Influence of Mass Consciousness on Quality of the Higher Education in Kazakhstan

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1. Introduction

The transformations that have affected the former Soviet states, including Kazakhstan, were very deep and affected almost all aspects of society (Hoen & Irmazarov, 2012; Aristei & Perugini, 2012). Nowadays, the major institutions of Kazakhstan in general correspond to market economy, although further development is confronted with quite certain difficulties, both objective and subjective character (Hoen & Irmazarov, 2012; Aristei & Perugini, 2012). There is no an exception with higher school, as well. Thus, it was shown that Kazakhstan's accession to the

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European Higher Education Area still remains in many respects formal, but integration processes are very slow. (Aristei & Perugini, 2012). Moreover, there are evidences that the quality of higher education is continued to fall in post-Soviet space, including in Kazakhstan, with the deepening of market reforms (Shaltykova, Suleimenova, Suleimenov & Obukhova, 2013; Dobryakova & Froumin, 2010). At least, the quality of higher education in Russia and Kazakhstan is not increasing as much (Witte, Wolfe & Dahill-Brown, 2013; Mukhtarova & Smith, 2014), as it might be supposed on the assumption of data on improving the overall quality of life in such countries as Russia and Kazakhstan.

Thus, it was noted that the increase of population’s standard of well-being as well as a significant increase of financial investments into science and education from the government side, which became possible as the reorganization of Kazakhstani economy to market, yet cannot be a guarantee for improving the quality of scientific researches and higher education by itself (Shaltykova et al., 2013). In this case the level of funding (Shaltykova et al., 2013) is necessary, but not sufficient conditions for the expected transformations.

It should be taken into consideration that the State's efforts to improve the effectiveness of science and higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan, currently, are now quite significant, particularly in terms of finance, which is analyzed in detail in (Nessipbayeva & Dalayeva, 2013; Mukhtarova & Smith, 2014). In particular, it is noted that “…Kazakhstan yet for three years is in the top of four countries with the highest index of education development (UNESCO). We are far ahead of all other countries in the post-Soviet space”.

In this paper by questionnaire method has shown that the considered phenomenon (the lack of pronounced correlation between financial investment in higher education of Kazakhstan and its quality), in considerable degree due to the inertia of mass consciousness. If in the early stages of transition periods in post-Soviet society stereotypes of behavior and perception have been significantly affected, as well as informal institutions, established under the conditions of domination of planned economy. But, nowadays on the society in such countries as Kazakhstan have a marked influence of informal institutions that developed during transition period. The above mentioned factors of inertia of the mass consciousness, mainly is expressed in the lack of motivation among students to obtain real knowledge; for many of them learning in university is reduced to obtaining formal attributes of the corresponding status (diplomas, certificates, etc.).

2. Author Artwork

Anonymous survey was conducted in five universities of Almaty (the largest city of Kazakhstan, in which concentrated more than 70% of all students of the country). The total number of respondents was 450 people.

Respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire, discussed below.

First question (the distribution of the responses is presented in Figure 1) was designed to compare how do students highly appreciate their own knowledge as compared with formal certificate of obtaining higher education (diploma).

Question 1. Do you think, is it possible to enter into professional life only with the knowledge that you gained at university, but without a diploma?

- Yes, maybe if you know everything in this specialty
- Yes, very often
- Yes, sometimes
- No
From the distribution of answers to this question, it can be clearly seen that in the eyes of the majority of respondents diploma is a necessary attribute of a professional career, valued significantly more knowledge as such.

Second question (Figure 2) has a similar goal, but was formulated in a more rigid form.

Question 2. Do you think, is it possible to enter into professional life with only a diploma, without knowledge gained at a university?

- Yes, almost always
- Yes, very often
- Yes, sometimes
- No, it is unlikely
- No

It is seen that only 22% of respondents definitely believe that knowledge is indispensable condition for a successful professional career, and about a quarter of those surveyed believe that a successful career can be held in the presence of only one certificate about acquisition of qualification that is not supported by real knowledge.

The next two questions directly related to the possibility of acquiring diplomas in corruption schemes.

Third question (Figure 3 (a)). Do you think that it is possible to buy a diploma?

- Yes
- No

Fourth question (Figure 3 (b)). Do you know someone who obtained a diploma without real level of required knowledge, just for money.

- Yes
- No
Questions 5 and 6 are largely intersect with questions 1 and 2; modified formulation allows us to estimate the reliability of the results obtained.

