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The problems of university education in Russia

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Abstract

In this article we are studying the problems of university education in modern Russia. The authors of the article are investigating which measures need to be taken in order for universities to develop successfully, how it is possible to preserve social and cultural matrix, basic, fundamental humanitarian traditions, experience and values under the conditions of governmentalization, modernization (mostly, technological modernization) and endeavor to make the university a market needs service “workshop”.

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1. Introduction

Transformation of university education in the history of Russia is directly related to transformation of the consciousness of people, the society.

Universities are one of the social institutions of the society and experience practically all changes which take place in the society. As the society itself, universities develop in the mode of alternating cycles: from crises to new quality, from tried and tested models to breakthrough strategies. Not only society influences the social institution of education but also universities in their turn influence the society. When scientists investigate the society, they emphasize such factors as the development of science and technology, mass media including new forms of communication (the internet), the level of individualism and pluralism development. In recent decades Russia has passed through financial, social, political crises. In general, this is the crisis of life, structural crisis and civilizational crisis.

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Which steps are needed for universities to develop successfully rather than teeter on the edge of survival? How is it possible to preserve social and cultural matrix, basic, fundamental humanitarian traditions, experience and values under the conditions of governmentalization, modernization (mostly, technological modernization) and endeavor to make the university a market needs service “workshop”. And what about the philosophy which states “to sow the reasonable, kind, eternal” and with the triune principle “teaching-development-education”?

2. Russian university is “at the crossroads”

In recent years in Russia it is possible to hear the calls to refuse the humanities and transfer the focus of endeavors into the sphere of transferable skills. In 2012 the Department of Philology of the Moscow State University made a firm statement on the destruction of humanitarian education in Russia. Teachers think that recently the Ministry of Education proceeded to the policy of direct discredit to humanitarian universities. “The concept of the culture forming role of the humanities knowledge is gradually but consistently forced out of the sphere of public consciousness” - that is what professors of the Department of Philology of the Moscow State University think (Savitsky, N., 2012). Refusal of the humanities negatively affect the society, it results not only in the destruction of the system of values in the society but also in the destruction of the society itself; therefore, a new paradigm of education addressing the importance of studying the humanities is required. Nevertheless, Russian universities also face other problems.

At the end of the twentieth century Russia entered into the process of accelerated multidimensional changes. These changes cover all sides of life: spheres of economics, finance, science, machinery, communication, education, culture and politics. In the epoch of globalism the demand for highly qualified specialists is growing. Therefore, Russian universities are forced to reconsider their mission, goals and functions so that the alumni of these universities are well-trained and become professionals and citizens of the world. Challenges of modern times require deep knowledge of the environment, urgent solution of international problems. In order to adequately respond to the challenges of modern times, it is necessary to change the mentality and educational paradigm.

What are the challenges of history? This is the appearance of a higher class of complexity and dimensions of goals the solution to which is related to the change of cogitative schemes, change of the structure of cogitation from passive-consumptive to innovative by means of “dramatic jump” in the level of intelligence. It is referred to the necessity to carry out mental revolution. That is exactly why the finding responses to new challenges is the destiny, mission of the new generation. But if these challenges are becoming more numerous, that means that the structure of universities requires not only “rearrangement” but “reformatting” i.e. change of its own philosophical - worldview, value, spiritual paradigm.

Let’s turn to the statistics. 80% of university alumni are the passive mass of the nationals of the state rather than innovators-“revolutionaries”. And only 1% of them can be classified as “the human being of the XXI century”. This situation can be changed and has to be changed. If we achieve radical change of the university position in the society as the temple of knowledge, science and culture, rise of the status of its main characters – the professor and student, then we’ll open the locks for extending academic freedom and turn it into the platform of thought-creation; restore originally inherent spirit of corporate fraternity, solidarity, responsibility and pride in the high brand of “Alma mater” equal for every member of this intellectual community.

The problems of education in Russia are related to the solution of global problems of modern times, problems of safety. The modern world is characterized by fast moving changes in economy, science, technology, communication, education, culture and politics. Transitional behavior of the process taking place on our country,

economic, political, social reforms resulting from democratization of the society, its movement to the dominance of market relations couldn't help influencing the social institution of the higher education as a whole and its specific subsystems in particular.

The crisis of the Russian universitarism appears in inability to respond to global challenges of modern times, inability to satisfactorily solve social and individual-personal tasks facing it and fulfill basic functions.

