

The Development of the Education Quality Assurance System in the Context of Socio-Economic Growth of the Cross-Border Region

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ABSTRACT

Modern high-tech production based on knowledge, the democratization of society and processes of globalization and regionalization form a new, dynamic labor market and actualize the problem of preparation of highly skilled professionals who ensure the stability of economic development and its integration into the world economic space. All this requires the educational institutions to not only constantly change and improve educational programs and technologies, but also to upgrade quality of higher education, due to the wide dissemination of guidelines for quality assurance in a cross-border higher education of UNESCO and OECD, as well as the creation of transparent intramural systems of education quality assurance for representatives of the labor market.

The purpose of the article is to present the results of theoretical and empirical research problems of improving intramural system of education quality assurance, aimed at increasing the competitiveness and efficiency of the university management in terms of socio-economic development of the cross-border region.

The study was conducted by methods of comparative analysis, monitoring, foresight methods. The theoretical basis for the study was multi-standard approach.

Practical implementation of the study is related to the development of the program of development of intramural system of education quality assurance, aimed at improving the competitiveness and efficiency of the management of the university. Consistency in the education quality assurance and confirmation of compliance of the system with the established international standards gives “credibility” on the part of the professional community and employers, and as a result, provides competitiveness in the domestic and international markets of educational services.

KEYWORDS

education quality assurance, the program of development, regional labor market, foresight methods, monitoring the quality of education

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Introduction

The development of scientific and technological progress and changing labor market demands require a systemic reaction of educational establishments. The education quality assurance system created at the university positioning itself as a supportive institution in the region, must be sensitive to all changes taking place in the surrounding environment. Creating an effective system of education quality assurance at the university is not only the improvement of all activities, this changes employees' mentality, thinking style of managerial personnel, the

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development of skills to solve problems in dynamic and contradictory conditions. It should be understood that the content of education is not only a response to the challenge of scientific and technological progress and development of society. Education provides a sustainable economic and social development and improves the overall quality of life of citizens. Educational organizations are a platform for different socially significant projects.

In recent years, many works are devoted to the creation and development of education quality assurance systems (Borkach, 2014), Fadeeva, Z., Galkute, L., Mader, C., Scott, G., Mohun, S. (Fadeeva, et. al, 2014; Mahsood, 2011; Csizmadia, 2008; Navodnov, 2012; OECD Better Policies for Better Lives). The main issues discussed are: the history of quality assurance, its evolution in the field of higher education, the current changes, gaps and trends in quality assurance in various countries.

Issues of influence of the education quality on the society are considered in works by N.Powdthavee, W.N.Lekfuangfu, M.Wooden, Z.Fadeeva, L.Galkute, C.Mader, G.Scott, S.Mohun(Powdthavee et. al., 2015), AregaYirdaw(Yirdaw, 2016; Fadeeva, 2014). The authors offer a variety of development strategies of educational institutions in order to enhance their competitiveness.

In his paper, D.Billing provides a comparative analysis of different education quality assurance systems (Billing, 2004). These comparisons show that it is impossible to apply one model of external quality assessment for different objects. But it is possible to identify the “general model”, the key elements of which are applicable in most countries. Angela Yung-Chi Hou considers the problems of integration of the national system of education quality assurance in international. The analysis of the problems faced by the institutions and the National Agency for Accreditation is given(Yung-Chi Hou, 2011).

Liv Langfeldt, BjornStensaker, Lee Harvey, Jeroen Huisman, Don F. Westerheijden analyzed the role of peer review in the functioning of the systems of external quality assurance of education and activities of quality assurance agencies (Langfeldt, 2010). And the work by Yung-Chi Hou(2015) is devoted to the study of problems and development strategies of the Asian quality assurance agencies ensuring the objectivity and transparency of their decisions and recommendations.

The experience of applying total quality management principles (TQM) is described in Bryan R. Cole (Cole, 1995). This study is interesting in that its results can be projected to a particular educational institution.

