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**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR THE QUALITY OF  
EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL**

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***Abstract***

The article presents the experience of the Russian-British project "The assessment of the quality of educational activities of schools and the creation of programmes for their development." The key question for the research team was the following: what is the way to develop, verify and hand such a model of assessment to all interested users that would reflect the quality of the educational activities of schools in quite a representative way, would base on comparable criteria and would be quite easy to use? The work began with a two-year experiment, which involved the participation of 36 schools in Russia (Volgograd) and 9 schools in Great Britain (Brighton Hove). During the pilot experiment there were interviewed heads of educational institutions, employees of the administrative apparatus on the city and municipal levels, and scientists – the teachers of teacher training university. All of them were asked what factors, in their opinion, affect the quality of education at school? Their views on the factors of quality of school education have served for the research team as one of the sources of evaluation criteria determining the quality of the educational activities of schools. As a result, a criterial model of the quality assessment of educational activities of schools was constructed.

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## 1. Introduction

Contemporary educational institutions function and develop in a competitive environment (Gibbons et al., 2008). Increasing migration, diversity of models, strategies and forms of organization of the learning process in schools nowadays, and, consequently, the possibility to choose educational routes motivate consumers of educational services, i.e. parents and students, to raise the question of where, in what educational institution education is better, i.e. where they can get higher quality education. Not to a lesser degree state education authorities, investors, education (Hanushek, 2005) and, of course, the professional community (Lomos et al., 2011) are interested in the matter in order to improve the quality of educational services.

A great number of subjects interested in the quality of school education and its objective assessment (state, society, parents, students, teachers, school administration, employers and subsequent educational institutions in relation to school levels of education) are the basis for the emergence of the modern approach to understanding the quality of school education as its meeting the requirements of stakeholders.

Currently, there are different points of view of scientists on the factors that have a significant impact on improving the quality of school education. A number of scientists define the purpose and content as a key factor in the quality of education: «The concept of quality should not be detached from purpose and context and quality has political undertones» (Harvey & Williams, 2010, p. 3). From this position, the quality of school education can be regarded as the extent to compatibility of the objectives and content of education with the needs of the subjects of education and the state in general, scientific prognoses of relevance of people's certain competencies in the future.

It is believed that the quality of school education depends on the quality conditions of the organization of the educational process from the perspective of its compliance with the expectations of the subjects of education:

- the quality of the material and technical basis of schools (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008; Hungi & Postlethwaite, 2009);
- the quality of methodical provision (Bolotov, Valdman, Kovaleva, Pinskaya, 2015);
- the quality of teaching (Barber & Mourshed, 2008; Gawlik et al., 2012; Goh & Wong, 2014; Panayiotou et al., 2014);
- the quality of educational schedule (Eren & Millimet, 2007);
- the quality of students' nutrition (Goldstein & Noden, 2003);
- the quality of the relationship between the participants in the educational process: between a student and a teacher, between a student and the school administration, between the school administration and a teacher, between a teacher and parents (Wubbolding, 2007; Gavidia-Payne et al., 2014).

In this case, many researchers determine the quality of teaching as the leading factor in the quality of school education (Barber & Mourshed, 2008; Gawlik et al., 2012). To improve the quality of teaching at school special attention should be paid to improving the competence of the teacher, and, accordingly, to training programmes and retraining of teaching staff (Goh & Wong, 2014), the modernization of the criteria used for the teacher certification (Heck, 2007), as the quality of school education cannot be higher than the quality of teachers working there (Barber & Mourshed, 2008).

Another important factor of the quality of school education is the results of education, expressed in the form of students' achievements (Brown et al., 2007; Hofman et al., 2009; Lomos et al., 2011).

Summing up the totality of positions, our research team has come to a conclusion that it is expedient to consider the quality of school education as, on the one hand, compatibility of the purpose, the process (conditions of the organization of the educational process) and the results of education to the needs of internal and external stakeholders, and on the other hand, as compliance of the content and education technology with scientific prognoses of production, communication, relevance, of these or those professional and cultural competences of people in the near and distant future.

## 2. Problem Statement

The quality of school education is a subject of concern not only of the state and region (outer contour of concern) (Bolotov et al., 2015), but also every particular educational institution (inner contour of concern) and its subjects (school leaders, teachers, students and their parents) (Volkov, 2015).

