

## **COOPERATION OF RUSSIAN PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITIES WITH WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES (THE CASE STUDY OF OPEN EDUCATION CENTERS)**

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**Abstract.** The objective of the present study is to analyze the nature of Russia-Africa relations in the field of education, with a particular focus on the experience of Russian language dissemination in West African countries and the work of the Centres for Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching. The article considers the historical dimension of Russia's collaboration with West African nations in the promotion of the Russian language. A particular emphasis is placed on the positive experience of the partnership that was formed by the Soviet Union over decades but was interrupted in the 1990s due to political circumstances. It also presents the current experience of some Russian universities in implementing the projects to spread the Russian language and culture in the countries of West Africa. The article highlights several significant aspects of educational interaction with African countries and describes the practices of cooperation between Russia and African countries. At present, Russia's 'soft power' in Africa is exercised mostly through the promotion of Russian education in African countries, including the implementation of supplementary general education programs, certification of foreign students in Russian as a foreign language, admission of foreign students to Russian universities under quotas, dissemination of Russian culture through the execution of educational and methodological academic activities, as well as professional development of higher education staff in Africa. The primary outcome of the study is the presentation of a comprehensive practical experience of promoting Russian as a foreign language by some pedagogical universities working in West Africa, which contributes to further African-Russian university partnerships.

**Keywords:** West Africa, Russian Federation, interaction, partnership, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Centre for Open Education, implementation of educational programmes, Russian language

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## THE HISTORY OF RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The long-standing relationship between Russia and Africa<sup>1</sup> is experiencing a new upswing. This appears both inevitable and rational when viewed in the context of the evolving global order, the emergence of a multipolar world, the rise of new centers of power, and the consequent ascendance of the Global South. It has been proposed by experts in the field that both Russia and Africa are exhibiting a mutual interest in a rapprochement. The consolidation of resources and technologies, as well as the commonality of views, are to enable the countries to implement ambitious and mutually beneficial projects in key segments of the economy, from the military-industrial complex, energy, and space exploration to agriculture, education, etc. Moreover, there are no misunderstandings or ambiguities between Russia and Africa regarding the colonial past of African states since Russia was never involved in the colonization of Africa and, on the contrary, supported the continent’s struggle for independence from the colonial powers.

Contemporary studies of Russia’s relations with Africa [Avdalyan 2023; Deich 2017; Kassaye-Nigusie 2017] often turn to the study of the concept of “soft power.” The term is defined as the capacity to realize objectives by means of the persuasive power of one’s culture, ideals, values, and policies, as opposed to the use of coercion [Nye 2004]. Thus, values, culture, and the language that underpins them constitute a significant component of “soft power.”

According to M.R. Avdalyan, the successful transmission of values and the formation of a favorable public image of the state cannot be achieved without a simultaneous development of human potential, the basis of which should be regarded as being firmly established within the domain of education. This is the reason why secondary and higher education systems are often the objects of “soft power,” with countries aspiring to play a prominent role in international relations increasingly developing international educational programs [Avdalyan 2023: 146].

As the successor state to the USSR, the Russian Federation has considerable experience in the export of education. Despite its belated entry into the global education services market, which only occurred after the Second World War, the USSR had attained second position globally in terms of the number of foreign students by the 1980s (surpassed only by the United States) [Sheregi, Dmitriev, Arefiev 2003].

This does not include those who were educated in their home countries under the mentorship of Soviet specialists. It is important to mention that Soviet universities offered specialized multidisciplinary training programs for prospective teachers, with the aim of preparing them to work internationally. These programs integrated education in the

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<sup>1</sup> The first documented interactions between representatives of Russian and African Christian and Muslim communities, who undertook pilgrimages to holy sites, occurred as early as the Middle Ages [Goumiledi 2023: 14].

humanities and exact or natural sciences with pedagogy and teaching methods as well as a foreign language that was to be utilized as a language of instruction for teaching subjects within the aforementioned areas. Separate programs for teaching Russian as a foreign language were also developed and implemented. Consequently, the extensive dissemination of Russian educational technologies and practices, in conjunction with the promotion of scientific ideas and a culture of academic and business communication (including via the Russian language), constituted a substantial element of Soviet “soft power,” effectively consolidating countries around the USSR.