Intellectualization of production, rapid pace of scientific knowledge development require fundamental reforms to be implemented in the modern system of education. It is referred to the necessity of changing the conceptual-value paradigm of the higher education. We are living in the time of information. In this time knowledge is becoming vital intellectual necessity. The development of new consciousness is a key aspect of reforms which need to be implemented in the higher education.

3. A glance at the history of the university education

A lot of problems which the university community is facing now date back to the distant past. In the sixties-nineties in Russia the number of universities increased, the university education changed from the elite education into the mass one.

In autonomous republics, areas and regions of the RSFSR (THE Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) new universities were established. In 1991 Russia comprised 68 universities (Moscow State University, 1991).

Simultaneously, the difficulties and problems in the Soviet system of universities were accumulating. The rating of the university education was decreasing.

The higher education in Russia is the result of urban and industrial growth. In the 1960s. The years of the "Khrushchyov Thaw" the first scientific and technical revolution took place in the USSR. The USSR was the first country which developed the space. A great number of brilliant mathematicians and physicists worked in the Soviet system of education. They appeared to be free from ideological influence.

In the years of the "Khrushchyov Thaw" the number of universities in the USSR increased. The reform of public education in 1958 had a positive effect on the university education. Preparatory divisions appeared, distance and evening education was developing.

Soviet universities in many respects were built based on the principles established by Wilhelm von Humboldt: qualitative education, small study groups, strong corporate spirit.

The main goal of the university education was to give deep fundamental knowledge, learn to think globally, be able to creatively handle complicated problems. The development of the fundamental education contributed to the fact that economic development of our country was successful. In the twentieth century people learnt a great number of subjects. The priority was given to theoretical studies rather than empirical ones. Universities were entirely funded by the state.

"In 1967 222 thousand teachers worked at the universities of the country including 74 thousand of doctors and candidates of sciences. More than 53 thousand of specialists took post-graduate studies at universities. More than 500 fundamental research and applied research laboratories were organized in universities and 41 research institutes are functioning there. Over 250 student engineering and design bureaus performing industry assignments are organized in universities" (Detskiy sad.ru 2013). Worldwide famous scientific schools in the sphere of mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and other sciences are successively developing in Moscow, Leningrad, Kazan, Kiev and some other universities of the country as well as in the largest technical universities.

For example, Kazan scientist Arbuzov B.A. (1903-1991) belongs to that group of eminent scientists who brought the reputation and fame to the science of chemistry. He is one of the greatest organic chemists of the country, the head of the modern kazan school of chemical science among the originators of which were such great scientists as Zinin N.N., Butlerov A.M., Claus K.K. and others. His works being fundamental in the highest sense of this word have huge practical importance.

Marxist ideology and the iron curtain had negative effect on the system of education.

In Russia the epoch of unexpectedly increased independence of universities began at the turn of the eighties-nineties more likely as the result of narrowing the space of its entering inside the walls of the university by the state. For universities themselves, acquired independence only added more “bitterness of problems” than “joy of freedom”. The condition of homeland universities got worse due to the crisis of the soviet system.

At the present time in Russia there are public and private universities. In 2010 45% of higher education institutes were private. Among them 1% were private universities. Highly specialized universities appeared.

At the end of the twentieth century the proportion of applied project, which require the activity of several organizations, increased. A lot of problems occurred in the process of interaction between universities and production units. The society required more pragmatic education ensuring close connection with production. The university had to develop and implement new technologies, establish university-based non-profit centers, centers of technical assistance. At the end of the twentieth century the state reduced funding for research. In response, there appeared “incubator” centers which were a kind of establishments to “breed” new companies. A part of them exist as university establishments and they are a link in the development of innovations between universities and private business. Thus, the twentieth century is characterized by the appearance of a non-classical system of education in Russia.

At the present time Russian university communities are facing the problem of commercialization of education. They will have to adopt new values and preserve old values. A great number of research workers think that excessive use of specialization and commercialization negatively affects the quality of education. The policy in the field of higher education is to be based on the system of life values rather than money value. The university has to focus on providing fundamental knowledge. “...If a human being has no fundamental knowledge, he will possess a set of competences rather than a system of comprehensions, ways of thinking and skills of what is called high...culture ” (Rubanov V.A., 2012). And direct contacts with enterprises are established in the process of postgraduate studies.

