

Quality in English Language Education (Students View)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify what students at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs in National Research University Higher School of Economics Moscow contribute to quality in foreign language education. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the study. The findings indicate that quality education for the students involves three main components: 1. competitive environment at the university, which provides students with a wide range of programs, perfect facilities; 2. qualified teachers who create friendly atmosphere and maintain effective communication at the lesson and 3. Supportive curriculum materials.

Key words: higher education, survey, quality in education, English language

1. Introduction

Education market in Russia is highly competitive. National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE/ HSE) occupies one of the leading positions in this market. It is mainly provided by its reputation for quality education amid its competitors, partners (universities, businesses), copartners (teachers, students and their parents) and other agents in the market (potential partners, future students). The research aim is to find out what components students at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs contribute to quality in foreign language education. A method we used is a survey research.

2. Review of Literature

Quality in education today is a great concern of the society. It correlates directly with quality of human resources. Human resources are considered to be one of the main factors of production. In the era of knowledge-based economy human resources are becoming the driving force of economic transformation and growth. The boundaries between universities and businesses in some spheres are blurred. These are two key reasons why quality of education is debated by both the academic and business communities. Education is co modified. Due to the fact that it is an investment in human capital (Welmond, 2006) education is mainly an investment good. Chattopadhyay (2007) thinks that education is a `mixed good or a quasi-public good` i.e. a `private good`. In Lazear`s (1977) opinion education is a joint product i.e. output. Other scientists (Teixeira et al., 2004) prove that higher education is an `experience good`. Until it is sold, it is a challenge to assess the quality of the good. Students are both consumers of it and copartners (along with the educational organization) in its production as they are participants in the educational process.

Their status gives them the right to assess the quality of education. Students are interested in quality education. It influences their competitiveness and positions in the labor market. This market is characterized by `status competition` (Marginson, 2004). The more reputed the educational organization is the more influential its role in the education market is. In practice the organization takes an active part in distribution of positions in the labor market. Businesses minimize risks if they hire former students of the particular university. The implication is obvious: graduates from top-ranked universities keep ahead of the `position competition` (Marginson, 2004) in the labor market.

Two logic chains are revealed:

Success breeds success` (Bridges and Jonathan, 2003). The educational institution gains two important tangible benefits from its leadership in the markets. The first one is lack of constraints to quality enhancement. The other is the university sets quality standards for all educational organizations operating in the market. The standards are `potential catalyst` (Crabbe, 2003) for quality improvement. These advantages make the position of the university in both markets (education and labor) stable and open new opportunities for organization`s prosperity, stability and improvement of quality in education.

National Research Council (National Research Council, 2010) and scientists (Myra Hodgkinson, Brown, 2003; Bowden and Marton, 1998; Wilson, 2009; Alidou et al., 2011; Mackay et al., 1998) define directions of quality enhancement: recruitment of professionals, their commitment to continuous improvement, effective communication in the classroom, implementation of innovative practices into educational process, inclusion into international mobility programs. Williams (2002) stresses the idea that one of the crucial characteristics of quality education is transparency of all aspects of the educational process: objectives, components, outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

166 students of the 2nd year (June, 2014), 158 students of the 2nd year (June, 2015), 142 students of the 1st year (June, 2015) of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs in National Research University Higher School of Economics Moscow were offered a questionnaire. Students answered two open questions:

1. Do they consider that university provides them with quality English language education?
2. What are the components of quality education?

The students of the 2nd year were asked to discuss what quality in education is.

128 students of the 1st year in September, 2015 answered one open question: what defined their choice to join the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs in National Research University Higher School of Economics.

4. Survey Results

All students of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs are sure that they get quality education in English language teaching. They consider that components of quality are:

- Staff: qualified; is interested in both subject and students` development;
- Programs: a wide range of well-structured programs;
- Atmosphere: supportive and friendly;
- Environment: competitive;
- Communication: effective;
- Curriculum materials for students: up-to-date, supportive;
- Study facilities (especially libraries) provided: exceptional.

