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THE CHANGING ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN A NEW COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

Currently higher education globally undergoes significant challenges. New conditions caused by arrival of the global knowledge economy force Universities to develop in an extremely competitive academic landscape. General tendencies are characteristic for HEIs all over the world, so the research focuses on the analysis of existing tendencies. Russia is not an exception from the academic mainstream. The changing role of Universities and their faculties is highlighted; focus on tendencies in Russia's HEIs is made; experience of the Reshetnev Siberian State University of Science & Technology is shown. Dependence of HEIs on both external and internal conditions including massification, globalization and changing the students' population is shown. Factors influencing internationalization in Russia's Universities are analysed. Besides, the problems which the Reshetnev University has faced in this respect are shown and found solutions are presented. They mainly concern completion rates, declining of state funding, place of Russia's Universities in international rankings and quality of education. Additional factor influencing the issue is difference between generations of experienced aged educators and new generations.

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Keywords: Challenges, state funding declining, trends, massification, internationalization.



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1. Introduction

We live currently in a constantly changing dynamic and interlinked world where more and more students study at the universities. These changes concern all spheres of life: culture, industry, economy etc. Higher education is undergoing great changes worldwide too. The arrival of the global knowledge economy as a consequence of second revolution in education means that universities compete globally in their fields of studies. Besides a galloping evolution of IT leads to integration of countries and effects proliferation of knowledge and cooperation via Internet. Many Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) worldwide face similar challenges, despite cultural, economic, political and social differences. University faculty is not an exception in this landscape too. The task of HEIs worldwide in this context is to estimate the adequacy of existing education models to the current and future needs and to consider how these models might adjust to new realities.

2. Problem Statement

Analysing the global academic trends and tendencies and basing on this analysis it is necessary to reveal conditions for achieving the goals of successful performance of the University in a changing academic environment.

3. Research Questions

We are to consider changing role of universities in terms of massification and globalization; challenges Russian Universities face and solutions they find to be in the academic mainstream; presenting Reshetnev's University experience as one in the global trend.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the article in connection with the above said is to investigate the issue of challenges modern universities and educators face in a new competitive landscape, to reveal global tendencies, to focus on domestic models and to share personal experience.

5. Research Methods

The following methods were used: search for literature, collecting data, analysis, synthesis and communicating results.

6. Findings

6.1. The changing role of universities in terms of massification and globalization

At the moment all societies have been focused on the development of higher education systems as it is the fundamental of society development.

Currently the key elements that are driving changes in the system of higher education are: massification, financial constraints, students' diversity, faculty quality, shortages, the use of English as a

medium of instruction (linked to the HEI ranking) and globalization (Altbach et al., 2009). Here we focus only on several elements.

Massification implications are following ones:

1. diversification of higher educational institutions;
2. diversity of trainees;
3. non-completion rates (dropouts);
4. educational process digitalization.

Globalization and internationalization are key realities of the 21st century driven with interstate globe system, advanced information and communication technology, the evolution of an multinational erudition domain, the role of English as Lingua Franca and other forces out of tertiary education institutions' pale. Universities should address a challenge of the globalization via internationalization defined by Altbach et al. (2009) as a set of measures (policy regulations and programs) authorities implement like student-professor exchange programs. The global tendency worldwide now is a growing number of international agreements between tertiary institutions including long and short term components. According to Böhm et al. (2002), it is suggested that by 2025 approximately 7.2 million students may be pursuing some higher education internationally.

The most important characteristic of internationalization is its pervasiveness. Large number of Universities is aimed at producing global citizens with global competencies, in other words young professionals with particular kinds of credentials and skills. The global community is interested in graduates who are skilled communicators, effective critical thinkers, dynamic problem solvers and productive team members in diverse environments (Rumbley, 2008). As now universities are in the education business, they train people with the end goal of helping them to acquire the skills and knowledge required to take jobs. The success of the universities' performance is obvious when their graduates find jobs especially the kind of jobs created in the 21st century. Universities have to train and qualify students having soft skills able to communicate, think and write. This is especially important because training for just one type of job or career in person's lifetime is becoming inapplicable. All these things are forcing to change the way educators teach and students learn in a variety of contexts.