Concept headings

Systems of education quality assurance are diverse in structure and content, so it is difficult enough to fully refer some of them to a specific educational organization. In connection with this there is a need to create intramural systems of education quality assurance and its development program, which allows taking into account features of the regional socio-economic complex. Established education quality assurance system of the supportive university should ensure the development of infrastructure of the university's interaction with the environment, the formation of strategic partnerships with other educational institutions in the cross-border region, with academic science, industry, business and regional authorities.

The purpose of the article is to present the results of theoretical and empirical research of problems relating to the improvement of intramural system of education quality assurance, aimed at enhancing the competitiveness and efficiency of the university management in terms of socio-economic development of the cross-border region (Russia, China and Mongolia).

In accordance with the specified purpose of the article the following tasks have been set:

1. Analyze the existing practice of the creation of education quality assurance systems in the universities of Russia and foreign countries.
2. Identify priority areas for improving the intramural systems of education quality assurance in accordance with the requirements of participants in the educational process.
3. Provide program of the development of intramural system of education quality assurance as a condition for cooperation in education and the labor market in a cross-border region.

The research methodology included the philosophical foundation of the category of quality (J.Dewey, I. Kant, A. Locke and others), and the process approach (W. E. Deming, D. Dill, S.Y. Trapitsin and others).

Theoretical and methodological basis of the study was a multi-standard approach, which is the basis of the European Foundation for Quality Management Model (EFQM); it takes into account the standards and guidelines for quality assurance of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), standards for quality management ISO/IEC 17024:2003, UNESCO/OECD guidelines on "Quality provision in cross-border higher education". (Method for the Improvement of the Quality of Higher Education in Accordance with the EFQM Model, 2015, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2009).

The study was conducted applying forecasting methods, comparative analysis and monitoring. A special place in the study takes the foresight method, including methods of peer review of strategic directions of socio-economic and innovative development of the Trans-Baikal Territory, identifying technological breakthroughs that could have an impact on the economy and society in the medium and long term (Miles, 2007). Its use enabled to identify possible alternatives to the development of intramural system of education quality assurance and choose the most preferred ones through integrated forecasting. Foresight methods include expert panels, the development of scenarios, bibliometric analysis, search and systematization of relevant national and international studies on expert activity, normative documents.

Methodological Framework

The main methods for research of this problem are: dialectical, abstract, and also deduction methods. We determine theoretical approaches, which might serve as a basis for searching the ways to improve the education system.

Results

Economic peculiarities of the Trans-Baikal Territory define priorities for the development of the supportive university in the region - Trans-Baikal State University. These features include the dominance of the mining sector in the

regional economy and cross-border location of the region (proximity to China and Mongolia). The main strategic goal of the University is to provide leading industries of Trans-Baikal Territory with staff.

Mineral resources base of common minerals in Trans-Baikal Region includes about 270 different types of deposits. Despite the fluctuations in the world prices for the main types of mineral resources, in 2015, the positive development of the mining complex in the Trans-Baikal Territory continued. As compared with 2014 the lead concentrate output has increased, of the production of zinc and tungsten concentrate is keeping almost the same level. The volume of gold production is growing, including those from ore deposits. In terms of gold production the Zabaikalye territory is among the top ten gold mining regions of Russia. In 2015, about 20 million tons of coal was produced here. Despite the fact that the Trans-Baikal coal account for only 1.2% of Russian reserves, this mining region occupies the 4th place among the coal-mining regions of Russia. The region retains uranium production level of more than 2 thousand tons per year.

In addition to rational and efficient use of mineral resources, the major problem of the regional policy is to ensure the reproduction of the mineral resource base of the mining industry. The basic directions of work on the geological study and reproduction of mineral resources base in the Trans-Baikal Territory in 2015 is to strengthen the raw material base of uranium, gold and fluorspar (Minister of Natural Resources and Industrial Policy of Trans-Baikal Territory).

The development of mining and processing sectors of the regional economy determines the need for relevant personnel. The result is that the university establishes a range of ongoing educational programs; the content of programs is determined. At the University leading specialists of enterprises and organizations of the region are involved in the teaching process, which allows graduate departments to know the situation on the labor market and to respond to employers' needs, create and update educational programs.