The situation changed dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in profound economic, political, and humanitarian ramifications. Concurrently, Russian-African relations underwent a marked decline, becoming an almost marginal priority in the nation’s foreign policy agenda [Deich 2017: 4]. Nevertheless, the efforts of Russia’s academic and scientific community to preserve the best achievements of Russian education while skillfully integrating effective foreign practices stimulated growing interest in Russian education as early as during the first two decades of the 21st century. This interest is further intensifying today, as Russia is successfully demonstrating that its educational resources are a valuable export asset, while the country’s robust intellectual and cultural base, considerable experience of integrating teaching and research, broad spectrum of scientific activities [Inozemtseva 2009: 4–5], technological sophistication of education, and other valuable attributes give Russia undeniable competitive advantages over other exporters of educational services in the global market.

African countries have been and continue to be one of the main importers of Russian education. The establishment of cooperative relationships between the USSR and Africa in the field of education commenced shortly after the attainment of independence by many African states in the 1960s. The USSR provided substantial support to African countries in developing educational centers at all levels, from constructing and equipping schools, colleges, and universities to providing highly qualified personnel for the entire education system, helping thereby to increase literacy and general education among the African population and to develop human capital on the African continent.

The geographical coverage of African countries that sent their students to Soviet (later Russian) universities and welcomed Soviet (later Russian) teachers who shared educational practices adopted in their country was extensive, encompassing all regions of the continent.

African students came to the USSR on scholarship programs to master the educational programs of the 5-year specialist degree (less frequently, postgraduate programs) in a variety of fields, including medicine, engineering (with a particular emphasis on mechanical engineering and mineral extraction), agriculture, pedagogy, and didactics. In exchange, teachers and subject specialists from the USSR were deployed to educational institutions on the African continent to deliver instruction in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, and other academic disciplines [Martynova, Yapi 2022; Waliyullahi 2016]. Collaborative scientific research endeavors were undertaken, academic and educational projects were implemented, and conferences and symposiums were convened.

In a number of countries, such as Benin, Ghana, and Sudan, specialized centers were established to promote the achievements of Soviet science and technology, culture, art, and sports [Ndiaye 2008; Kulkova, Sanusi 2016]. These centers traditionally organized Russian language courses, after which graduates could compete for the right to receive free higher (including postgraduate) education at institutes and universities in the USSR. These and other initiatives were accompanied by the promotion of rich Russian culture and the Russian language.

## EXPERIENCE IN PROMOTING THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES

The provision of Russian language training to African students was central to the implementation of academic and educational initiatives. In the case of **Senegal**, interest in learning Russian emerged rapidly following the ratification of the 1967 Agreement on Cooperation in Science, Culture and Technology, and the establishment of the embassy and cultural center in Dakar. A substantial section devoted to the study of the history and geography of the USSR was introduced to the official programs of the Senegalese education system, supplemented by Russian, which entered into the list of languages offered for study as a foreign language, along with German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic (both at schools and universities). According to M. Ndiaye, one of the most significant achievements in the field of education was the establishment of a Russian language department at the Cheikh Anta Diop University (*Université Cheikh Anta Diop*) in Dakar [Ndiaye 2008: 44].

The crisis in the teaching and promotion of the Russian language in Senegal, which stemmed from the suspension of support for relevant programs following the collapse of the Soviet Union, is gradually being overcome. A collaborative endeavor between the Association of Russian Language Teachers of Senegal and the Senegalese Ministry of Education has been initiated with the objective of addressing the prevailing challenges in the domains of teacher training, student recruitment, the establishment of Russian language clubs, and the organization of Pushkin Day, with the support of the Russian Embassy in Senegal and The Gambia [Ndiaye 2008: 47].

The Russian government has been facilitating the implementation of measures aimed at enhancing the professional competencies of Russian language instructors in Senegal as well as developing a teaching and methodological base for Russian language educational programs. In autumn 2024, a substantial Russian media library and lecture hall, named “Innopraktika,” was inaugurated at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. The objectives of the institution include the establishment of a Russian cultural space and the provision of a platform for dialogue on cultural, humanitarian, social, and other universal topics<sup>2</sup>.

The 1960s were marked by the strengthening of the Russian language’s position in **Nigeria** [Avdalyan 2023; Aigbovia 2020; Okoedion, Okolie 2020; Chukwube 2023]. As early as 1960, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) had introduced elective Russian language courses. Subsequent to the establishment of official diplomatic relations and the growing influence of the USSR in Africa, interest in the Russian language increased, leading to its inclusion in a full-fledged educational program. In 1965, Russian was incorporated into the curriculum at the University of Ibadan (UI), and in 1970 at the University of Lagos (UNILAG) [Avdalyan 2023: 148].