Questions 5 (Figure 4). Do you think that a learning in higher university is just the usual formalities?
- Yes, it's just a formality
- Most likely yes
- Probably not
- No

Questions 6 (Figure 5). Do you think that attendance to study at a institute is wasting of time?
- Yes, I'm sure of it
- More likely than no
- Yes, for the most part
- No, for the most part
- No, I do consider all this useful
A summary diagram of the distribution of answers to the above formulated questions are presented in Figure 6. In this diagram, the horizontal fragment of columns reflects the distribution of responses to the question with the corresponding number (vertical axis). Areas 1, 2 and 3 correspond to the answers are assumed that for the successful career diploma probably has value in itself. Areas 4 and 5 – the answers of the opposite character, i.e. mean that the independent value in the eyes of a respondent have the knowledge itself, not a formal proof of status.

It is seen that border between set of areas (1+2+3) and (4+5) for whole questions lies approximately about 50% on line. This result is an evidence of validity of obtained data (due to obtained correlation), besides it directly shows that for large part of Kazakhstan students knowledge itself has no pronounceable value.

3. Discussion

No need to prove that the lack of motivation to acquire proper knowledge (rather than formal certificates) obviously leads to a drop in the quality of education.

The situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan is determined by several factors, most of them are due to the inertia of the mass consciousness. It is essential that the stereotypes of mass consciousness, that define the behavior of Master students, are formed in the transition period. (For RK beginning of transition occurs in approximately 1992, i.e. in postgraduate study are learned those, whose becoming as a personality completely fit into framework of the transition period). This factor causes to consider a lack of motivation in acquisition of knowledge (actual education) namely as the post-transitional phenomenon, since it is completely generated by stereotypes that formed in the transition period which continue to act in the force of inertia of the mass consciousness.
Specifically, in the mass consciousness of countries that have experienced a long period of transition from planned economy to market economy, the following stereotypes that reflect (in distorted form) public value of higher education have been created.

- Personal investment (both in terms of the efforts and funds spent) in the actual technical education is not justified; most effective is career manager
- For career of a manager actual education and the actual level of competence have not defined value. A dominant for a career are corruption instruments and family-clan ties
- Personal status in youth medium is entirely determined by the level of income, but the level of education has almost no effect to them

These stereotypes of mass consciousness in RK rooted very deeply and turned into absence of most of the initiatives to improve the situation, particularly, if the recent initiatives related to usage of instruments of administrative regulation. Obviously, such kind of tools only in a very slight degree may affect to a dominant factor in higher education – personal motivation.

It should be emphasized that the above mentioned stereotypes are just myths (used in the context of the “myth” is not a synonym for “false view”); they reflect reality only partially. Namely, there are examples of how a family-clan ties provide career of individuals, but in the same time period of 2009 – 2013 is characterized by noticeable changes in the financial position of the social strata, that have been well considered in the examples of the opposite kind of (Nessipbayeva & Dalayeva, 2013; Mukhtarova & Smith 2014). (In particular, in RK to the mentioned period direct investment in innovation activity were significantly increased.)

Very clearly, in particular, the example is related to the formation of “gray” IT-sector in which income is also significantly higher than the average one. These and other examples suggest that stereotypes of mass consciousness are not fully reflect reality, but are determined mainly by inertial factors

Consequently, a key role in overcoming the negative trends in Kazakhstan at present time lies not only in the field of administrative regulation, but also in the field of mass psychology and institutional economics. The value of the last method is to find ways of formation of institutions, both formal and informal, which could transform the images fixed by mass consciousness.

Apart such measures that have an impact on the mass consciousness are already being implemented. (For instance, it is assumed the decision on required passage internships in leading international scientific and educational centers by Master students.).

However, by themselves, such measures are not able to overcome the stereotypes mentioned above. For this case it is necessary visual evidences of the effectiveness of personal investment in higher education, and the evidence must be substantial enough to “swing the pendulum to the opposite direction”

One of the variants of realization of this approach is the creation of youth start-up companies that demonstrate high profitability. Personal example of young engineers, who have achieved significant success through their own scientific research, could considerably change the stereotypes in youth environment. At the present time, one of these clusters is implemented by NEA of RK, and when it was created the information tools that provide the appearance of accompanied informal institutions were purposefully used (online community, etc.)

Complex analysis of causes of students’ decreased interest in learning, conducted in this study showed that the prime cause is a number of the steady mythologems that have taken roots in mass consciousness in Kazakhstan. It is paradoxical, but one of such mythologems can be formulated as follows: "knowledge in conditions of market economy isn't the factor providing support of career success". This thesis is precisely mythologeme, as it has no basis in reality, but is widespread.

It is also shown that the formation of this and similar mythologems was formed by economic conditions prevailing at the beginning of the transition period (1990), i.e. considered tendency is defined, mainly, by the inertia factor of mass consciousness.

It is shown that overcoming the considered negative tendency can't be provided only by means of financial instruments and existing formal institutions. The most effective tool to counteract negative trends of this type is the formation of informal institutions, providing implementation in public consciousness conception, corresponding to the interests of improving the quality of higher education.
References