Trans-boundary position of the territory gives the university the opportunity to successfully develop international activities. According to the results of monitoring the effectiveness of the educational institutions of higher education in the Russian Federation, the proportion of the number of foreign students enrolled in baccalaureate, specialist and master programs was 1.91 in the total number of students in 2015, which is almost two times higher than the required threshold and 43.6% higher than in 2014 (Chief computer and information center, 2014). Conducting international activities and active engaging of foreign students requires the quality of university services at the international level. This calls for the use of the international standards and taking conformity assessment procedures to comply with these standards in the creation and development of the education quality assurance system.

Rapidly changing demands of stakeholders need to form a system of continuous improvement of the structure and content of educational programs, as part of the system of education quality assurance in the university. On this basis, the policy of education quality in the Baikal State University is based on the following principles (Torino Process, 2016):

- formation of the policy of higher education quality assurance is determined by the heads of the organization (principle of responsibility);

- wide scope of stakeholders (the principle of the exchange of views and the search for consensus);
- a comprehensive and systematic approach to respond to the demands of the socio-economic environment;
- an assessment based on document-supported analysis (the principle of continuous monitoring, internal and external evaluation).

International context and analysis of the functioning of the domestic practice of education quality assurance systems gives Transbaikal State University the opportunity to build vectors of improvement and development, identify competitive advantages and form a high degree of confidence in the quality of high school education in the professional academic environment.

Creating a system of education quality assurance in Transbaikal State University and its positive functioning confirm the efficiency of the ideas identified during the analysis of the current practice of establishing systems of education quality assurance in the universities of Russia and foreign countries.

Changes in government policy, enshrined in the Federal target program of education development (Federal target program of education development for 2016-2020 years), require greater attention to the quality of education, and as a result, further improvement of the education quality assurance systems created in universities.

The result of the conducted study was the development of the program of intramural system of education quality assurance aimed at improving the competitiveness and efficiency of the university management (see Table 1). The program sets two global objectives: development of the system of the quality management of the university, passing external independent quality assurance procedures in order to increase the competitiveness of the university. For each task a number of activities, which include specific projects, has been developed. The program also describes the results of the implementation of each project.

Table 1. The program of improvement / development of intramural systems of education quality assurance, aimed at improving the competitiveness and efficiency of the university management

| Task 1. | Development of the system of quality management in the university |
|----------------|---|
| Event 1.1. | Formation of effective management mechanisms |
| Project 1.1.1. | Updating of normative and methodological base of the university in accordance with the existing legislative acts in the conditions of increasing responsibility of educational institutions |
| Project 1.1.2. | Foresight method for the strategic directions of university activity as a supotive institution in the region |
| Project 1.1.3. | Continuous operation of the internal audit service |
| Project 1.1.4. | Measuring the satisfaction of stakeholders |

As a result of the event:

- the existing administrative procedures will be optimized.
- base of normative-methodical documentation of the university governing all activities will be established.

the creation and implementation of joint projects of public and private partnership is planned for the preparation of highly qualified personnel for the socio-economic