Russian has experienced a decline in popularity in Nigeria, consistent with global patterns, but today it ranks as the third most studied European language in Nigerian universities, surpassed only by French and German. Research on key aspects of Russian language instruction in Nigeria has documented the emergence of institutions, programs, and organizations promoting Russian language and culture within the country. For instance, the office of “Russkiy Mir” (“Russian World”) at the University of Lagos provides access to audio and video publications, library collections, information materials, and scientific and

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<sup>2</sup> A media library will be created at a university in Senegal to promote Russian culture. *Russkiy mir*. 29.07.2023. (In Russ.). <https://russkiymir.ru/news/316098/?ysclid=m4ppk7nybr55800459> (accessed: 05.05.2025)

methodological literature. There are a number of organizations that facilitate communication in Russian and offer a comprehensive insight into contemporary Russia, including “Istok” (“Origin”) in Abuja and “Russkiy Dom” (“Russian House”) in Lagos, which undertake educational initiatives and conduct presentations, creative meetings, business forums, film screenings, and exhibitions at their venues. Additionally, they provide instruction in Russian to both adult and children’s audiences [Avdalyan 2023: 150–151].

The Soviet Union made a significant contribution to the development of the educational system in the **Republic of Mali**. Particular emphasis was placed on the provision of technical and material support: equipment, textbooks, brochures, etc. were supplied to Malian schools. Soviet teachers were providing instruction to students at five educational institutions in Mali, with Russian language study being compulsory. However, the most significant component of Soviet assistance was the construction of educational institutions to provide the country with highly qualified local personnel, which was recognized as a fundamental condition for ensuring Mali’s economic sovereignty [Davidchuk, Degterev, Korendiasov 2022: 721].

In addition, training programs for Malian students were organized at Soviet universities. Nevertheless, despite the comprehensiveness of Soviet assistance in personnel training, this area was the least developed. The provision of education and a range of internships in the USSR proved incapable of addressing the fundamental issue of the severe shortage of qualified personnel experienced by Malian enterprises. This ultimately compelled them to seek assistance from both Soviet specialists and those from other countries [Davidchuk, Degterev, Korendiasov 2022: 722].

Presently, the Russian language is taught in secondary schools and universities within the Republic. RUDN University (also known as the P. Lumumba People’s Friendship University of Russia) has established six centers “Russkoye Prostranstvo” (“Russian Space”), which offer permanent Russian language courses. Evidence from both historical Soviet teaching practices and current Russian language promotion in Mali points to a positive response of the population towards collaborative educational projects. Additional motivation stems from the potential for employment in enterprises involving Russian capital, or from pursuing higher education in Russia, incentivizing Russian language learning and cultural engagement [Aleshkovsky et al. 2024: 75].

**Ghana** was among the first African countries to gain independence from Britain (1957), and, within a year, diplomatic relations were established between the Republic of Ghana and the Soviet Union, followed by an exchange of embassies in 1959–1960 [Kulkova, Sanusi 2016: 297]. During the early 1960s, scientific and cultural exchange programs were in operation in both countries, and a Soviet cultural center was opened in Ghana, where Russian language classes were held. It has been estimated that hundreds of thousands of students were trained in these courses [Kulkova, Sanusi 2016: 297]. Some of the course graduates pursued their education in the Soviet Union. Beginning from 1961, more than 2,000 Ghanaians were educated in the USSR, while approximately 1,000 students enrolled in Soviet schools across more than forty cities within the country [Kulkova, Sanusi 2016: 298].

Concurrently, a significant number of Soviet specialists, including geologists, engineers, medical professionals, and educators, were engaged in various projects in Ghana. The scope of cooperation between Ghana and the USSR encompassed all domains deemed significant to the African state, including precious metal mining, the building of fishing vessels and factories for fish processing, and the energy sector. Noteworthy initiatives within the energy sector include the construction of the Bui hydroelectric power station (which commenced its active phase in the 1980s and was fully completed in 2013)

and works on the introduction of nuclear energy (where the USSR assisted Ghana in developing a nuclear reactor for research purposes and an isotope laboratory in Legon) [Kulkova, Sanusi 2016: 298]. Following a brief cessation in relations consequent to the military coup in Ghana in 1966, the USSR resumed cooperation with the country, including in the field of education. Beginning in 1973, nationals of Ghana were once again granted the opportunity to pursue their studies in the USSR. The association of graduates from Soviet universities was established. In 1975, the Soviet Cultural Center recommenced its activities [Kulkova, Sanusi 2016: 299].