In this connection it is necessary for the majority of the universities to adjust those challenges.

6.2. Challenges and solutions Russian Universities face

In Russia the HEIs are meeting far-reaching challenges, first of all due to the globalization influence, digitalization and the generation differences; as well the demographic situation is changing, which begins to formulate the new rules to the traditional education model.

Mostly high institutions in Russia are public and receive funding from the state and paid educational programs, that means per capita funding of HEIs and decrease in the birth rate leads to the factor, that the universities are forced to fight for the candidates. The new reality for the HEIs is the falling enrolments which are connected not only with the competition between the HEIs, in addition to the fact that every year the education tuition will become more expensive and inaccessible to many applicants, this has an impact on enrolment models, which becomes especially problematic in this context for economic and humanitarian programs and leads to the loss of the potential candidates.

Other factor is that Russian students became the international students and the percentage of such students is increasing from year to year. As was told above per capita funding has other side as reducing of state funding. This shows huge changes in the educational sphere and the reaction of HEIs to the long-term funding reducing. The decrease reached the fact that HEIs can no longer make up for the deficit through budget cuts; they have now to find the different ways to solve faced problems:

- need to enlarge tuition fees which are increasing the pressure on students and involving the services;
- enlarge the students number;
- multiply the international students number;
- participate in joint programs;
- develop additional professional education;
- introduce massive open online courses.

The first solution is the worst way for both sides; it could be the cause of the decreasing number of students. The other points are very perspective, but they need time to be implemented, here one of the main roles plays the low world ranking of Russian HEIs, the international students and partners are focused on quality and standard of education.

One of the main problems which Reshetnev University faced and what is the most worrying factor for it are the completion rates, where we can see the influence of completion rates is that it affects the regional economy, it means there is the deficit of qualified work force.

Another problem is giant differences between the generations and their needs. In fact that the traditional education system doesn't fit anymore to the young people and they are in great necessity of different type of education to start and advance their working lives as soon as possible. Now we deal with the Generation Z who thinks HEIs should provide individual educational trajectory, they're flexible, fast acting, pushing and adventurous and they are quite different generation not like their predecessors and have other values and estimation model of employer. Generation Z thinks about finding a job much earlier than the previous generation. 25 % begin to work studying on their first year at the university, while 50% start in their last studying years. Only 1 in 10 starts after graduation. Generation Z deeply understand the value of technology and how they can transform our way of working and living, about 55% of Generation Z daily use their smartphones more than 5 hours, and about 26% use their phones more than 10 hours per day (Ivleva & Fibikh, 2016; Lerman & Schmidt, n.d.; Rickes, 2016). While there may seem to be significant challenges to face, HEIs are facing these head on and adapting to this new environment.

The digital paradigm shift is a general tendency. It calls for innovative credentials from educators (teachers, tutors, lecturers) and complex reform of educational system. Artificial intelligence (AI) will enter life and will force out traditional didactic materials and teaching techniques. Three quarters of them will disappear and personal educational trajectory for each student will be built. It's all about review of traditional education model. The main effect of such technology development is a drastic change in educators' qualification and status. Their role is changing to widely educated, having project-oriented thinking, able to organize discussions and function as personal coaches.

What can universities do to thrive in an increasingly competitive market, just offer competency-based education?

