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PUBLIC ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The article is based on materials from a 2019 survey conducted by the Sociology Laboratory of Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University in the Novgorod Region of the Russian Federation, with the aim of analyzing the public assessment of the region's education sector. The article describes the history of the study of public assessment of education abroad and in Russia, identifies important methodological problems of obtaining public assessment of education. The article examines the dependence of public assessment of education on a number of characteristics of respondents associated with demographic and territorial characteristics, material well-being, and social status. Various research views are presented on which social groups from the population can be the subject of such an assessment and to what extent these ideas are confirmed in the materials of domestic and foreign researchers. The author examines the influence on the public assessment of education of not only traditional objective, but also subjective indicators, analyzing the relationship between them and the problems of education identified by respondents. The author believes that such an approach makes it possible to show the public assessment of education in a more volumetric manner than is done with traditional approaches, and therefore the use of subjective indicators in surveys has certain objective grounds for application. Showing a low assessment by the population of the work of local authorities in the field of education, the author attempts to determine the reasons for such an assessment.

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1. Introduction

Public assessment of education has been carried out in modern countries over the past few decades and immediately became an area of discussion on the following range of issues:

- 1) what should be the level of awareness of all stakeholders in the field of education;
- 2) what social groups should be involved in developing an assessment of the education system;
- 3) what methods of obtaining a public assessment of education are most effective.

The result of the discussions was the idea that a wide range of consumers of educational services (individual groups, the entire population) has the right to evaluate educational services, determine its problem areas, and know about the scale of education reforms. In general, the practice of public assessment of education corresponds to the principle of open cooperation of all participants in the educational process and is aimed at a broad discussion of educational problems.

Obtaining a public assessment of education solves the problems of an applied nature: providing management structures with feedback; getting an idea of the problems of education, as it were, at the "micro level", which is difficult to see in the analysis of traditional statistical data. The study of public assessments of education also requires the development of appropriate procedures for collecting and analyzing information, which should be based on clear norms for conducting empirical research and be understood by both specialists and all interested groups of the population.

All of the above actualizes research interest in the topic of public assessments of education, especially in regions where the practice of such assessments is just beginning to take shape.

2. Problem Statement

Evaluation of educational institutions by consumers of educational services has its own history. There is a well-known practice of regular surveys of the population in the United States with the participation of respondents from various segments of the population: schoolchildren, parents, teachers, members of boards of trustees, etc. (Plucker et al., 2009). The questionnaire included questions: from respondents' satisfaction with the quality of education to the correspondence of the content of education to the needs of consumers of services. Various methods of obtaining information were used: telephone and postal surveys, online surveys on the Internet.

In European countries, there is also a practice of studying public opinion about the satisfaction with the work of educational institutions. The possibility of analyzing public assessment of education is provided by monitoring within the framework of the European Social Survey (ESS) project, carried out every two years by the method of interviewing at home the population aged 15 years and older using a random representative sample. The project covers most of the European countries (Belyaeva, 2018).

Of particular interest is information on the national monitoring of the quality of school education under the SIMCE program in Chile (assessment of the educational results of schoolchildren in individual disciplines). In the SIMCE program, there is a practice of conducting a questionnaire survey of students and their parents about their socio-economic situation, assessing the qualifications of teachers, and assessing the work of schools before testing. Then the information from the surveys, along with the test

scores, is disseminated among schools, the media, parents, researchers, and Internet sites. Test results and questionnaires are the basis for resource allocation to schools. The experience of the program has shown that dissemination of information provides broad public support for education reforms (Ramirez, 2014).

Domestic practice of public assessment of the education system also has its own history. For example, in the 1990s, the Levada Center became the center for studying public assessments of education (Dubin & Zorkaya, 2009). Center employees interviewed respondents from various population groups and formed electronic databases with assessments of the education system, using them for further analysis. A certain shift in the study of public assessment of education was made after the decrees of the President of the Russian Federation in 2007-2008 with the task of annually revealing the satisfaction of the population with the quality of education. Since that time, the problem of public assessment of education has become relevant in the regions. An example of an analysis of public assessments of education in the Nizhny Novgorod region of the Russian Federation can be considered as one of the typical projects carried out in Russian regions (Zakharova & Zotova, 2019).

