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## **ENSURING EDUCATION QUALITY IN RUSSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GLOBAL TRENDS**

**Key words:** higher education system, tertiary education, modern challenges of higher education, quality management in education, quality assurance.

Development of education and science is the priority direction of the Russian state policy. The main goals of the Russian higher school modernization are defined by the global trends, on the one hand, and the need to overcome a number of contradictions peculiar to the national system of higher education, on the other. As A.D. Cortese puts it, “higher education institutions bear a profound, moral responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge, skills, and values needed to create a just and sustainable future. Higher education often plays a critical but often overlooked role in making this vision a reality. It prepares most of the professionals who develop, lead, manage, teach, work in, and influence society’s institutions” [1]. This approach explains steady interest of the government to various issues of education, especially of tertiary level.

To begin with, let us dwell on the general world trends in higher education. In the report prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education the changes taking place in the modern world of education were called academic revolution [2; 3]. It has taken place in higher education in the past half century and is marked by transformations unprecedented in scope and diversity. These dramatic changes inevitably challenge the system of well-established institutions and set new demands that they will have to meet. We would like to give a brief review of the global trends in development of higher education without which improvement of higher school is impossible nowadays [4]:

- internationalization at regional and international level;
- broad diversification of higher educational institutions types, their diversity, great variety and multi-model nature;
- increase of autonomy and academic freedom of higher educational insti-

- tutions along with their rigid accountability;
- serious transformations and updating of the systems of higher education in order to increase their flexibility, to meet consumers' expectations and create strong bonds with other steps and forms of education, especially postsecondary education;
  - continuous adaptation of educational programs to future requirements, improvement of higher education content in terms of adequacy and relevance;
  - transition of higher education to the paradigm "life-long education";
  - granting students an opportunity to make a choice when to "begin" and when to "stop" receiving higher education;
  - increased role of higher education for development of students' readiness to understand, interpret, keep, extend and develop national, regional, international and historical cultural values in their variety;
  - focus on teaching students in the spirit of civic consciousness and preparation to participate actively in the life of society;
  - strategy of higher education development based on social partnership, connection of higher education with the world of business;
  - achieving good balance between cognitive knowledge of academic subjects and mastering absolutely crucial skills in the sphere of communication, creative and critical analysis;
  - focus on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary educational programs;
  - introduction of modular training programs as a new organizational framework for training and teaching;
  - increasing student mobility;
  - the idea that academic staff are at the heart of the academic mission.

All the above mentioned trends that characterize the world of modern higher education require special attention on the part of academic authorities in the whole world and especially in Russia.

Integration of Russia into the world of educational space assumes creation of new models of tertiary institutions which follow globalization trends. However, reforms in many respects are restrained by numerous unresolved problems. We would like to enumerate the key ones that put special strains on most academic systems:

- insufficient flexibility of educational programs, poor respond to real requirements of labor market and business;
- mismatch of the structure of educational organizations and specialties and requirements of economy and social sphere, uncontrollable surge in private higher educational institutions which frequently provide poor quality of education;
- lack of effective control and assessment systems for estimating quality of university graduates' knowledge and skills;
- lower professional level of teaching staff and the professoriate;
- obsolete material resources and teaching equipment at most higher educational institutions with no hope for updating;
- inequality among higher educational institutions in terms of excellence and quality [for further reading on the topic, see: 5].

Higher pedagogical education shares all the problems of higher education as a whole, but at the same time is characterized by a number of specific features. Reforming of pedagogical education as one of the topical problems of modernization of the Russian higher school has been in the focus of attention of the officials and scientists since the 1990s.

However, development of pedagogical education in Russia is now under the influence of a number of conflicting trends. On the one hand, pedagogical or teacher-training institutions have really become scientific and methodical centers of regional academic space. The majority of teacher training colleges and institutes got the status of universities which equals making the knowledge gained there really fundamental. But, on the other hand, a large array of generally-scientific and humanitarian disciplines in most cases was introduced due to reduction of the number of purely pedagogical subjects. It may seem ridiculous, but a lot of Russian pedagogical universities try to make a shift from narrow pedagogical specialization and find place for non-pedagogical specialties by preparing economists, lawyers and interpreters. As a result, we witness transformation of pedagogical institutions into classical humanitarian colleges and universities. The reason of this process is pretty clear and is completely determined by economic factors: classical university can count on bigger budgetary financing; market sector of its educational services is much wider.