Our research reveals that students have a consensus view on components ranging. The top position in the list is occupied by the staff. All respondents (100%) are sure that a teacher is a keystone of quality education. They value university contributions to hiring top-quality specialists. The second priority rank is given to programs. Students appreciate an access to a wide range of programs (education, mobility). It is important for them to communicate with professors, copartners, administrators at all levels in a friendly atmosphere. Respondents note that the HSE provides them with exceptional facilities. They could get current information from different sources and read new professional books just after their publishing.

Students of the second year discussed what quality in education is. They wrote (citation):

- It is crucial to choose reliable University which guarantees quality education/ it is important to choose the right university;
- The employer looks for such applicants to be sure that would-be employee will cope with the work successfully.
- How does the employer define prospective worker quality? The criterion for hiring employees is their high-quality education;
- High quality education should equip students with the knowledge, skills and core competences they need to succeed in profession and society after graduation;
- Quality education builds up a sense of high self-esteem;
- There are fore features of quality education:
 1. Qualified staff;
 2. Clear schedule, balance of subjects;
 3. Systematic approach provides gradually shaping skills;
 4. Freedom: to manage time, have an access to all sources of information and to take part in different programs. The problem is to use this freedom to your sake;
- The system of education must be flexible. It should develop all the time under the conditions of the changing world;
- Most graduates join reputable companies and occupy important positions in them → it is a sign of quality education;
- The HSE constantly enhances quality in education to meet international standards.

Students value quality English language education at the Higher School of Economics. High quality education gives them an opportunity to compete in the up end of the labor market. They distinguish the key components of quality education and define an indicator (important positions in companies) of it. Students` approach to importance, definition and assessment of quality in English language education shows that they made considered decision to join the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs. They specially noted that their individual progress in English language is considerable.

Students of the first year (September, 2015) wrote (citation):

- Quality education in Russia is only at the HSE;
- It is the best university;
- It is the prestigious faculty which gives perfect language background;
- It opens good personal career perspectives.

These students formed their opinion about the level of quality in education at the Higher School of Economics from the reputation of the university in the education market.

5. Research Findings

We discuss the findings of this study with respect to the research questions. The students at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs in National Research University Higher School of Economics Moscow are sure that they are getting quality foreign language education. They consider that a key indicator of it is teachers` professionalism. Teachers are mainly responsible for guiding students` thinking and directing their creativity. Students` participation in a wide variety of programs on the one hand helps them decide what professional area is their great concern.

On the other hand it demonstrates how much the university contributes to quality in education: programs provided with quality teachers in English, conventional curriculum support materials and facilities. Students get an access to the information needed for their study and research.

The university encourages the students to express their opinion on all its activities. It involves students in discussion. Their involvement in discussions is one of the intrinsic factors of quality improvement. The higher the level of student's engagement in discussion the higher the level of internal transparency of the university. The survey results show that contributions of the university into quality education bring dividends in the form of reputation of the HSE in the education and labor markets. External transparency is also achieved.

6. Conclusion

Survey results reveal that students are satisfied with quality in English language education. The survey draws a parallel between strengths (Khamova, 2015) in teaching English language at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs and components of quality education offered by the respondents. It is presented in the table.

The HSE Students` view (citation)

Strengths in teaching English language Components of quality education creative academic environment established by the university competitive environment a wide range of programs effective communication perfect facilities effective learning environment created by the teachers qualified teachers friendly atmosphere effective communication at the lesson standard-based and conventional curriculum supportive materials up-to-date, supportive curriculum materials.

Analysis of the survey results lets us discover that the university meets students` demand for quality education. The results prove that National Research University Higher School of Economics operates in the domain of Total Quality Management (TQM): all participants in the educational process at all levels of the organization (administrators, teachers and students) are involved in TQM. It is the platform for:

- First, quality enhancement in English language education;
- Second, the university could predict and satisfy future demand for quality education.

This study opens the door for further empirical researches to be conducted: what strategies could the Higher School of Economics employ to improve quality in education; how globalization influences the demand for quality education; how the type of industry impacts quality in education.

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