Commercialization of education makes the university less accessible for poor people. Vinokurova N.A. and Nikonova M.A. mention that 93% of science workers are unable to pay for education of their children at universities. Therefore, the social composition of university students is changing against intelligentsia (intellectual class), the change of the social composition of students also results in the failure of succession in the sphere of science (Vinokurov, N.A. and Nikonov, M.A. 2013).

Let's determine the main negative consequences of the education reform:

Decrease of education quality. In the twentieth century the status of the lecturer in the higher education institute fell down, bureaucracy increased in the sphere of the higher education etc. Modern Russian universities still remain national organizations, they are also seeking to become the center of intercultural understanding, peaceful coexistence, democratization and global society. Russian universities are gradually changing from “ivory towers” into “open space”, i.e. they are solving economic and social problems as well as the problems of environment contamination, poverty reduction, improvement of population health, improvement of life quality etc.

What is Russian education now? According to the Vice-President of RFO (Russian Philosophical Community) Mironov V.V. “...the present-day education represents a sort of hybrid of a liberal model or, to say milder, aim of liberalization, and an administrative model” (2008). The definition of education which is given in the law “On education in the Russian Federation” is as follows: «education is an integrated goal-oriented process of upbringing and education which is a socially significant benefit and which is implement for the convenience of the human being, family, society and state as well as the set of obtained knowledge, skills and abilities, value system, work experience and competences of certain amount and complexity for the purpose of intellectual, spiritual and moral, creative, physical and (or) professional development of the human being and satisfaction of his needs and interests” (the Ministry of education and science of the Russian Federation, 20).

In the course of the whole history universities protected and popularized our cultural and intellectual heritage, simultaneously discrediting the norms of our society and beliefs. They brought up the leaders of our governments “...the walls of universities gave birth to the great titans of thinking, prophets predicting the future, politicians who shocked the world. Forming generation after generation of informed, radiant, creatively charged,

talentedly and brilliantly thinking activists, universities left noticeable marks of advance on the image of their epochs stimulating the movement of the human race up the stairs of civilizational maturity” (Tahirov, E.R., 2011). They created and used new knowledge in order to serve our society and they did it preserving values and principles so necessary for academic studies: freedom of research, openness to new ideas, aiming for rigorous research and love for studying. It is clear that in the epoch of knowledge the higher education will flourish.

We can mention the dialectics of reformism and counter-reformism in Russian modern education. Education reforms which started in the nineties of the twentieth century are also lasting in the twenty first century.

We must also consider that basic problems of universities are not so much pedagogical as political, ideological and economic. Economy of society influences university education including universities in the system of financial and economic relations. University education is one of the most important social and economic resources for the development of society. All of the following problems, i.e. high cost of studies, inaccessibility of the higher education for school leavers from poor families, low quality of technologies, absence of flexibility in the policy of the university, are to be solved by universities. Universities have to change and adapt but at the same time to keep the most important values and traditions.

The “Founding Fathers” of the prototype of modern universities (diversified academies, systems of schools of: elegance, public speaking, declamation, martial art...) laid in their matrix a classic triad of goals/functions which is unfading through the time, these functions are education, development and upbringing. The thinkers of antiquity who were “designers” of the university (Homer, Socrates, Aristotle...) set a pattern, its primary model which, in their opinion, was intended for shaping a human being of a new type – a miscellaneously developed, humanities-oriented, morally educated person.

4. Conclusions

The main goal of education is to teach students to think critically. Teachers must instill intellectual independence and critical attitude to the world in students. Only in this case they will become free people. Intellectual independence directly depends on the quality of education.

At universities students learn the skill to use knowledge, they are involved in in the process of preparation to their role in society, here they undergo socialization by means of language, learn economics, learn to be leaders in political, economic and legal systems. It is they who will have to create the future society, the society of knowledge, to form a creative class. Knowledge itself is becoming the main strategic resource which is necessary for the society to flourish, i.e. the value of educated people has raised. As opposed to natural resources, knowledge is inexhaustible. Therefore, the role of universities in the society will grow.

One of the university missions is to prepare highly qualified world class specialists for Russia and foreign countries based on the integration of the academic process with science and production, to concentrate efforts on preservation and reproduction of academic elite, retraining and human resources development, execution of research projects which can ensure innovative breakthrough in the economy of the country.

Thus, in the modern society university education is acquiring new characteristics. One of the goals of the university is to transmit spiritual culture. Nevertheless, university education does not completely fulfill its culture-forming, integrative functions, it does not contribute to spiritual unity and does not influence moral constituents of individual and public mentality.

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