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LAUNCHING AN ENGLISH-TAUGHT BACHELOR'S PROGRAM IN IT FIELD FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HIGHER IT SCHOOL AT TOMSK STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. This article presents a detailed review of launching an English-taught bachelor's program in Software Engineering at the Higher IT School (HITs) of Tomsk State University (TSU). It explores the faculty's team motivations behind the program's creation, the transformative vision for IT education, and the issues encountered during its implementation. The analysis focuses on the significant challenges emerged, including differences in mentality, a lower-than-expected level of academic preparedness and language proficiency for the students, and systemic gaps in the university and city environments. The article reflects on adaptive strategies performed by the faculty staff, the importance of cross-cultural understanding, and the necessity of structural support for sustainable internationalization. It sums up with the idea that educating international students requires not only academic readiness but also cultural and institutional transformation. The case underscores the importance of Learning by Doing and continuous improvement to ensure long-term success in global education initiatives.

Keywords: cultural adaptation, cross-cultural communication, English-taught education, institutional readiness, internationalization, software Engineering.

The launch of a new educational program always presents a faculty team with a set of specific challenges. Introducing such a program in English provides an additional layer of complexity – especially at faculties where foreign languages and/or regional studies are not part of their core academic focus and are not perceived as critical issues by default. This article provides an overview of a relevant case study: the launch of an English-taught bachelor's program in Software Engineeringat at the Research and Education Center "Higher IT

School" (HITs) at Tomsk State University (TSU). I was particularly interested in conducting this analysis after discussing with colleagues their experiences during the program's initial launch, as I joined the faculty only in the third year of its implementation. The article explores the context and motivations behind the program's creation, the objectives defined at the time of its initiation, the difficulties encountered by the School's team, and the conclusions and recommendations drawn from this process.

In 2015, a team was formed at the Department of Software Engineering at the Faculty of Informatics at TSU. The team began actively working on a project to transform the model of IT education within a "classical university" setting. The motivation for this was compelling: the traditional model was beginning to fail. The prevailing approach to training IT specialists – and software engineers in particular – was no longer aligned with industry demands. Upon entering the job market, graduates increasingly faced the reality of being told to "forget everything you were taught over the past four years" [2].

With support from experts at the Skolkovo Moscow of Management, the program was reassembled with the goal of rethinking and elevating its foundational components [1]:

1. Educational Model and Quality of Training. The team scrupulously analyzed best practices from the top 300 global engineering schools, using Stanford, Carnegie Mellon University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as benchmarks. This analysis revealed the need to accelerate the period of foundational training for specialists and to reorient toward pedagogical methods that promote students' self-directed educational activity, moving away from the classical model where "the instructor and their textbook are the only source of truth".

2. Staff Policy. With the rapid speed of development in the IT industry, it became evident that the training of practice-oriented professionals could not rely exclusively on only-academicaly-engaged faculty staff members. It was necessary to focus on attracting and retaining industry practitioners within the academic environment.

3. Interaction With Real IT Market Players. It became clear that industry partners should not meet students only after graduation, but during their studies. These interactions should go beyond internships and include mechanisms for providing feedback on student work – feedback that would not be just formally acknowledged but would actively stimulate curriculum adjustments in response to current market needs.

These processes were initiated under favorable conditions: the university's participation in the federal project "5-100". To achieve strong positions in global university rankings, it became essential to build a succesfull engineering school. This goal required the mentioned before rethinking of the educational model. Furthermore, in pursuing the ambitious yet seriously formulated goal of building a world-class School, it was crucial to enter the

global arena – or rather, to invite the world in, steadily building the brand and reputation of the School, and spread it beyond the country's borders together with the program's graduates.

Another important consideration was the economic efficiency of the School. A tuition-based program targeting international students became a vital component of the project's financial sustainability. Thus, the decision was made to launch the program in English, targeting the international commercial education market.

In 2017, the English-taught bachelor's program at HITs was among pioneers undergraduate degrees in TSU. There was already one bachelor's program in humanities (philology), and Software engineering became the first in the technical field. Mostly, until then, fully-English-taught programs existed only at the master's level. There was little opportunity for consultation on launching such programs within the local academic network, and seeking an expert advice from external institutions did not seem necessary at the time. Essentially, the English-taught program was launched in a "Learning by Doing" mode – the very approach that is among the School's core educational technologies. The foundational idea was to create two parallel programs in different languages, with the English-taught track essentially being a translated version of the Russian-taught one.

Before the official launch, two key objectives were defined for the initial phase:

1. To start admissions and determine whether international students would be willing to come to Russia to study programming via a non-traditional approach.

2. To understand the differences between a typical Russian applicant and an unfamiliar international applicant.

Let's take a closer look at each goal and the results of achieving them.

1. Starting admissions and determining whether international students would be willing to come to Russia to study programming via a non-traditional approach.

