Modern Higher Education: Problems and Perspectives

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Abstract

The article deals with the problem of integration of the regional higher education system into the European educational space. According to the authors, one of the main tasks of modernization of the regional higher education system is the creation of a system of higher professional education of the third generation, which is supposed to solve, on the other hand, the problem of integrating into the Bologna Process and, on the other hand, the problem of elaboration of the concept of the Russian regional higher school modernization. Special attention is paid to the description of a new humanistic paradigm, based on the consistent attitude of the teacher to the student as an individual, an independent and responsible person with his own background, and at the same time as a member of educational process. The paper covers the main problems, which the system of the regional higher education may be confronted with, and defines the prospects of the regional education development.

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1. Introduction

The system of higher education is a multifold structure of nation’s intellectual capital formation, pedagogically organized socialization of students. The Russian educational system as an important element of social, political and economic life is a prerequisite for the development of all the sectors of the country’s economy. The significance of education for all the aspects of social life is supported by the fact that education is the first link in the innovative chain “education – research – venture projects – mass application of the innovations”.

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In 2003 Russia joined the Bologna process and committed to fulfilling a number of conditions such as making the transition to the module education system; introducing comparable qualifications in the field of higher education and a two-tier educational system (bachelor degree – master degree), the point rating model, and European-type academic credits into the academic activity of the Russian institutions of higher education (Suleimanova & Fatkullina, 2014). Fulfilling these conditions is aimed at ensuring the integration of Russia into the united European Higher Education Area, while maintaining the basic education principles in compliance with the Bologna process, such as: comparability of the curricula; academic flexibility of students and professional mobility of teachers staff which is to be achieved through constant improvement of pedagogical skills and widening the scope of the academic interests, also equivalence of diplomas of Russian and European institutions of higher education in the common labor market.

2. Objectives, methodology and research design

For a long time the Russian educational system was characterized by ‘subject-object’ education paradigm, according to which the aims, tasks, contents, principles, forms and methods of teaching were determined by the teacher. Being an object of the educational process, the student performed his passive function of the “receiver” of knowledge. Such system of education was proposed by a German educator Johann Friedrich Herbart as far back as in the first half of the XIXth century and was quite appropriate for solving problems of the industrial society.

However, the educational system at its current state of development is oriented not only at equipping the student with knowledge, but also at cultivating his desire for continual independent and creative approach to obtaining new knowledge, at training his abilities and skills of independent education. Self-development is becoming the key task of the pedagogical process.

The reformation of the Russian educational system is connected with a number of issues, such as the necessity to preserve the fundamental values (it is no secret that the goal of the whole educational process in Russian universities was a more substantial training in the fundamental sciences), to ensure integrity of education, to keep the traditions of the Russian higher education and its active role in creating social and cultural environment, etc. Any possible obstacles are caused not so much by the process of integration into a more pragmatic European higher education system, as by the transformation of the teaching paradigm ‘subject-object’ into the ‘subject-subject’ paradigm, which focuses on the student himself, on his wishes and aspirations. It was an American educator John Dewey (1859-1952) in the first half of the XXth century who claimed for the first time that the student himself should choose what to study and how to study. According to this approach, the student should be taught not only the whole sum of knowledge, but also the methods of thinking (theoretical, dialectic, logical, systematic approach, analysis and synthesis). The student should be supported in the development of his creative skills (the ability to apply the received knowledge in any circumstance up to establishing the task himself, as well as finding new ways to complete these tasks) and in the improvement of his professional skills (easily operating in standard and non-standard situations). Dewey suggested that the functions of the teacher should be limited to individual observation and directing the student’s activity into an established “trajectory” of development within the module educational process (Dewey, 1970).

The representatives of the radical humanistic sociological school I. Illich and P. Freire supported the subject-subject form of education both at school and at university and characterized the subject-object approach as a “bank method”, in which the student is more of an object – a coin bank of knowledge, and not a subject of the educational activities, thus leading to the suppression of the personality and to the position of conformity with the reality. In the XXIst century the idea that students are “rightful members of the higher education society” was also stressed in the Prague communique of 2001 during the meeting of the European ministers. Nowadays the society’s deep concern with the issue of humanization is mostly connected with the evolution of philosophical views, which now place the individual at the core of scientific research. And he has to meet a completely new set of requirements, when apart from his professional knowledge and skills, he must acquire spiritual culture as well, that is needed to qualitatively change the structure, the contents and the organizational forms of the entire pedagogical education system.
3. Discussion of the research outcomes

While in the traditional education system it was the knowledge and skills of the student that underwent qualitative changes, the new humanistic educational system is to affect the student himself. Thus, the change of the meaning of the notion “specialist” to the notion “competitive specialist” is of particular interest.

