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THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL FACTORS ON THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of analyzing the effect of external factors on the development and quality of higher education in Ukraine. Among them the authors differentiate quality secondary education, well organized vocational guidance at schools, effective system of selection and admission of school leavers, prediction of the need for certain specialties, providing autonomy for universities and effective work of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Various definitions of the concept of “higher education” are presented and analyzed. The authors consider the reasons of low competencies of higher schools applicants in almost all secondary school subjects and as a consequence the challenges facing the teachers of higher educational institutions in training high–quality specialists. It is emphasized that most universities and institutes are to take the responsibility for the quality of education. This will enable them to be internationally competitive.

Keywords: *higher education, quality higher education, external effects on the quality of education, higher educational institutions.*

INTRODUCTION

The quality of higher education is one of the important main claims of the Bologna process declaration. Having joined the system of the Bologna process in 2005, Ukraine committed achieving the high quality of higher education. 10 years have passed since Ukraine joined the Bologna process, but we cannot say that our society is satisfied with the quality of higher education and higher schools graduates.

Adequate secondary education, the proper system of students' admission to higher educational institutions and their predictive licensing, effective vocational guidance, the total autonomy of educational establishments, the productive functioning of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education that controls the quality of higher education have the great impact on the Ukrainian educational system.

While establishing the problem, V. Kremen points out that “it is necessary to recognize the fact that development of the national educational system of Ukraine is not conducted in an

appropriate way. There is no correspondence between the quality of higher education and the number of higher educational establishments” (Kremen, 2014, p. 6).

The number of higher educational establishments has increased in nearly four times during the last 25 years. Nowadays in Ukraine there are 800 higher educational establishments, including 317 universities. In comparison, in most European countries there is only one university for a million of population. There is obviously a contradiction between reduction of the number of graduates from higher schools of Ukraine and a great number of higher educational establishments in the country.

It is essential that management of educational institutions aim at admitting students to licensed places. This is the reason for financial support, the workload of teachers’ staff and prestige of universities. Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine helps them in this by stating low passing grades (points) of External Testing. As a result, more than 80% of school leavers enter higher educational institutions. Thus the principle that only 2 – 3% of gifted children are born and there are 16% – 18% of talented children who can successfully become students is violated.

This year faculties of physics and mathematics of pedagogical universities admitted school leavers with passing points 100,11 – 100,40 in Mathematics and 100,85 – 100,40 in Physics. At these faculties, it has become impossible to teach Mathematics to students who have insufficient knowledge of elementary Mathematics. Evidently, those students will not be excluded through failure. State demand for specialists in the field of mathematics this year was 619, but only 457 students were admitted. There is also a lack of students at the faculties of physics at pedagogical institutes. So the problem of quality in higher education is extremely relevant because it is an integral part of our future.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the research is to identify reasons of Ukrainian higher educational establishments lagging behind their European counterparts. We will analyse the external influence on the Ukrainian system of higher education and its quality. The authors investigate factors that are set by appropriate Laws of Ukraine and other regulatory and legal acts. Our purpose is also to deepen the concept (the quality in higher education) and identify its main components at the macro level. And it is important to consider the contradictions that arise as a result of inefficient management of educational institutions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

A great number of scholars such as V. Kremen, V. Bakhrushyn, K. Levkivskiy, A. Nikolayevska, L. Kaydalova, L. Shevchenko, Yu. Zhurovskiy and others investigated the problem of the quality of education in higher educational establishments.

RESULTS

V. Kremen deeply examines the quality education in new conditions. He emphasizes “traditional system of education that attempts to give a person proper knowledge of a subject for the whole life is to yield education that forms personal, fundamental competency (it is the ability to learn during the life). Besides that main principles of the quality in education are the following: to effectively inculcate progressive and promising values; to consider essential, individual characteristics; to reveal and develop talents and inclinations of every child; to form independence and self-sufficiency of a person; to educate innovative personality who is apt to perception and change creation. The considerable notion of quality in education is the openness to self-improvement, continuous modernization, and innovation” (Kremen, 2014, p. 5).