The first admissions campaign was conducted under spartan conditions. Prospective students were being invited to join a program that, in essence, did not yet exist – there were no upper-year students or graduates, no live examples of classes being held. At the same time, there was experience of the department and the direction of "Software Engineering" at TSU, there was a general idea of strong Russian programmers and a promise to teach students in Siberia in English.

To facilitate enrollment in the English-taught program, a staff member from TSU International Division was brought in. With prior experience in recruiting international students in Russia, this person became the only international communications related expert on the School's team. It is important

to note that this staff member's role was strictly recruitment-focused and did not include consultation on adapting the program for international students.

Preparations for the admission campaign began in February-March 2017: program brochures were revised, social media accounts were created for outreach, and incoming leads via the International Division were handled promptly. In addition to the general challenges of launching a brand-new program, there were other obstacles, such as: far from ideal university's geographic location (the counties, that appeared to be target, are typically closer to Moscow time zone); Siberia's image – associated with extreme cold, unwelcoming people, and a lack of civilization; program tuition fees – moderate to high compared to average European universities, some of which offer free education to international students.

In the first year, 11 students were enrolled out of the planned 25; in the second year, They were 13. The TSU Faculty of Pre-University Training (now the Pre-Courses Department) was a key resource in recruitment during the first two years. By the third year, with a growing body of information about the program circulating in international student communities and preparatory departments of other Russian universities, the target enrollment of 25 students was achieved. Thus, the fundamental question was answered positevly – yes, international students are willing to come to Siberia to study programming in English. Whether they fully understood that the program followed a non-traditional approach is another matter, but that aspect is not central to this discussion.

2. Understanding the differences between the typical Russian applicant and the unfamiliar international applicant.

The distinctions became evident almost immediately.

***1. Academic Preparation*.** The levels of mathematical and IT training among average first-year students in the Russian- and English-taught programs was significantly different. In Russian schools, Informatics is a standard subject; graduates typically have basic computer skills and some experience in elementary programming. Due to high competition for IT-related university programs, even average Russian applicant shows fairly advanced programming skills, and top-ranking students are often winners of contests and olympiads.

In contrast, in most of the countries from which international students came, Informatics is either absent from school curricula or limited to user-level skills. Some students – especially quota students from low-income countries – arrived without even owning a personal laptop. A level of mathematical preparation also fell short of expectations. Thus, the initial idea of launching the English-taught program as a direct copy of the Russian-language one – without adapting content, pace, or pedagogical approaches – proved ineffective.

***2. National and Cultural Specificity*.** Over 70 % (8 students) of the initial group came from Arab countries, mainly Egypt – a trend that persisted for several years. The teachers and staff of the school were faced with something

that was not included in the initial hypotheses – a fundamental difference in the mentality of the students who prevailed in the group. These included divergent views on what constituted "normal" or "high" academic workload, time management, obligations (e.g., attendance and punctuality), and student-teacher dynamics. There was a general reluctance to seek clarification when material was not understood, differing approaches to conflict resolution, and even a resistance to recognizing female authority figures. The School was naturally introduced to the concept of "loss of face", that appeared to exist not just in Asian, but also in Arab cultures – though manifested differently. Arab students were more likely to defend their "face" (even if it was "lost" through their own fault) assertively, sometimes confrontationally. This often took the form of complaints against teachers when, for example, a late assignment was not accepted or a higher grade for a poor work was not awarded. Such confrontations were emotionally charged and unfamiliar within the Russian academic setting, occasionally leaving staff at a loss. This led to students being accommodated – sometimes not only when necessary but in ways that enabled academic regression. This was partly driven by the need to retain a small, assembled with great difficulty student collective. It took time to realize that effective interaction with students of such cultural backgrounds requires a "firm hand" guided by a calm and reasoned mind, resilient to emotional provocation.

3. English Language Proficiency. Despite passing entrance exams, many students struggled with the program's content, which involved a significant amount of spesific technical and mathematical terminology.

Beyond the students themselves, gaps were revealed in the university environment outside the faculty. Although TSU had been offering English-taught for several years already, it turned out that the Department of Paid Educational Services was lacking bilingual contract templates for tuition-paying students, key application/admission documents on the university level also existed only in Russian. This "paperwork battle" continued for years, but due to the persistent efforts of HITs staff, many resources now exist in English or bilingual formats – including internship report journals and scientific writing guidelines for courseworks and theseses.

Wider issues persisted. In both the university and the city, it is rare to find someone capable of communicating in English – whether in administrative offices, public services, or healthcare. For students not planning to learn Russian, the social environment could be as important as the academic experience in determining whether to study in Russia.

Systemic unpreparedness extended to the federal and legislative levels. For example, in many attractive countries for international applicants (Europe, North America), deadlines for fall semester admissions fall in February-March. In Russia, at the time of the program's launch, document intake was officially beginning in January, with meaningful recruitment activity only starting around

April (minding different bureaucratic processes that are important for the start of actual active work with applicants) – by which time many potential applicants had already received their acceptance letters elsewhere. In 2025, the official start date for document intake and exams performing is June 20, indicating a negative trend.

