo 1).

Project information days were held among the students of the BrSTU as well as at the enterprises of the Brest region and in the employment center. This allowed us to spread the information about project among the local community and to invite young people and adults for project courses. For this purpose, the possibilities of social networks were also used. The first enrollment of students for the project training courses took place in November 2019 — February 2020.

What conclusions can be made from the results of the BELL project implementation at Brest State Technical University?

First of all, it should be noted that for most of the teachers participating in the project this was the first experience of organizing training courses for distance learning. They took part in the discussion of the concept and structure of the courses, developed the course content and assessment methods, organized the advertising of the project in target groups, and accompanied the training of students. This allowed them to gain new experience that can be successfully used in the near future.

The acquired skills of working with students of different ages and belonging to different social groups are of particular value. At the same time, the problem of retaining students for the entire period of study

was clearly identified. Not all of the students were able to complete daily self-study. It is especially true for English courses. Despite the great interest in the courses at the beginning, only 5.2% of students successfully completed their English language training (Table 2).

**Table 2** — *Results of piloting of BELL courses at Brest State Technical University*

Course name	Number of students who registered for training	Number of students who successfully completed training	Percentage of students who successfully completed training
English Language	77	4	5.2%
Information Security	47	14	29.8%
Law literacy	24	12	50.0%
Economic literacy and entrepreneurship	43	26	60.5%
Energy saving in everyday life	28	18	64.3%

This means that when organizing new distance learning courses at the university, it is necessary to understand the mechanism for accompanying students during their studies more clearly.

Networking between the EU and Belarusian universities should be noted among the achievements of the project. By international networking the universities involved to the BELL project consolidate the irresearch and educational potential, their overall competence level, available resources, competitiveness and innovation ability. The established personal contacts between the teachers within the consortium are already being used for cooperation and solving problems outside the project.



**Photo 1** — *Computer class in BrSTU equipped with the BELL project funds*

Another achievement of the project is the introduction of new pedagogical practices into the university. Skills gained during study visits to EU universities challenge teachers to try new strategies, explore new ideas in existing lectures and workshops, make positive changes in their teaching styles.

Thus, it can be noted that participation in international project activities allows the university to integrate new experience into the educational process, to increase the motivation to innovate among teachers and students. This is especially important because it is the low organizational culture and the reluctance to change that are often the obstacles to the internationalization of higher education [7].

A competent and adequate strategy of internationalization allows Brest State Technical University to develop in conditions of high competition among domestic and foreign universities. When competing for talented Belarusian and international students and researchers, integration of multicultural and international elements into university teaching is a significant factor in addition to the high quality of education, brand recognition and supportive and safe environment.

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