

**PRESTIGE OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES IN ESTIMATES
OF TEACHERS OF CULTURE UNIVERSITIES:
MISSION OR BUREAU?**

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Abstract. The article provides a comprehensive assessment of the modern educational process from the standpoint of teachers of higher education institutions of culture. It observes the correlation of the scientific activity of teachers with the performing various professional duties within given time budget. In addition, this work explores the basic problems that impede the prestige of education, from the viewpoint of university professors of culture in the context of reforming the higher education system. Cultural institutions of Barnaul, Kemerovo and Chelyabinsk provided the study base for this research. This article operates the results of the sociological survey, a single instrumentarium questionnaire selected as the main research method. The total number of 250 teachers participated in the survey at each university. The study showed that the paperwork on instructional programs accompanying the educational process forces out any field-specific types of teachers' professional activity, which in its turn compromises the researchers' satisfaction with their own scientific activities.

The overwhelming majority of respondents of 76.5% consider the lack of time, as the main cause of insufficient scientific activity. In particular, the respondents point to time-consuming workload with additional assignments, as well as performing duties, distracting from the full focus on science. According to the respondents, the bureaucratization of higher education in the cultural sphere displaces actual scientific activity, which allows achieving prestige, career growth and upward mobility in the university environment. Furthermore, an increasing number of rate indicators, a variety of paperwork describing methodological standards, increasing procedures for monitoring and supervision of the activities of the teacher lead to the shortage of time for self-education of teachers, reduce research activity and, eventually, become a tangible obstacle to sustainable interactions with students preventing personalized translation of personal influence and experience.

Tutors of universities of culture state that the general atmosphere in the country does not give the feeling that science is in demand in our society. Therefore, they do not see the point of spending efforts; and only 14.4% admitted that difficulties are purely subjective in nature (that means that a teacher does not fulfill his or her responsibility to reach new scientific problems generate original ideas, look for ways to implement them). In other words, the shortage of time combined with the underfunding of scientific activity are the main reasons for the lack of scientific efficiency of teachers of higher educational institutions of culture. Overwhelming majority of the teaching community is dissatisfied with the formalization (bureaucratization) of higher education. A common thread in researching the problems and prospects for the development of modern education is that an effort to standardize results (shaping them as an effective and technological educational “product”) in order to increase the competitiveness of Russian universities among the world's leading scientific and educational centers, manifests totalitarian standardization of the educational process.

Reforms of higher education remain unintelligible for a critical majority of teachers of universities of culture under this study. Most scientific and pedagogical workers believe that these reforms are rather harmful, as they aim at destroying traditional communication between the teacher and the student. As the teachers believe, converting educational process into the mere “paper flow” deprives the teacher of the possibility of effective interpersonal communication with students.

The empirical base of the research described in this article features several Universities of Culture. However, numerous publications on similar topics in various publications and the Internet make it possible to expand the article conclusions significantly, and to extend them to the entire system of higher education of the Russian Federation. With the only exception of particular metropolitan universities that have a special status and, therefore, the ability to ignore most odious reformist attitudes.

Keywords: universities of culture, prestige of educational activities

Introduction

Cultural universities hold a special place in the higher education system of our country. This specific is predetermined not only by the peculiarities of the main subject of study, that is culture, which is all pervasive and immanent to the basic subjects studied in educational institutions of any profile. For some time now, administrative documents of universal action determine this special nature by recognizing culture as a "national priority", which in its turn require the implementation of effective cultural policies.

Universities of culture currently obtained the mission to train personnel capable of providing intellectual support for the implementation of these administrative documents in the long term. It is obvious that the success of such a mission depends entirely on the effectiveness of scientific and pedagogical staff of universities of culture, and respectively on the quality of scientific activity of teachers, their professional and social optimism, personal growth and leadership.

Researchers share their attitude towards the trends in the current reforming of higher education in Russia by means of putting paradoxical questions in the title of the materials (and thus determining their key message): "The Job of a University Teacher: Creativity or "Survival"?" (Sheregi, F.E., Kirillov, A.V., 2017), "Higher Education: Struggle for Quality or an Attempt on Human Capital?" (Smolin, O.N., 2015), "Is There a System of Higher Education in Russia?" (Zborovskiy, G.E., Ambarova, P.A., Shuklina, E.A. 2017) and others.