A number of officials support the idea of "folding" higher pedagogical institutions. Impartiality and radicalism of their position are embodied in the conclusion that higher pedagogical education in Russia is useless. They believe that classical universities, institutes of culture and other tertiary institutions can prepare teachers quite successfully. In modern Russia there is an opinion among academic authorities that it is enough to increase pedagogical component in non-specialized institutions for training good teachers. They feel sure that under conditions of demographic recession and surplus of the people with degree in teaching in the country, higher teacher-training educational institutions

can be completely eliminated. Moreover, it will allow releasing additional budgetary funds which will be allocated to support the pedagogical component in non-specialized higher educational institutions mentioned above.

In our opinion, non-specialized institutions can only partly solve the problem of preparing teachers, let alone the huge potential of pedagogical education. We feel sure that pedagogical education makes up the "neural center" of all modern educational system. In terms of scientific, methodical and content aspects, it deals with all levels of Russian education: pre-school, primary, secondary, professional and post graduate. Pedagogy models and conceptualizes all the system of national education, predicts its development and forecasts its future. Only pedagogical education purposefully trains experts for teaching as that. Their professional competence is based on pedagogical culture, while in other higher educational institutions there is the tendency to somehow ignore the problems of graduates' inner development.

Supporters of the idea of preparing teachers in classical universities are convinced that it is enough to train experts who know their subject well. An intelligent person possessing high standard of knowledge is able, in their opinion, to work at school successfully. However, it becomes obvious today that all attempts to destroy the system of higher pedagogical education for the sake of any issues of modernization, reconstruction, and optimization not just contradict the world trends, but also undermine educational background of the state. The teacher who the modern school desperately needs shouldn't have just sound knowledge of the subject; well-rounded and specialized teacher's preparation is necessary. New global tendencies of education create new kind

of school – humanistic, variable, the school of pedagogical creativity focused on development of personal potential of pupils, their spiritual culture. Pedagogical education has to prepare graduates with new skills, a broad knowledge base and a range of competencies to enter a more complex and interdependent world of modern school. All these factors mean that modern school has to be provided with highly-qualified specialists. For a modern school teacher it isn't enough to be simply a means of subject-focused translation of knowledge.

In this respect, we are absolutely sure that educators in Russia should talk not about elimination of pedagogical education as an independent branch, but about creation of the standard regulatory base for teacher-training departments, about development of the new concept of pedagogical education and introduction of modern educational technologies into academic process of higher school. Quality of education at all steps primarily depends on the quality of pedagogical education – preschool, primary, secondary (general and professional) and higher. It is evident that pedagogical education is the original professional sphere and that a graduate cannot get well prepared for a successful career in teaching as something secondary or additional to his/her major.

All the above mentioned challenges considered, we can come to the conclusion that Russia feels the urgent need to develop and improve the system of pedagogical education on the basis of the best traditions, on the one hand, and taking into account contemporary reality, on the other. Search for the optimum way of modernization in the sphere of higher pedagogical education led to emergence of new Federal Universities, formed as a result of a number of merges.

Southern Federal University (SFedU) is now trying to find footing on the global

higher education stage, to develop as a modern and competitive higher educational institution in the world markets of work and knowledge. Modern market of educational services recognizes only one advantage of an academic institution over its competitors – high quality of education and knowledge. There is only one universal product in the world market which can be exchanged to all other goods and services – quality. Dominating positions in the world market are taken by the institutions capable to sustain the fiercest competition – competition in terms of quality. Nation-wide value of SFedU refers neither to volume of the received budgetary and extra-budgetary funds nor to the number of eminent scientists and teaching professoriate. It is connected with achieving quality of education, science and production which would meet international standards or be even higher.

In the context of scientific and technical progress and contemporary information revolution, quality of education gains increasing value. The development of formal quality assurance is one of the most significant trends to affect higher education systems during the past few decades. Starting in the early 1980s, quality became a key occupation of higher education policy [6]. According to Ben A. Maguad, there are several reasons why the theory of quality management is applicable to higher education. One of them is that quality management is not only compatible with educational reforms, but actually builds the case for them. Besides, “quality management is a paradigm capable of integrating several diverse higher education reform movements (e.g. accreditation or input-based approach and outcomes assessment approach) so that these attempts at reform can make their optimal contribution” [7].