The concepts “higher education” and “the quality of higher education” are defined in the new Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education”. In particular, higher education is a set of systematized knowledge, practical skills, ways of thinking, and professional, ideological competences. They are acquired during the process of studying for obtaining certain qualification at different levels of higher education. In other words, the quality of higher education is the level of knowledge and skills obtained by a person that represents its competence according to educational standards (Law of Ukraine on Higher Education).

It is obvious that the concept “higher education” is too vague and incomplete. Regardless of a profession a modern specialist should possess foreign language communicative skills and computer competencies.

Briefly defining the concept of “higher education”, it is advisable to identify it as professional competence (practical skills and experience, value orientations such as respectful attitude to oneself, the family, the motherland, culture, state symbols, church, God...). Taking these into consideration we can define “higher education” as a set of the formed professional competencies for a certain qualification; obtaining computer and foreign language competencies, which imply a lifelong learning, perception and creation of innovative changes, and the result of optimal and intellectual personality development.

It is incorrect to define the quality of higher education as a level of acquired knowledge, skills, and other competencies. Each professional competence consists of theoretical and practical skills. Summing up, “the quality of higher education” is a satisfactory, good, excellent level of professional competencies regarding higher educational standards gained by a person.

In pedagogical studies such researchers as K. Levkivskiy and Yu. Sukharnikov endeavor to investigate the quality of higher education. They point out: “while developing the quality programs in educational institutions one should note that an integration of quality education with progressive properties of a specialist is determined by such factors: quality management of educational system and professional training; efficient policy in admission of students; effectiveness of didactic concept of higher education; integration of content and structure of educational curriculum according to students’ characteristics (health, intellectual development, professionally important qualities); well prepared scientific and pedagogical staff; correct policy in the assessment of students; quality of higher educational infrastructure; quality of external factors concerning higher education; compliance of the actual students’ workload with legal requirements (Levkivskiy & Sukharnikov, 2004, p. 89).

Nowadays most universities and institutes are to take the responsibility for the quality of education. This will enable them to be internationally competitive.

K. Levkivskiy and Yu. Sukharnikov name all the factors that have the impact on the quality of the specialists’ training process. We have a try to complement and concretize them. In our opinion the qualitative higher education is impossible without qualitative secondary education. The results of External Independent Testing in 2016 demonstrate the low level of secondary education (44,3 % of school leavers passed tests in the Ukrainian language at elementary and pre–intermediate levels, such results being in History of Ukraine and Mathematics – 65% and 54,5 %, respectively) (Ofitsiynyi zvit, 2016).

In our opinion, reasons for the low quality of secondary education are the following: pupils of graduation classes very often do not attend classes in the second semester, whereas many of them have courses and practical training with tutors. As a result, pupils miss school classes on generalization and systematization at the end of an academic year; a great number of subjects that pupils have to study (optional part of the curriculum consists of 17–22 subjects); lack of curriculums and manuals for optional subjects; low quality of pre–profile orientation of curriculum in the secondary base classes and profiled (specialized) education. As a result, teachers of higher educational establishments have to spend a lot of time to generalize skills and reach professional level step by step; lack of a systematic reform of the educational system (a large number of ungraded secondary schools); inadequate school funding and low salaries of teaching and support staff; low level of teachers’ professional training (students are admitted to pedagogical faculties with unsatisfactory level of general education); teachers do not use new effective, educational and computer technologies, very often because they are not available; management structure in education is outdated and characterized by bureaucratization and formalization; administrative culture is not of a proper quality (Laws of Ukraine “On Higher Education” and resolutions of Cabinet of Ministers are ignored at schools).

The first and main external component of high–quality education is highly qualified secondary schools. In order to provide the quality of higher education, we should use an adequate

system of selection and admission of students. Nowadays this problem aggravates contradictions between simplified procedure of students' admission (low scores at External Testing, commercial form of education) and requirements of curriculums in higher educational establishments; poor quality of vocational guidance and students' possibilities to enter several universities or institutes; various levels of school leavers' preparations (standard level, academic level and profiled level) and teaching of students according to curriculum in heterogeneous groups (Sikorskyi, 2014).