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|--|--|
| development of the Trans-Baikal Territory | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – when making management decisions, audit evidence will be taken into account – University quality assurance will take into account the needs and expectations of students, other stakeholders and society in general | |
| Event 1.2. | The development of the system of monitoring education quality and the education quality assurance |
| Project 1.2.1. | Implementation of international techniques for assessment and study of the education quality |
| Project 1.2.2. | Implementation of the electronic rating sheet providing record of the educational process development, interim assessment of results and the development of educational program in general |
| Project 1.2.3. | Automation of monitoring education quality assurance, based on a single electronic platform / in a single information space of the university |
| As a result of the event: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the transparency and openness of the university will increase, which will contribute to mutual trust of stakeholders – the comparable quality of monitoring the system of education quality and the university education quality assurance with international standards will be achieved | |
| Event 1.3. | Providing organizational and methodical and consulting work in the region on the general issues of the application of the national qualifications system [Letter from the President-sponsored National Council ... |
| Project 1.3.1. | Creation of a regional training center of competence |
| Project 1.3.2. | Training of experts of a regional center for professional qualifications |
| As a result of the event: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the necessary elements of a national system of vocational qualifications will be formed at the regional level – Regional Training Center of Competence will be created – training of experts on the evaluation of professional competencies demanded in regional economies will be carried out | |
| Task 2. | Passing the external independent quality assurance procedures to enhance the high school competitiveness |
| Event 2.1. | Passing the procedures of state regulation of educational activity |
| Project 2.1.1. | Licensing and implementation of new educational programs demanded by regional economies |
| Project 2.1.2. | Preparation and passage of the state accreditation of educational activities of the university |
| As a result of the event: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the legitimacy of the university activity will be confirmed – This will induce new innovative educational programs tailored to the needs of the regional labor market and services, the potential employer requirements | |
| Event 2.2. | The introduction of a systematic approach to the passage of external expertise on behalf of the professional and expert community |
| Project 2.2.1. | Regular passing an independent assessment of the education quality by students of the university |
| Project 2.2.2. | Passing the professional public accreditation of educational programs |
| Project 2.2.3. | Creating a non-profit organization promoting the independent evaluation of the education quality "International Association of |

independent evaluation of the education quality"

As a result of the event:

- the attractiveness of the university is expected to be increased in the context of globalization and internationalization in the field of education, accompanied by the growing mobility of students.
 - the quality of culture will be developed, which covers all participants in the educational process: students, teachers and university management.
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As part of the first task the following activities are provided: development of effective managerial mechanisms; the development of monitoring the education quality and the education quality assurance; providing organizational and methodical and consulting work in the region in general issues as regards the application of the national qualifications system.

Any modern organization, including education, is a complex system interacting with the external environment and operating under the impact of random factors. In such circumstances, realization of the projects on the formation of efficient management mechanisms becomes essential, which includes updating of normative and methodological base of the university in accordance with the legislative acts; foresight of the strategic directions of the university activities as a supportive higher educational establishment in the region; the continuous functioning of the internal audit to determine the compliance of the quality management system with the requirements of the normative documents regulating the issues of education quality assurance; measurement of stakeholders' satisfaction with the organization of educational process and its results.

In the context of increase accountability of an educational organization, all activities should be defined by normative documents of the university. The process of updating the regulatory and procedural base must be standardized. Mechanisms for creating and updating local acts, existing at the University (the taking decisions on creating or updating, agreement and approval) enables to rapidly respond to changes in the legal framework in Russia.

In a market economy the effectiveness of any project depends on how reliably one can evaluate the prospects for its development and implementation in the future. One such effective method is the foresight method (originating from the English word "foresight). Foresight method is a priority activity in the development of strategic and tactical long-term programs of development of different areas of university. Foresight is a system of peer review techniques and has established itself as the most effective tool for the selection of future alternatives, which allows mobilizing the available resources, coordinating possible actions and determining the optimal scenario of the project. The most productive techniques of use foresight method include the following one: SWOT-analysis, brainstorming, formation of expert panels, the development of scenarios, Delphi technology, roadmap, critical technologies. The combination of the methods used for assessing any project must be selected taking into account various resources: financial, time-related, human, informational, etc. (Sokolov, 2007; Dalkey and Helmer-Hirschberg, 1962; Martin, 1995).

Foresight is primarily focused on the analysis of the external environment, so based on the foresight method Transbaikal State University is working out a long-term strategy of the development both of particular areas of training, and

the university as a whole, which allows it to be adaptable and ready for the challenges of tomorrow (Calof et. al., 2015; Calof and Smith, 2010).

Internal audit service provides the senior management of the University with objective and timely information about the level of compliance of the quality management system and its individual processes with the requirements of the normative documents regulating the issues of education quality assurance and evaluation of the effectiveness of processes and the system of university management quality as a whole. Internal audits are conducted in accordance with the annual program of audits of the internal quality management system. The procedure of internal audit includes the following stages: audit planning; audit preparation; auditing; analysis and summary of the audit results; development of corrective and preventive actions and control over their implementation.