Not so long ago it was a person with a certain set of knowledge and skills, and now it is a person who can develop and update his knowledge and skills in a continuous modern rhythm. Due to this fact he is to have a certain set of intellectual personal qualities and high cultural level.

The development of the Russian educational system focuses on forming among school students such qualities, as science competence, self-sufficiency, independence in judgment, abilities of self-adjustment, self-consciousness and communication. These factors act as a backbone of a professional specialist.

It should be noted that at present higher education institutions of the Republic of Bashkortostan have already implemented the level-based educational model (bachelor degree – master degree – postgraduate degree). The experience of implementing the level-based educational model at the Bashkir State University showed that such modernization leads to certain changes in the content of general professional and special disciplines in the sphere of modern achievements in science, new training opportunities based on introducing modern information technologies with allowance of current demands for experts in the main training branches. The development of the scientific and methodological bases for the educational process is also important. In particular, while drafting the State Educational Standards of Higher Professional Education of the third generation, the special attention was given to the transition to the module system of the educational process with the competence-based approach and introduction of the credit technologies. Higher education institutions of the Republic of Bashkortostan are oriented at introducing structural reorganization of higher professional education which is based on the idea that the innovative educational programs, created within the Bologna Process, are to be modernized according to the following:

1) competence-based approach (focused on the results of the training due to achievement of basic competences), which presupposes the ability of the student, being personally motivated, to carry out the educational activities, based on a set of general educational skills, as well as the abilities to make decisions and to foresee possible results, which depend on the individual system of values;

2) module structure which performs the function of an educational program. This program is individualized in the content, methods of education, the intensity of the cognitive educational activity of a student. The module has some definite structure, aimed at achieving an integral didactic goal and poses as a significant element of the educational material;

3) measuring the amount of the academic workload in credit units or credits, which is a modern instrument of assessing the student’s participation in the process of educational-practical activities as well as scientific and extra-curricular activities - that results in promoting new quality system in process of education.

It should also be mentioned that the combination of all three characteristics (competences–modules–credits) makes these programs genuinely “innovative” and appropriate for modern European and global labor markets.

According to the concept of modernizing the Russian education system, as Fatkullina noted, “educational institutions should train a personality with modern scientific world outlook, develop his intellectual abilities, promote his cognitive interests and create conditions for him to use new information technologies. Nowadays students are to register information about the outside world, to make search projects, to analyze the results of their investigations and also to plan their actions, scientific achievements” (Fatkullina, 2014, p. 218).

In 2002 the Russian Ministry of Education posted online a news release “On the multi-point assessment system in the Russian educational process”, according to which the modernization of higher education involves reviewing the approaches to the system of students’ knowledge assessment (Press-reliz, 2002). This problem is raised from time to time by mass media as well as by university teachers. However, it is well known that in reality most of the teachers follow the traditional evaluation system, e.g. our “five-point” grading system, which is actually transformed into a “three-point” system, since “bad” and “very bad” are not included into student’s academic record. In fact, “multi-point” systems of knowledge assessment are accepted in most of the countries of the world and the majority of the Russian universities have already switched to the new multi-point systems of evaluation of students’ knowledge.
Thus, a (100-point) evaluation system is being tested at the moment in the universities of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

The issue of advanced study of English as the language of international communication in the universities of Bashkortostan as well as in the Universities of Russian Federation becomes increasingly important. At the same time the nineteenth century “motto” of the famous Austrian philosopher and linguist Ludwig Wittgenstein should also be taken into account: What can be said at all can be said clearly and what cannot be said clearly should not be said at all. This means that in the process of teaching English as the language of international and multicultural communication the students should be taught “the most clear-cut and comprehensive logical linguistic model of expressing any form of scientific knowledge with the help of which a scientist could distinguish and specify the essence of the innovative ideas that make up the basis of the genuine knowledge of the world” (Morozkina, 2009, p. 87).

It is necessary to teach the student not only to express his thoughts accurately, correctly and logically compatible with the native language and English, but also to obtain the competences of perceiving and interpreting profound and complicated scientific texts. At the same time, students must be able to correct “anticipation sense” “in accordance with the obtained information, transforming it into some new entity”. It will help to reduce “the amount of inevitable “pseudo senses” and “pseudo meanings” and create the situation, in which the “sense making” basis of the text becomes “more deep and profound” (Morozkina, 2012, p. 156).