Following a period of isolation due to a series of coups and political instability in Ghana, the nation resumed its contacts with the USSR in the 1980s. However, these contacts declined again in the early 1990s, this time due to the collapse of the USSR. Nevertheless, since the late 1990s, the countries have been engaging in dynamic interaction in both traditional sectors of the economy and new areas such as transport, security, and high technology. Ghana and Russia are also developing fruitful cooperation in the field of education. The Russian language is taught in universities in Ghana. In 2005, 300 students at the University of Ghana in Legon opted to study Russian as a foreign language [Kulkova, Sanusi 2016: 307]. In 2007, the Russian Embassy in Accra organized for the first time a Russian language competition for students, with the objective of assessing their proficiency in the Russian language and their knowledge of Russian history and culture. The competition has evolved into an annual event, during which Russian diplomats deliver lectures and organize exhibitions dedicated to historical and cultural events in Russia [Kulkova, Sanusi 2016: 308]. The present study explores the ongoing dissemination of the Russian language within Ghanaian educational institutions.

However, according to Ghanaian sociologist R. Tenkorang, the level of competition among foreign languages studied in the country's educational institutions is notably high. Due to the peculiarities of the linguistic landscape of African nations and China's current political and economic strategies towards Africa, the foreign languages of utmost demand are French and Chinese, as they can secure for the graduates employment opportunities within Ghana and the broader African continent. The establishment of an organization similar to the Chinese Confucius University, in terms of its functions, appears to be a rational measure for the purpose of promoting the Russian language in Ghana [Tenkorang 2022: 120].

At present, 11 cooperation agreements have been signed between Russian and Ghanaian universities, with the majority concerning the education of Ghanaians at Russian universities. In December 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the Ghanaian Ministry of Education on cooperation in the field of higher education. It involves the development of joint programs and projects, the exchange of experience and information, and the organization of joint events. The agreement was concluded on the sidelines of the 4th meeting of the Intergovernmental Russia-Ghana Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation. Following a request from the Ghanaian side, an increase in the number of the Russian state-funded places for study in Russian universities for Ghanaians was approved, from 70 to 110. At present, there are more than 900 Ghanaian students enrolled in bachelor's, master's, and specialist programs in Russia, of whom more than 300 are studying free of charge<sup>3</sup>. The collaboration in the domain of training national personnel for Ghana in Russia was continued in 2023. In the 2023/2024 academic year,

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<sup>3</sup> Russia and Ghana expand cooperation in higher education. *Russian Ministry of Education and Science*. 18.12.2023. (In Russ.). <https://t.me/minobrnaukiofficial/6919> (accessed: 10.05.2025).

110 students selected under the Russian government-funded quota commenced their studies at Russian universities<sup>4</sup>.

The Russian language and educational practices are also becoming a subject of interest in educational institutions in the **Republic of Côte d'Ivoire**. The diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire were established in January 1967, followed by a period of suspension between 1969 and 1986, and are currently on the rise. The 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the country has led to a significant intensification of bilateral cooperation in a number of key areas. These include national defense and security, the extraction and processing of hydrocarbons and other minerals, the construction of power facilities, the establishment of ties in the field of agriculture, and, naturally, in the sphere of culture and education. In 2016, Ivorian students received approximately thirty scholarships from the Russian Federation, with the possibility of an increase in the number of candidates. In certain instances, students are prepared to fund their own education, as evidenced by the fact that in 2015, 120 individuals pursued academic studies in Russia at their own expense [Okana-Gakosso 2023: 159].

Cooperation between Russia and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire is most actively developing in the higher education sector. A significant number of agreements on scientific and educational cooperation between universities were signed in 2022–2023. The nation's advantage lies in the increasing use of the Internet, encompassing the implementation of educational programs. This approach has proved to reduce educational inequality, including in rural areas, and promote the involvement of a significant number of citizens in the learning process. As a follow-up of the outcome of the second Russia-Africa summit, the prospect of establishing an online platform for the instruction of Russian in several universities in Côte d'Ivoire is being deliberated [Aleshkovsky et al. 2024: 75].