Due to the sharp increase in consumer demand for the quality of education services the university constantly analyzes the compliance of its activities with these requirements. Every year, the university monitors the stakeholders' satisfaction (students, graduates, employers, parents and university staff) with the organization of educational process and its results.

The development of the system of monitoring education quality and education quality assurance at the university (the second event within the first task) involves the implementation of international instruments for assessment and study of education quality and automation of monitoring education quality assurance, based on a single electronic platform in a single information space of the university.

At present a problem of assessing the quality of teaching outcomes through international instruments is very urgent. In the university much attention is paid to the study of the experience of foreign educational institutions and international quality assurance agencies as regards the assessment of the progress of learning outcomes at different levels. Also the systematic work is conducted as for the introduction of the appropriate foreign techniques in the intramural system to evaluate the education quality.

University electronic information-educational environment provides a record of the educational process progress, the results of the interim and final certification. Work on creation of e-statements rating students' performance, individual achievement portfolio is carried out. One of the priority directions of development of the information space in the university is to automate the monitoring of education quality assurance.

A key focus of the work at the University at the present stage is to ensure the organizational and methodical and consulting work in the region relating to general issues of the application of the national qualifications system. Certification of qualifications in the regional center for professional qualifications will enable to form an assessment of graduates by employers, business representatives and professionals in various industries. The creation of such a regional center is due to the introduction of new professional standards.

The second task involves the implementation of two events: passing procedures of state regulation of educational activity; introduction of a systematic approach to engaging external expertise on behalf of the professional and expert community.

A must for the state educational organizations in the Russian Federation is passing the procedures of state regulation of educational activity: licensing, state accreditation, state control and supervision (Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”). The university opens new innovative educational programs tailored to the needs of the regional labor market and services, the requirements of a potential employer.

The positive experience of the university activity can be considered the introduction of regular external review procedures by the professional and expert community. The priority of the educational activities of the university is training for the leading mining industry in Trans-Baikal Territory’s economy. In order to increase the attractiveness of the university in the context of globalization and internationalization in the field of education, accompanied by the growing mobility of students, Transbaikal State University passed a public professional accreditation in the Specialty Mining in Engineering Education Association of Russia.

Creating a non-profit organization promoting the independent evaluation of the education quality, the International Association of Independent Evaluation of the Education Quality, is aimed at achieving the following objectives: assistance to the members of the Association in the implementation of the state policy to ensure an independent assessment of the quality of general, secondary vocational and higher education; dissemination of international instruments for assessment and study of the education quality in the national system of independent assessment of the education quality; international co-operation of organizations in the education sector of the Asia-Pacific region for independent evaluation of the education quality.

Discussion

The undertaken comparative analysis of research in the field of creating systems of education quality assurance in different countries and the existing experience of Trans-Baikal State University allowed us to develop a program of intramural systems of education quality assurance, aimed at increasing competitiveness and management efficiency of the university, based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European higher education Area (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European higher education Area, 2015).

The novelty of the research is in working out a program for the development of intramural systems of education quality assurance. The analysis of the existing literature has shown that is mainly the experience of creation and performance of the systems of education quality assurance, identification of problems and prospects of development should be studied. We failed to find any specific programs of development of intramural systems of education quality assurance.

The consistency in the education quality assurance and confirmation of compliance of the system with the authorized requirements gives a kind of credibility on the part of the professional community and employers, and as a result, enhances competitiveness of educational services in the domestic and international markets.

Conclusion

The developed program of building intramural systems of education quality assurance, aimed at improving the competitiveness and efficiency of the university management will be implemented in the Baikal State University in 2016-2018. It can be the basis for the design of similar programs by other universities.

During the implementation of the program an adjustment of targets, indicators of their achievement may be carried out, measures to improve the management of the program and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of projects and programs in general can be undertaken.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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