The introduction of External Testing and admission to higher educational establishments helps to clear educational system from bribery. As it was noted earlier too many universities and institutes prompt Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine to lower significantly passing scores. Consequently, many students without thorough knowledge and intellectual abilities are admitted. The only way out of this situation is after the first session to expel all the students that cannot cope with the scientific curriculum and pass successfully credits and exams.

Another external component for providing high-quality education is training of professional in specialties that are required by the labor market. Nowadays the labor market is saturated with lawyers. Some of them register in the Employment Centre, others train for a new profession such as a builder, a seller. Such uncertainty in future employment is not a contributive factor for the qualified process of learning. It is difficult to predict the necessity of certain specialists. Actually, there are no vacant employment places for teachers of English, Biology, Ukrainian, History, but there is nobody to fill vacancies of teachers of Mathematics and Physics at schools.

Vocational guidance at schools is an equally important method of achieving high quality of education. Management of schools and teachers neglect this fact. They do not teach how to take into account physical and psychological characteristics of secondary school leavers when they choose a future profession, pay no attention to professiongrams. The problem is that school leavers very often choose higher educational establishments by intuition and parents' or friends' advice. Such actions do not give effective results.

Another important fact in providing high quality higher education is the autonomy of higher educational establishments. It stimulates them to be more responsible for their results in the process of teaching. The autonomy of universities and institutes must be held in a legislative way.

Many European universities direct their autonomy towards the following: formation of vocational guidance by introducing flexible systems of teaching trajectory; establishment of master's and doctoral programs, their directions and specializations; independent determination of content of curriculum; all scientific degrees and titles are to be awarded with appropriate diplomas; presentation of diplomas of own models; recognition of diplomas and degrees of foreign universities and institutes (Master degree, Doctor of Philosophy, Associated Professor and Professor); decision-making on giving the same status to foreign teachers with appropriate employment position and payment; autonomous determination of subjects, which students passed abroad to their own curriculum according to specialty; correspondence between learning experience and results obtained within informal process of learning (Ensuring the quality of higher education, 2014).

Our higher educational establishments (universities and institutes) are far away from obtaining the autonomy. It is necessary to credit the autonomy.

Finally, one more external factor is the monitoring of high-quality education by an agency which is independent of Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. According to the law of Ukraine "On Higher Education", there was established the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. This agency is formed to perform regulatory and controlling functions.

Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the personal staff of the National Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education on July, 27. This agency is in the authority to do the following: to form the requirements for quality assurance systems of higher education; to develop regulations and accreditations of educational programs and submit them for approval to Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine; to analyze the quality of education provided by academies, institutes and universities; to conduct license examination, organize an opinion on the possibility of issuing the license for educational activity; to form a list of specialties in which candidates can be

trained at appropriate levels of higher education; to create a single database for implementation of specialization at each level of higher education; to accredit educational programs; to form the evaluation criteria of the quality of higher education (it is easy to determine ratings of universities); to develop requirements for academic qualifications of people who acquire degrees, to develop a procedure for their award by the Specialized Scientific Councils; to accredit specialized Scientific Councils and control their activities; to accredit independent evaluation institutions and quality assurance of higher education; to realize plenary powers predicted by the law (Levkivskyi & Sukharnikov, 2004).

As the agency has just started its work, it is difficult to predict how it will affect and improve the quality of higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

So the quality of higher education heavily depends on external factors. Among them we differentiate quality secondary education, well organized vocational guidance at schools, effective system of selection and admission of school leavers to higher educational institutions, prediction of the need for certain specialties in the national economy, provision of autonomy to universities and effective work of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Well-qualified teaching staff, proper material and technical database, curriculums, scientific plans and programs, appropriate teaching materials are also of importance but they will be dealt with in our further research.

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