Cultural and scientific ties are also being actively developed with **Benin**. After a long hiatus, Beninese students resumed studying at Russian universities on state scholarships in 2003. In 2024, Benin's quota in Russian universities was 150 places funded by the state. Beninese diplomats are also improving their professional qualifications at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Gérard Gbaguidi, a Soviet university graduate, and his Russian wife founded the A. K. Vereshchagin Higher School of Construction in Cotonou. The Russian Embassy regularly provides the school with fiction books in Russian. The Association of Beninese Graduates of Soviet and Russian Universities ("Soyuz-Benin") is based in Cotonou too. Since 2017, the Embassy has held an annual Russian Film Festival in Benin<sup>5</sup>.

**Burkina Faso** is home to a non-governmental "Russkiy Dom" ("Russian House"), which hosts meetings with representatives of Russian universities and offers Russian language courses to over 200 Burkinabés. In response to a request from partners, the decision was made to increase the number of state scholarships available to Burkinabé citizens. In 2017, the two countries' ministries of education signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of higher education. Since the end of 2023, the Russian-Burkinabé "African Initiative" association has also been operating in the country, implementing a number of cultural projects attracting musicians and graffiti artists<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Russian-Ghanaian relations. *Russian Embassy in the Republic of Ghana*. (In Russ.). <https://ghana.mid.ru/ru/countries/ghana/political-relations/> (accessed: 10.05.2025)

<sup>5</sup> 2021 presidential election in the Republic of Benin. *Institute for African Studies*. 12.05.2021. (In Russ.). <https://www.inafran.ru/node/2473> (accessed: 10.05.2025)

<sup>6</sup> Primakov: "Russkiy Dom" in Burkina Faso will prepare students for admission to Russian universities. *TASS*. 24.01.2024. (In Russ.). <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/19805581> (accessed: 10.05.2025)

The training of specialists at Russian universities remains one of the key areas of Russia-Togo bilateral cooperation. To date, more than 900 Togolese nationals have received an education in Russia. For the 2023/24 academic year, 86 scholarships were allocated from the federal budget to Togolese citizens. Until 1992, the Russian Embassy had provided significant assistance to the Russian community in Togo in resolving various issues. However, after its closure (today Russia's interests in Togo are represented by the Russian Embassy in Benin), cultural ties with Russia have significantly diminished. In fact, there are no Russian institutions operating in the country anymore. Nevertheless, the Association of Russian Women in Togo, "Druzhba" ("Friendship"), helps to keep Russian citizens united<sup>7</sup>.

Programs to promote the Russian language in other West African countries, such as **Liberia** and **Cape Verde**, were implemented under agreements on cultural and scientific cooperation between the USSR government and African republics in the 1970s and 1980s. These agreements aimed to encourage the study of the languages and literature of the respective countries' peoples in educational institutions. At the same time, cultural and scientific ties were established, and these are gradually being resumed at present.

#### CENTRES FOR OPEN EDUCATION IN WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES<sup>8</sup>

Since 2023, Centres for Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching (COEs) have been operating in almost half of the countries of West Africa: Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal. A number of Russian universities have been actively promoting COEs, including the State University of Education (operating in Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon); Saint Petersburg State University (Guinea and Central African countries); South Ural State University of Humanities and Pedagogy (Senegal, Mali); Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K.D. Ushinsky (Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire).

Universities implement supplementary general education and development programs for foreign students and schoolchildren, whilst also organizing events to promote the Russian language and culture and to assist university teachers in partner countries in improving their qualifications. For instance, between 2023 and 2024, the University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin offered on-site Russian language training to 600 students and distance learning programs in Russian to an additional 120 students. In a similar vein, the University of Lagos in Nigeria delivered in-person Russian courses to 524 students and distance language training to 200 students. In 2024, a total of 373 students were enrolled in in-person Russian language classes at the educational institutions in Senegal and 390 students at the private Ahmed Baba Institute in Mali<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Trade and economic cooperation. Togolese Republic. *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 2023. (In Russ.). <https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/tg/1737907/> (date of reference on 10 May 2025)

<sup>8</sup> In 2023, Centres for Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching (COEs) were established with the support of the Russian Ministry of Education in 54 countries worldwide, the number having increased to 62 countries by 2024. In the same year, the number of COE's open platforms had reached 170. In accordance with the directive issued by the President of the Russian Federation (No. Pr-1087 of 30 May 2023), the Foundation for the Support of Humanities "Moya Istoriya" ("My History" Foundation) has been designated as the operator of the Comprehensive Network of COEs with effect from 2024. The Foundation's support has been instrumental in facilitating the attainment of commendable outcomes by country operators. In 2024, the number of COE students learning Russian reached 15,700. The centres employed 252 teachers, implemented 326 educational programs in Russian and hosted more than 135 educational, informational and scientific events around the world. The aforementioned information was obtained from the concluding meeting of the Foundation's country operators, held on 3 December 2024.