Interestingly, studies of public assessments of education have led to a discussion about whether it is possible to replace public opinion polls with polls of parents (preschoolers, schoolchildren). This is due to the fact that surveys of parents and students provide more necessary information for the interaction of educational institutions with the families of students (Abankina & Filatova, 2018; Antipkina et al., 2018; Avraamova & Loginov, 2016; Berzin et al, 2018). However, this point of view quickly found its critics. Parents' surveys are criticized in terms of their social heterogeneity and the unwillingness of some parents to communicate with parents from other social strata, which leads to the erosion of parental assessments (Orekhova et al., 2018). A similar problem is noted in the analysis of classes or student groups, in which there are students with different cultural and social capital, religious experience, the practice of migration, i.e. there is a blurring of the once homogeneous groups of schoolchildren and students living in different “social times” (Klyachko, 2016). Despite criticism, researchers do not lose interest in surveys of groups participating in education, proving the irrelevance of using population surveys in assessing educational systems (Agranovich, 2019; Avraamova & Loginov, 2016).

In general, despite the large number of works on the assessment of education by the population, it must be stated that a number of hypotheses still require empirical confirmation, and the selected factors can be enriched with data from additional research on the problems of public assessment of education.

3. Research Questions

- What is the quantitative public assessment of educational institutions based on the answers of respondents from various social groups?
- What is the list of problems in the education sector in the region?
- What is the public assessment of the work of local authorities in the development of the education sector and the identification of factors influencing it?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the article is to describe the public assessment of the regional sphere of education and to analyze the social factors that influence the assessments of respondents from different groups. The answers received from respondents regarding the designated range of issues will be discussed in this article.

5. Research Methods

The article is based on materials from a 2019 study in the Novgorod region of the Russian Federation. The survey was conducted among the population aged 18 and over. A multistage territorial representative sample model was implemented. The main sampling parameters included:

- 1) the proportions of the population of the region, districts, large settlements;
- 2) quota assignments for the selection of respondents in the districts of the region;
- 3) signs for quota assignments: gender; age; territorial residence; education.

The deviation of the sample parameters from the parameters of the general population was no more than 3%. The method of collecting information is a questionnaire. The answers to the questionnaire were received in the self-filling mode. The survey questions included:

- 1) an overall assessment of the work of educational institutions in the places of residence of the respondents;
- 2) the severity of the problems in the education sector that were offered to the respondents;
- 3) assessment of the work of local authorities in the development of the education sector.

After collecting and rejecting part of the questionnaires, an electronic data array was formed, processed in the sociology laboratory of NovSU.

6. Findings

6.1. Public assessment of educational institutions

The results of the study show that the population assesses the work of educational institutions at 3.1 points on a 5-point scale (5 is the highest positive score, 1 is the most negative score), i.e. to “satisfactory”. The share of negatively rated the work of educational institutions is low (16.6% in the entire array of respondents). The general trend for the average level of satisfaction is shown by both men and women (3.1 and 3.2 points), residents of various settlements (cities of the region - 3.1; rural settlements - 3.1).

The dynamics in assessing the work of educational institutions begins when analyzing the indicator “age”. If for 18-24-year-olds the level of assessment of educational institutions is 3.5 points, then in the group of 25-49 years it drops to 3.1 points, in 50-59-year-olds the assessment grows to 3.2

points, in the group of 60 years and older the assessment increases to 5.0 points. The indicator of material well-being also makes it possible to fix the tendency towards changes in the assessments of educational institutions. For respondents with a low and critically low level of well-being, the assessment of educational institutions is 2.9 points, among the well-off population, the assessment rises to 3.4 points.

The questionnaire included questions related to subjective indicators of the quality of life: “the threat of becoming unemployed” and “assessment of changes in life in the next 2-3 years”. Their allocation was due to the relationship between the estimates of the population of educational institutions and family incomes, the scale of unemployment, and the quality of life in the region (Agranovich, 2019; Mareeva, 2018). The survey data also showed the presence of a correlation between the assessment of the work of educational institutions in the region and the subjective indicators included in the questionnaire. Let us consider the assessment of educational institutions:

- respondents who are not worried about being fired from work have 3.3 points, those who think about it - 3.1 points, among those who think that they will be fired in the first place - 2.5 points;
- in the group of those who think that their life will change for the better, it was 3.4 points, for those who think that their life will remain unchanged, it dropped to 3.3 points, for those who answered that their life would change for the worse, it decreased to 2.7 points.

The survey materials showed a clear connection between public assessment of education and indicators of material well-being, subjective feelings of a possible job loss and possible changes in the quality of life.

6.2. Problems of education in the region "through the eyes" of the respondents

The presence of differentiated public assessments of education shows that not all groups of the population are satisfied with the existing educational policy and have their own ideas about the problems in education. 80% of the respondents indicated the existing problems in education (Table 01).