Recently in Russia (Panasyuk & Ly`mar`, 2016; Shishov et al., 2016) as well as in other countries (Hofman et al., 2009) the practice of intra-evaluation of the quality of education began to spread:

- at the school administration level (the way the management team works, what objectives it sets and to what extent it creates the conditions for achieving them) (Panasyuk & Ly`mar`, 2016);
- at the teachers' level (the way teachers work, to what extent they are competent, united) (Borisenkov et al., 2016);
- at the student's level (how well children study, to what extent they are motivated, independent, educated, master educational and other activities) (Baxmutskiy & Yasyukova, 2015).

Currently, a special significance is taken on the question of what criteria and parameters can be used to assess the quality of education at the local level? There is no standard approach in this matter as well as in the question of the essence of quality of school education (Harvey & Williams, 2010).

This fact has led our research team to search for the answer to this question.

## 3. Research Questions

Work began with a pilot experiment during which there were interviewed 80 heads of educational institutions, more than 20 employees of the administrative apparatus of the city and municipal levels, and about the same number of scientists – the teachers of teacher training university. On the British side three employees of the Department of Education and 9 principals of school were involved in the experiment. Project managers were: on the Russian side - V.V. Serikov, PhD, the member of the Russian Academy of Education, on the British side- Dr. D.Hawker, the Head of the Department of Education, Brighton Hove.

Pilot experiment began with a poll of managers of more than forty schools in the city of Volgograd. Among others, there was asked a question about what factors in their opinion affect the quality of education at school. Their views served for the research team as one of the sources to determine the criteria for evaluating the quality of school education.

According to the results of the poll, among the most frequently called factors affecting the quality of school education, the following were noted: the objective and the "philosophy" of the educational institution, its educational policy; educational content and syllabus and methodical provision, forms of

organization and technology of educational activities; quality of working at school teachers, their qualifications, work motivation, the ability for professional commanding communication; the quality management staff of the school; quality management; motivation and the ability for self-learning, self-organization among students.

As a result of the pilot experiment six criteria for assessing the quality of the educational activities of schools were formulated: school management and efficiency of governance; the quality of educational programmes and curriculum; students' achievement; coordination and effectiveness of the teaching staff as a team, teachers' competence; psychological climate, the ability teachers' self-realization; potential (resources) of the educational environment of the school.

Next, the experiment was carried out with 6 working focus groups, each of which was charged with developing a specific criterion. The purpose of each group was to develop the content and observable parameters for the relevant criterion. Each group was to test and offer practitioners available and effective ways to diagnose the criterion. The result of work of the whole team was an integrated effective model for criterial evaluating the quality of schools functioning, the procedures to create programmes for their development and evaluation of the programmes themselves.

Each team consisted of: the head of the working team (as a rule, it was a professional scientist, an employee of Pedagogical University), the headmaster of the base (pilot) school, 5 administrators of school-satellites, an employee of the regional or municipal Department of Education, teachers-consultants, postgraduates of Pedagogical University and others. The basis of the work of each group was centre consisting of 6 schools (the basic experimental school, where the primary development of criterion content was carried out, and 5 schools, where testing, check and elaboration of the parameters of the criterion and the ways of their diagnostics were carried out).

The first focus group, responsible for the search of parameters of quality of intraschool management, presented the following results: the efficiency of school management is manifested in the fact that the school administration: has clear understanding of the expectations of internal and external stakeholders; sees the strategic goal; optimally defines the mission of the educational establishment taking into consideration the expectations of internal and external stakeholders; reflects the potential of the school in achieving the goals set; can develop the administrative decision under uncertainty and risk; effectively monitors and evaluates its implementation; creates conditions for the realization by teachers their professional interests and personal growth; creates conditions for the rational organization of labor at school; monitors the effectiveness of the use of school resources; is a leader in the teaching staff; helps create a situation of success in the professional work of a teacher.

The second focus group suggested the following parameters of the quality of the educational programme and evaluation of the quality of the curriculum: accordance to educational standards, the quality of a school component of the curriculum; consideration of age possibilities, needs and interests of students; balance of subject areas; an adequate level of complexity of educational material; an opportunity to master multilevel curriculum; nature and level of interdisciplinary connections; assistance in social and life adaptation of pupils; reflection in the programmes of moral, social, civil and other aspects of education.