Higher education institution should become the avowed hub of knowledge, the center of regional culture and the technically perfect ground for scientific research. The government and the society should realize that it is the higher education institutions that will properly train the professional specialists of the third millennium («Myagkiy put», 2005).

The main task facing the republic universities faculty members is to supply the education process with the appropriate quality control system. As it is well known, the main drawback of the traditional system of student knowledge assessment is that it does not promote active and dynamic work of students, since the situation is not properly monitored and the qualitative work of student is not enough motivated. The current control system does not mark out the best students who passed all the tests and exams ahead of time, or during the credit week. The final examination grade does not take into account individual work of the students. These and many other disadvantages of the traditional system brought about the search for new possibilities of objective assessment of students knowledge, abilities and skills. The problem mentioned makes it necessary to modernize the traditional education technology, win order to train highly qualified specialists with the help of new methodological, informational and technical levels. One of the variants of such modernization is the module rating-based education technology, which provides the opportunity to actively influence the process of education and improve its functional characteristics, increasing students’ motivation in the process of education and, thus, improving their academic performance.

Module system of education aims at making the student study regularly during the whole semester, it requires strict rules of educational process, which should be implemented by both students and teachers. This system consists of two parts that are interconnected with each other: rating and module (Suleimanova & Ziyatdinova, 2013).

Module rating-based system of students is based on continuous individual work with each student during the semester. The module rating-based system allows the student to analyze and evaluate his achievements individually, rate his performance and correct it by doing additional assignments. The greater scope of knowledge students obtain on their own, showing creativity and motivation, which surely improves the quality of their knowledge. Thus, not only the teacher is involved in the process of monitoring knowledge acquisition, but also the student himself.

Discussing the issues of the Russian higher education, many researchers agree that its integration into the European Higher Education Area provides great opportunities for the rational use of financial and human resources in the sphere of teaching. Future professionals are to obtain the competence of divergent scientific investigations and to develop creative power. It gives each student the opportunity to reach his professional and personal potential etc. Restructuring the Russian educational system has required fulfilling a number of conditions, such as introducing comparable qualifications in the field of higher education and two-tier educational system (bachelor degree – master degree); European-type academic credits into the academic activity of the Russian institutions of higher education; transition to module education; Introducing credits system and point rating system; increasing students motivation in the regular studying activity during the whole period of education and many more. Fulfilling these conditions is oriented at providing a smooth, but steady integration of Russia into the single European Higher Education Area,
while observing the basic education principles in compliance with the Bologna process, such as: comparability of the curricula; academic flexibility of students and professional mobility of teachers which is achieved through constant improvement of pedagogical excellence and widening the scope of the academic interests; equivalence of diplomas of all the European institutions of higher education in the labor market; opportunity of free employment in any European country, etc.

Handling these issues requires wide substantial and methodological modernization of all the disciplines studied at the universities, implementation of modern methodological support of the courses, introduction of new educational programs taking into account the needs of the individual, the society and the government, the use of innovative teaching methods, and the development of strategic methods for the decision of nowadays problems and foreseeing the perspectives, prognosis and request response.

In the Republic of Bashkortostan, for example, “the cohabitation of peoples in the same territory leads to a contact between the languages, which influences the interacting languages and leads to the emergence of a phenomenon of bilingualism” (Fatkullina, 2013, p. 121). In the conditions of multi-ethnic area (and of multicultural and multilingual society) for the sake of conflict-free existence of nations speaking different languages it is necessary to know some language other than native, normally the intermediary language with the help of which people can engage in communicative contact. In the conditions of a multilingual society an individual cannot manage knowing only the native language, he needs an intermediary language, through which he can establish linguistic contact with people of different nationalities. Due to historical tradition, the Russian language has been the intermediary language in Russia for more several centuries, and it is recognized as the official language of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Bashkortostan.

It can be noted that non-Russian population in Russia is mostly bilingual, and the national Russian bilingualism is gaining its momentum, however, there are many issues still remaining in this sphere. The main problems are as follows:

- forming active national bilingualism in Russia, which presupposes fluency using of two languages - Russian and the native one, and active implementation of both in different life spheres in the oral and the written form;
- forming active bilingualism entails the problem of increasing the speech culture of a bilingual person in both languages - the native one and the Russian - free from interference and intercalation;
- educating a bilingual individual, who can not only communicate using two languages, but who has learned two national cultures, two linguistic worldviews (Vorobiev, Suleimanova, Fatkullina, Khaireullina, 2014).