Bearing this in mind, Reshetnev University is oriented on providing the implementation of individual educational trajectory through the e-learning now. As the generation of students has changed, the way people want to consume learning content has also evolved. Flexible e-learning has grown in the last number of years. This educational process is based on motivated and controlled intensive self-dependent work of the learner, who can study in the convenient place due to the individual schedule, carrying special learning tools set and concerted opportunity to contact with the teacher. Talking about advantages of the distant learning, first of all, it has positive sides for students, like: learning schedule's flexibility, opportunity to study by individual plan according to their own needs and abilities, unprejudiced and independent from the professor's knowledge assessment system, opportunity to consult with the teacher during the study. Such form of education primarily means the appearance of additional possibility for the teachers to present material to students, i.e. de facto the opportunity to teach more students within the same teaching load appears (Ivleva & Fibikh, 2016). According to university data, the number of students at university enrolled in at least one online course and the proportion of all enrolled students studying online continued to rise and this trend is set to continue. But e-learning isn't just about driving enrollments, it's also important in retention and completion rates due to the challenges of the Generation Z (Shumakova & Savelyeva, 2019).

One more advantage of individual educational trajectory implementing through the e-learning is the increasing of international students' number. As enrolment rates in Russia are dropping, there's a need to look at other avenues to recruit students from further afield. In this connection several steps were undertaken at a national level. The passport of the Federal project "Export of Education" was developed by Government of Russian Federation to increase the attractiveness of Russian education in the international educational market. The project "Export of Education" sets up a specific goal to increase the number of foreign citizens studying full-time in organizations engaged in educational activities under higher education programs (Fedotova et al., 2019). On a global scale, there have been shifts as to where international students are going Russia is seeing increase. The statistics show that Russia attracts 6% of the global number of international students, it takes the eighth place after the United States, Great Britain, Australia, China, Canada, Germany and France. Though Russia exports more than imports, but the number of students from abroad studying in Russia is quite more, than the number of Russian students abroad. Moreover, the share of international students over the past year has grown by 5.7%, and over ten years - by 100%. Experts attribute this to the fact that young people are satisfied with the price-quality ratio of Russian education. Most of the citizens studying in Russia are representatives of the CIS countries, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Within the framework of the Federal project "Export of Education" the Russian government will spend 107.5 billion rubles from 2019 to 2024 to attract more international students. This measure should double the international students flow. It's key for HEIs to ensure they adopt an international lens to recruitment and look at trends in queries or applications from territories in order to know their target base and create content that can be used to drive engagement, where is the key not to rely on one country as a guaranteed revenue stream, for example Reshetnev University enrolls more than from 23 countries.

Reshetnev University individual educational trajectory pursues a goal as align with industry needs. This is particularly true for adult learners who already have experience and knowledge and require upskilling in niche areas that can progress their careers. The key for Reshetnev University is to keep on top of the job market trends to ensure they are servicing professionals and industry. It is very important for the Reshetnev University as a flagship university to have the partnerships with local industry through recruitment fairs, lectures and employment, where having links to the industry could offer students learning content that is instantly applicable in the workplace.

Education must be flexible, because this is the challenge of the next new generation, Generation Alpha, which is already on the threshold and who have quite different Habits of Mind.

7. Conclusion

Most HEIs have had the same educational strategy for years, with little variation in their range of program offerings and target student population. The HEIs have focused on where they can involve incremental investments and tuition discounting strategies for increasing the number of programs and students instead of raising the quality of their programs and student body through highly qualified faculty recruiting and internal competition.

Education at present should become a market for educational services with the dominance of the principle of openness, accessibility, with internal and external competition. The role of HEIs should ensure that students are able to adapt to changing situations, independently and systematically acquire the necessary knowledge, apply them in practice, think critically, work competently with information, take responsibility for decisions, have the necessary level of social - psychological competence, effectively interact with other team members. The indispensable conditions for achieving the listed and related goals are the involvement of each student in an active cognitive process, the reduction of reproductive forms of work with educational materials, the introduction of new individual study track technologies, ensuring free access to the necessary information, and having the practical orientation of the academic disciplines content.

We are sure, that HEIs will look to the education as an agile and creative education to expand and adapt to new threats and opportunities. Those HEIs who use these tools to respond to the needs of new generations of students will be able to survive and even thrive in this changing environment.

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