The result of the third focus group research was development of parameters related to the criterion of "student achievement". For their evaluation 4 block parameters were proposed, the first of which

provides assessment of students' achievements, the second one shows the pupils' responsible attitude to their social responsibilities; the third one assesses characterological qualities of pupils; and the fourth one estimates the common cultural qualities of students.

The task of the fourth focus group was to substantiate the parameters to assess two criteria: coordination and effectiveness of the teaching staff as a unified team; the competence of teachers. The parameters of the first criterion were divided into the following blocks: values and objectives; cooperation and interdependence; the professionalism of teachers; the effectiveness of the team. To estimate the second criterion - the competence of teachers – the group suggested the following characteristics: knowledge of the peculiarities of children of different ages, their contemporary interests, behaviour stereotypes, reasons for studying, life plans; the ability to identify pedagogical goals for the class, student groups, individual children; the ability to find and design material for educational and extracurricular activities, to transform it into interactive and activity forms; continuous improvement of their educational system, assessment of its effectiveness in accordance with students' achievement, their interests, their activity and the desire to cooperate with the teacher.

The 5th focus group worked on substantiation of the parameters of the criterion psychological climate of the school, the possibility of teachers and students' self-realization. The psychological climate parameter involves taking care of the mental and physical state of students and teachers, that proposes the optimal school routine, health-improving measures, the expediency of using school space; the existence of a distinctive social "psychological service" that is a group of experienced teachers that can help solve the life problems, conduct consultations, psychological trainings.

The 6th focus group worked on the parameters of the criterion of potential educational environment of the school. For the examination of this criterion the following parameters were proposed: adaptation of the school building's project to the local climatic and environmental conditions; technical level of air conditioning and heating, the temperature in classrooms and halls; correspondence between the sizes of classrooms, furniture and lighting and the number of students in classes, their anatomical and physiological characteristics and age peculiarities; the existence of specially equipped rooms to study all subjects, equipped with means of fire safety; the level of equipment of a dining-room, library collection, a reading room, etc.

For each criterion the measurement scales were developed. The idea emerged to make a scale for measuring the quality of school work quite differentiated by distinguishing 7 gradations of quality (levels): 1 - the highest 2 - high, 3 – upper-intermediate, 4 - intermediate, 5 - below average, 6 - low, 7 - very low (Podinovski et al., 2014).

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The beginning of our research fell on the period of active work of the British Council in Russia. With the support of the Deputy Minister of Education in Russia Viktor Bolotov we came into contact with the Department of Education of the City of Brighton Hove (the UK), which at that time was headed by a well-known British expert in the field of education management Hokker David. He suggested a number of key ideas for our project concerning criteria base of assessing the quality of functioning and development of schools, which, however, needed testing and checking. The draft of the research was developed, and then

as a result of the competition, which was held under the auspices of the British Council and the Ministry of Education of Russia, we won a grant of the British Council to conduct this research. Together with British partners the following task was being purpose of the study: to develop, test and hand over to all interested users such a model of assessment, which would represent the quality of the educational activities of schools, based on comparable criteria would be simple enough to use at the local level.

## **5. Research Methods**

The following research methods were used as the main ones: 1) sociological polls of the heads of educational institutions, representatives of the education inspection services, teachers, parents, high school students, high school teachers - members of the selection committees of higher education institutions; 2) tests with the scales of measurement; 3) a search (pilot testing) experiment; 4) an innovative (approved) experiment; 5) observation; 6) the method of expert judgment and liberal statements.

## **6. Findings**

Having been carried out for 10 years, monitoring on the basis of 36 schools in Volgograd has shown that the results of the project have integrated direct and indirect application and further development of the modernization of the education system.

The main scope of dissemination and development of the project was usage of its technology to create educational programmes and programmes for the development of schools. The necessity for the latter is due to the democratization of the Russian system of education, giving schools the right to plan the content and forms of educational activity. To create a qualified educational programme and to determine the resources for school development tools for the analysis of its condition are necessary. They just were developed during this project.

Initially 10 schools, with the number of pupils in the school from 400 to 2,000 (seven urban and three rural schools), participated in the experiment on the creation of development programmes. At the initiative of the chairman of the regional committee on education this model has been offered to all schools in the region after the successful testing.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, the dissemination of Russian-British project "Assessment of the quality of educational activities of schools and the creation of programs for their development", as the survey showed, has turned out to be very fruitful and has led to the expansion of the scope of the project and new results. Obviously, there is every reason to continue cooperation in this field.

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