<sup>9</sup> The aforementioned information was obtained from the concluding meeting of the Foundation for the Support of the Humanities "My History" Foundation's country operators, held on 3 December 2024.

In the two-year period, 609 students from the University of Ghana and 608 students from universities in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, including such institutions as the Félix Houphouët-Boigny State University (Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny) and a number of private universities—ETIC (ETIC-U), the Methodist University (Université Méthodiste de Côte d'Ivoire), and the Abidjan University Institute (Institut Universitaire d'Avidjan)—have successfully completed the aforementioned programs.

In 2024, there was an observed increase in the interest of schoolchildren in learning Russian in these republics. This issue was discussed at the concluding meeting of the Centres for Open Education, organized by the foundation “Moya Istoriya” (“My History” Foundation) for Russian pedagogical universities implementing projects to promote Russian as a foreign language.

Among all the universities mentioned above, only the University of Ghana has included teaching the Russian language in its core educational programs. At this institution, a considerable number of students enroll in such programs as Archaeology-Linguistics-Russian Language, Economics-Psychology-Russian Language, Philosophy-History-Russian Language, and others. Within a three-component program, students are formally granted the opportunity to study only one foreign language (or occasionally two, namely French and Spanish) as part of their formal education. Under certain circumstances, students can obtain a bachelor's degree without having studied a foreign language.

According to statistics cited in publications by lecturers at the University of Ghana's Department of Modern Languages, the number of students studying Russian has increased from 112 in 2001 to 528 in 2024 [Chaibok-Tverefu 2018: 83–90]. In a short space of time, universities have organized educational, informational, and methodological events that have brought together students and teachers from Africa and Russia. For instance, South Ural State University of Humanities and Pedagogy collaborated with the Center for the Organization of Scientific and Cultural Events in the Field of Public Diplomacy to hold an international youth forum titled “I Want to Know the World.” Representatives from Russia, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Niger participated in the forum.

A total of 117 people, including high school and university students, participated in the international forum. A series of events were organized with the purpose of providing career guidance to their participants, featuring presentations on the Russian education system, the most promising areas of study, and the prospects for receiving education in Russia. Graduates who had successfully completed their studies at Russian universities shared their experiences with forum participants, telling them, in French and in Russian, the stories of their professional successes achieved through their graduation from Russian universities.

In October 2024, South Ural State University of Humanities and Pedagogy organized a Congress of Russian Language Teachers in Dakar. In the course of the event, a presentation was delivered on the subject of the Russian education system and the opportunities for studying at Russian universities. The presentation was composed of contributions from seven Russian universities. A series of methodological master classes were conducted for African educators in the field of Russian language instruction, along with a master class designed for individuals aspiring to undertake the TRFL (Test of Russian as a Foreign Language). A review of contemporary textbooks on Russian as a foreign language (RFL) for students and teachers of Russian was furnished.

In December 2023, Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K.D. Ushinsky held an international scientific and practical conference entitled “Russia-Africa 2023: The Paradigm of Education.” Its purpose was to discuss current issues of scientific, methodological, and educational support for educational and enlightenment activities promoting the Russian language and Russian culture in African countries and the

implementation of the Russian Federation's humanitarian policy abroad. The conference was attended by representatives of the Russian Ministry of Education, St. Petersburg State University, 11 pedagogical universities of Russia, and teachers of Russian as a foreign language from African universities and schools.

In 2024, Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University hosted the "I Love Russia" festival of science and arts, which comprised a Russian language competition for schoolchildren and students, a competition of works by universities and schools' students entitled "I Draw Russia," interactive platforms presenting the Russian traditions and Russian culture, and a concert of Russian songs and dances performed by Ivorian students.