Among the crucial problems in the sphere of education, we must mention, firstly, a limited access to educational services, an insufficient funding of universities and evolving formalism and bureaucracy of the educational environment (Kalmykov, N.N., Satyr', T.S., 2016: 95). Secondly, downgrading of the teacher profession, the growing amount of "red tape" and misunderstanding of the academic specifics by administrative institutions. In bulk, the loss of national scholarly and educational traditions (Khagurov, T. A., Ostapenko, A. A., 2014: 107).

This reorientation of the education system to the "spiritual mass production" and the "ideology of selfish service" contradicts Russian historical and cultural experience of social development. As traditionally, Russian society entrust educational institutions a fundamentally different mission, expressed in the "ideology of selfless service". Modern Russian university is to obtain a status of the "professional bureaucracy" (Grudzinskiy, A.O., Chuprunov, E.V., 2016), which only complicates the processes of strategic transformations. As it does not only respond to the desired "mission of selfless service", but also it comes in collision with the requirements and demands of the market with its "ideology of demand" imposed by employers (Klyucharev, G.A., 2015). An increasing number of rate indicators, a variety of paperwork describing methodological standards, increasing procedures for monitoring and supervision of the activities of the teacher lead to the shortage of time for self-education of teachers, reduce research activity and, eventually, become a tangible obstacle to sustainable interactions with students preventing personalized translation of personal influence and experience.

Objectives / Purpose of the study

The sociological laboratory of the Chelyabinsk State Institute of Culture in the period from November 2018 to February 2019 carried out a research, which involved academic staff of regional universities of culture. The aim of the study was a comprehensive assessment of the modern educational process, consisting of several objectives. Firstly, we explored the time budget and compared how academic activity of teachers of higher educational institutions of culture correlates with the time spent on performing other various professional duties; Secondly, how self-awareness of university teachers of culture changed in the context of reforming the higher education system.

Methodology

Cultural institutions of Barnaul, Kemerovo and Chelyabinsk provided the study base for this research. This article operates the results of the sociological survey, a single instrumentarium questionnaire selected as the main research method. The total number of 250 teachers participated in the survey at each university: 24% of men, 76% of women. Teachers with the experience of university work: up to 5 years – 10.4%, from 5 to 20 years – 45.6%, more than 20 years – 44%. Teachers without a degree (rank) – 26%, Candidates of Sciences – 48.8%, Doctors of Sciences – 10.8%, Associate professors – 20.4%, Professors – 9.2%. Teachers with an honorary title - 17.2%. The results of the study do not demonstrate any significant discrepancies in the answers depending on the city of residence (Barnaul, Kemerovo, Chelyabinsk), which most likely confirms the situation described above.

Results / Findings

Time spent on the teachers' own research and development activities hardly reaches the level of visibility. At the same time, a substantial part of teachers cannot even go beyond the five-percent time budget when providing "assistance in the implementation of research activities of students and graduate students", "personal cultural development and self-education", "communication with students, graduate students and colleagues about professional issues in the framework of creative meetings and informal conversations".

Thus, it is possible to note down the substitution of any profile types of professional activity of teachers for "filling in a variety of paperwork aimed at developing methodological standards accompanying the educational process". Auxiliary, in fact, the latter activity has now become not just dominant, but able to replace other processes that affect the quality of education directly. This situation negatively affects one's own satisfaction with academic activities - 64% of teachers. According to modern rules, it is

scientific activity (and only) allows to achieve prestige, career growth and upward mobility in the university environment. Within this framework, the eightfold predominance of dissatisfied teachers with their own scientific activity serves as a fundamental reason for the slowdown in the quality of personnel reproduction in universities of culture.