Table 1. List of problems in the education sector with assigned average scores (based on the respondents' answers, where 5 is the highest score for severity, 1 is the lowest score for severity)

№	Problems in the education sector	Average score
1	Insufficient funding	3.6
2	Shortage of qualified personnel	3.6
3	Low quality of services received	3.4
4	Weak educational work	3.3
5	Imperfection of curricula	3.2
6	Lack of places in educational institutions	3.1
7	Territorial accessibility of educational institutions	2.9

Analysis of the data showed that there are problems that the majority of respondents agree with (insufficient funding and a shortage of qualified personnel), and problems specific to certain territories or groups of the population (territorial accessibility of educational institutions).

6.3. Assessment of the work of the authorities in the development of education

The attitude of the population and the authorities is an urgent topic of regional governance. The thesis about insufficient public activity of citizens in solving problems of local importance has been voiced more than once (Frolova, 2016; Trofimova, 2015). However, the weak public activity of citizens does not mean that people do not have their own opinion or cannot evaluate the work of management structures at different levels. The question of the population's assessment of the work of local authorities in the field of education was included in the questionnaire.

The data show that the average assessment of the work of local authorities in the development of the sphere of education is 2.8 points on a 5-point scale. That is, respondents as a whole have a relatively low assessment of the work of local authorities in this area. The low level of public assessment of the authorities may be associated with its weak ability to solve the problems of regional education. The reality of such an assumption is indicated by the correlation in the answers of the respondents who critically assessed the work of local authorities in the field of education and at the same time noted the problems in education. Among the respondents who critically assess the work of local authorities: 34% indicated the problem of lack of places in educational institutions; 48% noted the low quality of received educational services; 49% identified insufficient funding for education; 52% indicated a shortage of qualified personnel. The data show that the respondents, seeing the low ability of the authorities to solve educational problems, reflect this in their assessments.

The assessments of the work of local authorities in the field of education differ slightly in the context of different groups of respondents. Among men and women, the score is 2.8 points; among respondents with secondary general and secondary vocational education 2.8 points, among respondents with higher education 2.7 points; the assessment of the work of the authorities by respondents with a low level of well-being is 3.0 points, in the group of those satisfied with the level of well-being 3.1 points.

However, there are groups of respondents with a large scatter of assessment values (Table 02).

Table 2. Evaluation of the work of local authorities among respondents of various types of settlements and age groups (from 1 to 5 points, where 5 is the highest positive score, 1 is the most negative score)

Types of settlements				Age groups (years)					
Veliky Novgorod	Other cities	Urban village	Rural settlements	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and older
2.6	2.8	3.0	2.8	3.2	2.5	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.7

Residents of the regional capital are more critical in assessing the work of the authorities than residents of other settlements. In terms of age groups, it can be seen that a positive assessment of the work of local authorities is more characteristic of young people under 24 than of older respondents.

Analyzing the answers further, let us single out more features in which dynamics is found. This is the concern of the respondents about the possibility of losing their jobs and their views on life changes in the next two to three years. So, if the average assessment of the work of local authorities in the region is 2.8 points, then in the group:

- those who are not afraid of losing their jobs, the score is above average and is 2.9 points;
- those experiencing anxiety about the possibility of losing their job, the score drops to 2.7 points;
- those who noted that they could be fired in the first place, the assessment of the work of the authorities drops to 2.2 points.

Regarding the indicator of changes in life, it can be seen that in the group of those who are confident that life will change for the better, the assessment of the quality of work of local authorities is higher than the average for the region (3.1 points), among those who believe that their life will deteriorate, the assessment drops sharply down to 2.3 points.

Thus, empirical data show that moods of anxiety and anxiety, increasing the feeling of insecurity among respondents, influence the formation of negative moods among residents of the region, influencing the social perception of education.

7. Conclusion

Based on the data of a survey of the population aged 18 and over, the article analyzes the public assessments of the education sector in the region, which showed that the respondents, on the whole, are satisfied with the work of educational institutions. Only every sixth respondent gave a negative assessment. The respondents also highlighted the problems that are most inherent in education and can become a starting point for further education reform. The survey showed a low assessment by the population of the work of local authorities in the development of education, the reasons for which may be the situation with unsolvable, from the point of view of the population, educational problems.

The data indicate that in order to explain the level and direction of public assessments, it is necessary to adjust the technology for obtaining them. We are talking about supplementing the block of indicators of educational monitoring with indicators that are not directly related to the education system, for example, indicators for assessing the quality of life of people, the situation on the labor market, the scale of unemployment in certain social groups, and others. There is no doubt that the development and application of these groups of indicators is possible only if their positive correlation with public assessments of education is proved.

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