The operating countries have identified several issues, most notably, difficulties in facilitating access to online education and free online platforms, as well as a paucity of teaching and methodological literature on Russian as a foreign language. In certain countries, groups of students pursuing Russian language studies within the context of supplementary education programs are enrolled without consideration of the students' level of knowledge, education, and age. Moreover, there is a disparity between the commencement and cessation dates of the academic year in Russia and in partner countries, a circumstance that introduces a degree of complexity to the COE planning its activities and the organization of training for foreign students in Russian universities.

#### PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE YAROSLAVL STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR OPEN EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLICS OF GHANA AND CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The Centre for Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching in the Republic of Ghana was established at the University of Ghana in the capital city of Accra in 2023, following the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation. At present, close collaborative relationships are being cultivated with the university, with the Department of Modern Languages, in particular. In 2023, general development programs in Russian as a foreign language were devised and implemented for university students at the "Elementary" (A1), "Basic" (A2), and "First Certification" (B1) levels. In addition, three events (educational, informational, and methodological) were conducted, and testing was carried out based on the results of the Russian as a Foreign Language course at the "Elementary" (A1), "Basic" (A2), and "First Certification" (B1) levels of Russian language proficiency.

From 15 June to 31 July 2024, teachers from Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University (YSPU) visited the University of Ghana to implement six supplementary general development programs, each with a duration of 72 hours. The programs included "Russian Language in Professional Communication" and "Russian Statehood: A Synopsis of the Governance Landscape in the Russian Federation"; "Meeting at A.S. Pushkin's: The Life and Creative Work of the Russian Poet"; "Spiritual and Moral Values of the Russian People"; "Student and School Movements: How Russian Youth Live"; "Musical Geography: Instruments and Dances of the Peoples of Russia," as well as testing Russian language proficiency.

During the 2023–2024 academic year, Russian language instruction was provided at Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University within the Faculty of Russian Philology and Culture (9 students) and the Faculty of Foreign Languages (2 students). Following the conclusion of the Russian language course, a test was administered to the Ghanaian students based at YSPU in order to ascertain their level of proficiency in Russian as a foreign language (levels A1–B1).

Furthermore, plans for cooperation with the private language school E-MORT, which teaches Russian to children and adolescents between the ages of 9 and 14, were discussed.

The Centre for Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching in Côte d'Ivoire is organized on the basis of four universities in Abidjan.

During 2023, Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University concluded cooperation agreements with the private university ETIC-U<sup>10</sup>, the Félix Houphouët-Boigny State University, and the Methodist University (Université Méthodiste de Côte d'Ivoire) in Abidjan. In 2024, a further agreement was made with the University Institute of Abidjan. In the same year, the private schools Muguet and Ephrata in Abidjan demonstrated a particular interest in teaching Russian.

In 2023, supplementary general development programs in Russian (levels A1, A2, and B1) were devised and implemented for students of partner universities in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. Subsequent to this, three events (educational, informational, and methodological) and testing were conducted, the basis of the latter being the results of the Russian as a foreign language course completion. The purpose of this testing was to assess the level of Russian language proficiency.

At present, within the framework of the existing agreements and with the active support of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, close cooperation with all four universities is ongoing. In autumn 2024, a delegation of educators from Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University visited the universities in Abidjan. The objective of the visit was to implement six supplementary general development programs, each encompassing 72 hours. The programs included "Oh, Sport, you are Peace: a century of sport in Russia," "Historical milestones in the development of the Russian state," "Russian language: Rich and Beautiful: How to Speak Russian Correctly," "Great Cities of Russia: History and Modernity," "Once Upon a Time: Secrets of Russian Fairy Tales," "Traditions and National Holidays of the Peoples of Russia," as well as to conduct educational and informational events and to assess Russian language proficiency. During the 2023–2024 academic year, eight students from partner universities pursued their Russian language studies at the Centre for Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching, affiliated with the Faculty of Russian Philology and Culture at Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University.

In order to promote the Russian language and popularize models and practices of the Russian education system, Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University is organizing methodological support for educational and enlightenment activities. This includes the provision of advanced training courses (longreads) on business communication in educational and academic environments and on the use of information and communication technologies in educational environments. The textbook for students from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire on the Russian language and Russian regional culture, "Listening, Speaking and Writing about Yaroslavl: Step by Step to Success," was written. This textbook has been specifically designed for use as a supplementary teaching tool within general development programs for foreign students. It is composed of two parts. The first part contains tasks in English and Russian and is intended for English-speaking students, while the second part offers tasks in French and Russian for French-speaking students. The materials have been developed based on the experience of teaching students from YSPU's partner universities in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

African students possess a strong inclination to pursue Russian language studies, an experience that has been widely regarded as a prestigious endeavor across numerous

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<sup>10</sup> École Technique Informatique et Commerciale (Université).