Third (foreign, mostly English) language acquisition is connected with certain difficulties, and the difference of the worldview of the peoples who speak different languages lies at the heart of the issue. The real world is perceived through the language, and the notion of “linguistic worldview” stands for the view of the world, reflected by means of a particular language. According to Fatkullina, “different languages do not only differently represent the same thing, sign, action or phenomenon, but reflect a different view of this object, feature, event and phenomenon, i.e. the national view of the world is reflected in the language” (Fatkullina, 2014, p. 215). Thus, second language acquisition comes together with acquiring a new linguistic worldview. Since language and culture are organically interconnected (language is a treasure trove of culture), second language acquisition presupposes entering another culture, learning the way of thinking, world outlook, system of morals, customs, traditions and mentality of the people - the native speakers of the language.

With regard to the task of promoting active bilingualism and educating a bilingual personality, the Bashkir State University is dealing with the following topical problems of organizational and methodological character: the issue of bilingual education at the university (form, content, methodology)(it requires a review of all the content and all the methodological system of language teaching); the problem of methodological support of educational process: creating new generation textbooks and methodological manuals both in the native and Russian languages for foreign and Russian students of the department; the issue of training educators who can successfully implement the task of promoting active bilingualism and educating a bilingual personality in the process of language training.

Apart from the issues of bilingualism, “in the conditions of modern global civilization and strengthening ties between nations and peoples in a number of life spheres - economic, political, scientific and cultural, another problem becomes topical - the issue of multilingualism (polylingualism)” (Fatkullina, 2015, p. 345). The bilingualism becomes vividly insufficient in the process of growing globalization in all areas of life. The
international contacts between multilingual nations are getting more and more wide-scale, and the communication in foreign languages is turning into the everyday necessity. Life itself dictates the necessity of speaking at least one foreign (international) language, for instance, English, as an intermediary language. “Similar to bilingualism, trilingualism is becoming commonplace” (Fatkullina, 2015, p. 346). At present the study of foreign languages is a requirement for linguistic education in regional universities, which creates the basis for the expansion of multilingualism in our country. It can be stated that nowadays the transition from bilingualism to multilingualism has begun in the regional educational area, and this process requires serious support. For example, at the Bashkir State University, in addition to English, other foreign languages are being studied, in particular: European, such as German and French, and Asian, such as Chinese, Arabic, Turkish and others. Their choice is determined by the local conditions, first of all, by the availability of specialists, i.e. foreign language teachers. In this regard, another issue becomes relevant, that is the training of foreign language specialists.

The need to restore and strengthen the relationship between the fundamental and humanitarian spheres of science becomes a serious problem for modern regional universities. The reserves for the future development of the country are hidden in intensifying and strengthening the integration of science and higher education.

The “symbiosis” of sector of research and development establishments, the Russian academy of science and its regional sector of branches, scientific laboratories and scientific technical laboratories, on the one hand, and universities, on the other hand, will allow to significantly narrow the gap between higher education and science, and in the long run to solve the problem of involving the scientists of the highest level into the educational process.

The movement of fundamental, sector of science, academic science “towards” universities will help to attract some of the most talented students in order to solve serious problems of fundamental as well as applied character.

4. Conclusion

The mechanism of integrating science into the higher education system should be developed and launched as soon as possible. As a result, “a gradual merging of academic institutions, sectoral research institutions and universities should take place”. “At the same time, the above mentioned institutions should be provided with the system of correlation and cooperation in a the integration process that will allow to substantially deepen the knowledge of students, and to orientate them at solving current scientific problems, will help the younger generation to expose their talents and to find a suitable employment” (Morozkin & Morozkin, 2009, p. 74).

The most important thing is to provide the conditions, when not only the administration of the universities, but also teachers and students will strive to join the Bologna Process, i.e. to form the chain “student → teacher → chair → university → place of employment” which should be functioning actively and efficiently sharing the values of the Bologna Process. Each of these links has to be clearly understood by the participants in the educational process, its aims and ways of their realization, as well as the motivation of the whole stuff in achieving positive results while coordinating the role of the universities at the Bologna Process and providing further development of higher education system in future.

References