Quality as the priority state task includes different dimensions: quality of

work, quality of production, quality of management, quality of life, social relations, etc. To achieve high quality in education, it is necessary, first of all, to define the object of quality management. At Southern Federal University we believe that educational process in its real existential measurement is carried out in the system "teacher – student". University teacher is the only person capable to raise or lower quality of education directly and this assumption is shared by SFedU authorities. Activity of other participants (administrative, scientific, and economic) has indirect impact on quality of education, through a teacher. For this reason, the object of quality management in a higher educational establishment is the system "teacher – student". Three key parameters in this system can be adjusted and regulated: 1) responsibility of the teacher and the student for results of academic activity (their motivation for work); 2) content of education; 3) education technologies. The central point is the understanding that quality cannot be bought in the market and is not something beyond institution boundaries [8].

Quality of education at Southern Federal University does not stand for a certain number of educational system indicators, each of which has to reach the required level. What is education? What is its quality which remains after its external, quantitatively represented features are omitted (here we mean the condition of university facilities, good library stock, space allocated per student, material and financial assets and many other, undoubtedly, important indicators)? Academic process in higher education institutions is comprised of every-day situations, interaction between a teacher and a student. Various necessary conditions of the organization of education apart from simple academic

situations are: buildings, facilities, equipment, material and financial resources, systems of administrative management, etc. Quality management of education is the system regulating the nature of the relations between a teacher and a student. The leading role in the organization of educational process, management of an academic situation belongs to a member of teaching staff. Therefore, quality management can be also defined as management of the attitude of a teacher or professor to the professional activity [9].

A teacher is the main component, the leading party of educational process management which means that its quality generally depends on him/her. The content of education, technical means, teaching methods and technologies of training come to life and start working only at his/her will. Adaptations of educational process to personal traits of students as well as their personal and professional development happen only when the teacher reveals high personal and professional culture. Only the teacher is capable to raise or lower the bar of academic excellence since he/she is the only person who has immediate access and is the direct subject of education quality management. Other participants of education quality management – heads of institutions and their divisions, scientific employees, administrative staff and parents – can only indirectly, through the teacher, have impact on quality of education. Any educational system represents a certain set of the conditions, intended to increase overall performance of the teacher, to make it better. There is always a teacher between management of educational system and education quality management. His consciousness, culture, professionalism, responsibility, motivation and dedication to work to a great extent determine how much qual-

ity of education will conform to the requirements of external management and personal requirements of students.

The teacher is the most qualified expert in quality management owing to a special place which he/she takes in education. In real time he sees the results of his/her own activity, compares them to goals and makes changes in the course of teaching if necessary. Professional competence and rich personal experience allow the teacher to fully estimate the quality both of his/her own work, and work of the colleagues. All other experts (administrators, members of special boards and committees, etc.) only deal with formalized indicators of academic process.

The quality management system applied at Southern Federal University makes it possible to solve the problem of interaction between students, higher educational institution and employer since it is focused on shaping the key competencies of graduates. The Council of Europe defined five groups of the key competencies of special significance. These are what might be called key-competencies in the sense that they open the door to other competencies with a more specific application [10]:

1. Political and social competencies, such as the capacity to accept responsibilities, to participate in group decisions, to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner, and to play a part in running and improving democratic institutions.

2. Competencies relating to life in a multicultural society. In order to check the resurgence of racism and xenophobia and the development of a climate of intolerance, education must "equip" young people with intercultural competencies such as accepting differences, respecting others and the capacity to live with people of other cultures, languages and religions.

3. Competencies relating to the mastery of oral and written communication, which are essential for work and social life to the point that those who lack them are hence forward threatened with social exclusion. In this same register of communication, the mastery of more than one language is taking on growing importance.

4. Competencies associated with the emergence of the information society. The mastery of these technologies, the understanding of their applications, strengths and weaknesses, and the capacity for critical judgment with regard to information disseminated by the mass media and advertisers.

5. The capacity to learn throughout life as the basis of lifelong learning in both occupational contexts and individual and social life.

Greater dynamics of modern business demands from graduates not merely flawless professional qualification, but rather good organizational and administrative skills: the skill to find the necessary information fast, the skill to plan the work and set priorities, to optimize production and apply the most effective administrative approaches. When applicants are selected for certain jobs, special attention is paid not only to their specific professional competencies, but also to personal, social, and administrative ones and competence-based approach enables higher educational establishments to prepare them for it.

The system of education quality management at Southern Federal University enables to provide conditions necessary for high quality of work of teachers and students. The system "teacher – students – employer" being the object of quality management has proved to be quite effective means of quality assurance. After further approbation, this system will be ready to solve the task set

by the Russian President of preparation of competent professionals. Back then, we will be all on a learning curve that can only go up.

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