African nations and has a long history dating back to the 1960s. A significant economic incentive for choosing to study at Russian universities is the fact that Russia annually funds the education of African students at all levels, from undergraduate to postgraduate programs. For instance, the Russian Embassy in Côte d'Ivoire facilitates the annual enrollment of 100 Ivorian students at Russian universities free of charge, with an option of taking a pre-tertiary Russian language training course for one or two years. It is evident that possessing a certificate attesting to the attainment of the Russian language, even at the A1 level, will confer a significant advantage to students. Consequently, it can be posited that the interest in Russia as a nation with traditional values, which is proactively engaged on the African continent and furnishes young individuals with the prospect of acquiring a robust education, constitutes a compelling impetus for the pursuit of proficiency in Russian. At the same time, however, such elevated motivation is not sufficiently stable; therefore, the task of the organizers of the educational process is to identify the reasons for this instability in order to find ways to maintain a high level of motivation to learn Russian.

Consequently, the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation have led to a notable increase in the efforts of Russian universities to promote the Russian language, as well as to foster collaboration between Russian pedagogical universities and their partner institutions in West African countries. The collaboration between Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University and universities in the Republics of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire has evolved into a productive union over the past two years, as evidenced by the enhanced interest in learning Russian on the part of universities and schools in these republics: there has been an annual increase in the number of platforms with which Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University carries out educational and cultural interaction.

The productivity of this collaboration is evidenced by the interest shown by Ghanaian and Ivorian students and school graduates in enrolling in master's and bachelor's degree programs at higher education institutions in Yaroslavl. Furthermore, there is a noticeable interest amongst teachers in enhancing their qualifications through YSPU programs and postgraduate studies. It is imperative to acknowledge the significance of Russian universities' work aimed at extending, by utilizing "soft methods," the influence of the Russian Federation within African nations and at fortifying ties with partner countries across a spectrum of interaction, encompassing the realms of education, culture, and science. This endeavor, unquestionably, will leave an indelible imprint on the annals of effective and mutually beneficial cooperation between the Russian Federation and West African countries.

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Научная статья

## СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО РОССИЙСКИХ ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИХ ВУЗОВ СО СТРАНАМИ ЗАПАДНОЙ АФРИКИ (опыт центров открытого образования)

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**Аннотация.** Целью предпринятого исследования является анализ сотрудничества Российской Федерации и стран Западной Африки в сфере образования, в частности, опыта продвижения в африканские государства русского языка и работы Центров открытого образования на русском языке и обучения африканских слушателей русскому языку.

В работе затрагивается история продвижения русского языка в странах западноафриканского региона. Отдельный акцент сделан на положительном опыте партнерства в образовательной сфере, которое формировалось Советским Союзом на протяжении десятилетий после обретения африканскими государствами независимости, но было прервано в 1990-е гг. в силу политических обстоятельств. Рассматривая возрождение сотрудничества в последнее десятилетие, авторы представили современный опыт некоторых российских университетов, которые реализуют проекты по продвижению русского языка и русской культуры в государствах Западной Африки. В статье освещаются некоторые значимые аспекты образовательного взаимодействия со странами Африки, описываются практики сотрудничества России и африканских стран. В настоящее время основной методикой «мягкой силы» является продвижение российского образования в страны Африки, включая реализацию дополнительных общеобразовательных общеразвивающих программ обучения, сертификацию иностранных студентов по русскому языку, прием иностранных студентов на обучение в российские вузы, продвижение русской культуры через реализацию образовательных, просветительских и научно-методических мероприятий, повышение квалификации педагогов высшей школы в Африке. Главным результатом исследования является представление комплексного практического опыта продвижения русского языка как иностранного некоторыми педагогическими университетами, работающими в Западной Африке, что способствует продолжению партнерства африканских университетов с российскими вузами.

**Ключевые слова:** Западная Африка, Российская Федерация, взаимодействие, партнерство, Гана, Кот-д'Ивуар, Центр открытого образования, реализация образовательных программ, русский язык

**Конфликт интересов:** авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**Вклад авторов:** совместное исследование.

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