A further obstacle was the restriction on employment for international students. A key advantage of HITs is the opportunity to secure paid internships with industry partners. However, this required formal employment, which was difficult due to regulatory barriers. Fortunately, Federal Law No. 16-FZ of February 6, 2020, simplified employment for international students, marking a positive trend.

Was It Possible to Take Any Preventive Measures?

While it would have been nearly impossible to influence federal regulations or reshape the city environment in the short term, other issues could have been addressed through proactive strategies:

1. Cross-Cultural Communication About Unfamiliar Mentalities. Cultural consultancy prior to launching a program for international students could have been immensely helpful. It would be inappropriate to blame technical specialists for overlooking factors like "mentality, culture, and educational background" during program design. A more reasonable approach would involve recommending and providing mentorship or expert consultations from university departments professionally engaged in international communications. Such targeted and timely support could help revise not only initial goals but also critical elements of the program's structure and content. This kind of assistance would benefit any program oriented toward international students – not just English-taught ones. Both personal consultations and professional development courses (offered by specialized universities) on intercultural student engagement could be valuable for both academic and administrative staff.

2. Academic and Language Readiness of Applicants. This category of challenges is difficult to predict in advance but can be addressed through flexible teaching practices – something that HITs team actively implemented after facing the issue. At the same time, a preventive matter of significantly increasing the difficulty of entrance exams is not a viable solution: with so many other barriers to international recruitment, maintaining a balance between program sustainability and student success remains crucial.

3. Institutional Environment Readiness. A university aiming to attract students from abroad must have a systematic vision of how international students will interact with its infrastructure. This should involve a unified institutional policy, requiring the conscious engagement of all departments (at the very least, ensuring that everyone knows where to direct a non-Russian-speaking student seeking help). Certainly, improvements in institutional readiness are accelerated by the growth of the international students number. At

the time of the program's launch, the total number of international students from non-CIS countries at TSU was much lower, and the majority were enrolled in Russian-taught programs – leading probably to a "they came to study in Russian, so all communication must be in Russian" mindset. However, over the years, with an increase in both the total number of students from abroad and the number of English-taught programs, there have been significant positive change within the university. As we shape the environment, the environment shapes us in return. Even if the lack of preparedness described above could not have been fully predicted, efforts to influence the situation during implementation provided meaningful results.

To sum up the review, it is worth saying that the launch and evolution of an English-taught bachelor's program in Software engineering at the "Higher IT School" of Tomsk State University proved to be not just a professional challenge, but also a profound learning experience for everyone involved in its implementation. While preparing to launch the bachelor's program, the School's team set two main goals: to understand whether there is demand among international applicants for studying programming in English in Russia, and to learn how an applicant from abroad differs from a Russian one. An important stage in launching a program oriented toward students from abroad – spesificaly, the need to adapt the program to the mentality and the level of subject and language preparation of incoming international students – was postponed until the actual rollout of the program. This was done for various reasons: the unclear importance of this stage for specialists in technical field, the lack of qualified staff around to provide methodological support, etc. After the program's launch, the faculty staff encountered the following problems: the difficulty of intercultural communication due to differences in mentality; the lower-than-expected subject and language preparedness of applicants; and the poor readiness of both the university and the broader city/national environment to interact with students who arrived to Russia for studying in English. Some of these problems could not have been predicted, while others could have been smoothed out through preventive expert consultation.

The School performed flexible approaches, learning in the process, step by step transforming itself and transforming not only the students but also the university environment around them. It is also worth noting that any such work must be systemic, implying coordinated efforts not only within the faculty but also at the broader university level. In this case, it will be possible to achieve maximum effectiveness by preventing many potential problems and difficulties.

The last idea that I would like to highlight is that internationalization is not just about attracting students from abroad – it's about becoming a place where they can feel comfortable and truly succeed. The challenges described here were not always predictable, often difficult, and sometimes discouraging. But they also opened doors for institutional growth, intercultural learning, and

academic innovation. Most importantly, they offered a deeper understanding of what it means to educate across borders – not only in geography, but in mindset, experience, and expectations.

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СИНОНИМИЧЕСКИЕ КОНСТРУКЦИИ В ЯЗЫКЕ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ А.С. ПУШКИНА)

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Аннотация. В статье рассмотрены синонимические конструкции на примере творчества А.С. Пушкина. Переходность и изоморфизм показывают, каким образом реализуются связи между языковыми единицами в прозаическом тексте, и это свидетельствует о подвижности системы языка. Цель работы – описать структурно-семантические особенности простых предложений, осложненных причастными оборотами, и сложноподчиненных предложений с определительными отношениями. Результаты проведенного исследования позволили установить, что между простыми и сложными предложениями при различии в их структуре наблюдаются синонимические связи. Изоморфизм как языковая закономерность создает связность между простыми и сложноподчиненными предложениями с определительной семантикой. Различного рода