Despite the traceable dependence of dissatisfaction with one's own scientific activities on the bureaucratization of university life, teachers had a direct question about the reasons for such dissatisfaction (if any). The overwhelming majority of respondents of 76.5% consider the lack of time, as the main cause of insufficient scientific activity. In particular, the respondents point to time-consuming workload with additional assignments, as well as performing duties, distracting from the full focus on science. Another 42.5% supplemented the previous answer with an indication of insufficient funding for research and development activities: lack of funds to cover the publication charges, research itself and trips to conferences. What is more, 33.6% referred to the workload of academic work, which correlates with the position of the excess time spent on variety of paperwork describing methodological standards. Another 22.4% believe that the general atmosphere in the country does not give the feeling that science is in demand in our society. Therefore, they do not see the point of spending efforts; and only 14.4% admitted that difficulties are purely subjective in nature (that means that a teacher does not fulfill his or her responsibility to reach new scientific problems generate original ideas, look for ways to implement them). In other words, the lack of time combined with the underfunding of scientific activity are the main reasons for the lack of scientific efficiency of teachers of higher educational institutions of culture. The scientific activity itself exists in relatively autonomous areas (albeit complementary). While evaluating their own activity, "related to the placement of articles in publications indexed in international databases," 46% of university tutors of culture chose the "none" position. Nearly 31% admitted that such activity is "low" (which actually indicates the ineffectiveness of the corresponding attempts); 21% chose a mediate position "average". Only 2% rated their activity in this academic area as "high".

Two following questions can serve as test ones (or clarifying) in order to make the preliminary conclusion. The first verification question is intended to capture a retrospective of changes in academic life in the situation of permanent reforms of higher education: "How do you think, does the ratio of time spent on the professional activities of a university teacher changes over time?". Almost 80% of teachers answered that academic life is becoming increasingly formalized and standardized; teachers spend

considerable time and energy on classes, at the expense of professional self-improvement. Obviously, such a response indicates a negative assessment of the changes that have occurred in the higher education system in the recent years; 12.8% did not observe any significant changes. Only 7.6% of teachers believe that they manage to devote more time to “work for themselves” and to concentrate on professional self-improvement.

The second test question aims at assessing the need for the devoting the amount of time to filling paperwork on methodological standards that, in its current form, accompanies the educational process at the university. Thus, 47.6% defined the evolving amount of this documentation as completely unnecessary, time-consuming and routine, which does not benefit neither to the students (who are not able to understand the "pile-up" of data), nor to the teachers. Only 10.8% indicated it as an important element of their job that helps students and teachers to obtain necessary information for the educational process.

The comments made in a free form, in the overwhelming majority, criticized the growing bureaucratization of academic life (Methodological work simply suffocates, takes time and drives into depression”; “Less formalism means more time for working with students both for creative and scientific activities”; “Terrible bureaucratization of work”; “Round-the-clock workload interferes with productive work. Thus, we do anything but our beloved job”).

Discussion

Summing up the results of the study, we can make a number of conclusions. Reforms of higher education remain misunderstood by a critical majority of teachers from the universities of culture under study. The overwhelming majority of academic and pedagogical staff believes that these reforms are rather harmful and tend to destroy traditional communication between the teacher and the student, while translating it into the field of paperwork; moreover, it deprives the teacher from the possibility of effective interpersonal communication with students.

Formalization (bureaucratization) of the educational process associated with the development and repeated alteration of the documentation that accompanies the educational process, gradually displaces all other activities from the field of professional activity of the teacher. Even academic activity, which enlighten the perspectives of the teacher in the university community, gradually becomes peripheral.

The situation grows worse due to the increasing formalization of the assessment of academic activity. Introduction of different types of research chops, an obligation (for certain categories of scientists) to issue scientometric papers in the academic journals indexed in the international

databases, to participate in conferences of different levels annually regardless of the need for such participation (Birzhenyuk, G.M., Efimova, T.V., 2018).

At the present stage of higher education reforms, researchers of this process in real time observe the “Parkinson's law” in action, because the activity that was initially technical and auxiliary (the development of documentation supporting the educational process) acquired the status of the main one. This “paperwork invasion” displaces and forces out not only the relevant fields of work or the university teacher, but also, but also deprives him or her from the academic activities. Unfortunately, this academic activity traditionally comprises the basic mission of university, designed to provide research updates of its disciplines and science in general.

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