

Current Trends in Russian Education

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Abstract

Russian system of education is undergoing dramatic changes in the twenty-first century. During the last two decades changes were made in the structure and content aspects of secondary and university education. This paper examines some current trends and different problems of Russian education, caused by the reduction in state funding and demographic crisis in Russia.

Russian system of education remains relatively centralized. Nevertheless over a short period public universities have diversified their funding sources. In 2015 the government cut its spending on national universities by 10% and they had to reduce purchase of new equipment, repairs, R and D activities and so on. Nearly the same with general education.

Special attention is paid to regional education in Sakhalin. The situation here is quite different. Sakhalin State University gets sponsor's money from companies involved in oil and gas projects and covers expenses on new equipment, academic mobility of faculty and scholars, new curricula development. Expenditures on general education in Sakhalin are constantly rising all these years owing to regional budget.

Another problem is Russia's demographic crisis, that reduced the number of school graduates and the universities faced a competitive challenge all these years. Now we expect an increase of student population as a result of a baby boom of the last decade.

Key Words: school education, university, reform, financing education, demographic crisis

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Introduction

For most of the Soviet era, Russians attended carefully to both research and education. They saw education as fundamental to the shaping of an individual's potential. In many ways, the last twenty years have been the most difficult in Russia's thousand-year history, with collapse of education, the economy, science, healthcare, and most other aspects of life. The transition being made from the Soviet version of socialism to a society with a mixed market economy fell into a severe crisis soon after its inception. The reform policies aimed at free enterprise, democracy, freedoms, and a respect for human rights were implemented irresponsibly, without much thought, and much too quickly.

With the help of the media, in the post-soviet Russia new concept of justice, based on the world's view of individualism and pragmatism was illustrated to the people. Education was no longer seen by a certain segment of the population as a necessary part of the "success", and the median level of education has started to go down. (Rutkevich, 2000)

1. The result of educational policy

During the last two decades Russian educational system has been reformed, following worldwide educational trends. As a result, the system of education in Russia has been considerably renewed. The changes were made both in the structure components and content aspects of educational activity.

The results of educational policy, aimed at the implementation of the Bologna process, consisted in:

- Two-tier system of education in higher educational institutes
- Adoption of grade-rating system into the educational process
- Development of distance learning technologies
- The introduction of the USE (Unified State Examination) for secondary school graduates
- New standards of secondary and higher education
- Overhaul of Russia's university system

2. Higher Education reform

As far as it concerns the system of higher education it has undergone considerable change in the following areas:

- **Goals** – with an orientation towards the needs of the market, society and individuals;
- **Structure** – decentralization (in contrast to Soviet centralized planning);

- **Autonomy of higher education institutions** – introduction of private higher education; four- and two-year programs in parallel with the traditional five-year programs; elimination of a bias towards engineering specialties;
- **Financing** – diversification of financial sources instead of a reliance solely on state financing;
- **Content** – increasing the humanitarian components in the curriculum, and diversifying programs and courses (Kitaev, 2008)

It goes without saying that many of the above-mentioned innovations reflect global educational trends. On the other hand it is important to know about specific Russian and regional characteristics in the realization of progressive ideas in higher education development.

Russian government plans increasing funding to the best: to end support for hundreds of under-achieving institutes and to concentrate funding in a smaller number of high-performing universities. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the number of public and private universities has doubled, to around 1,100. At the same time experts suggest that no more than 50 Russian institutes are up to international standards.

About 500 higher education institutions (about 100 universities and 400 local branches) on the basis of criteria such as quality of students, research intensity and productivity, and the amount of teaching space should be closed or merged with more proficient institutions. They were labeled “ineffective” and they mainly concentrate on teaching rather than scientific research.

“Russia needs better-trained university graduates and it needs more stronger university research”. About 40 of Russian top universities have been classed as elite universities by the government (Moscow state university, St. Petersburg state university, federal and research universities). (Schiermeier, 2012)

3. Sakhalin State University (SSU)

SSU belongs to a group of universities named regional and it concentrates mainly on training university graduates in full accord with the needs of local industry and community.

Over two decades the reform in SSU is also going on. Now we are witnesses of the implementation of:

- grade-rating system
- two-tier system of education
- new standards of higher education
- reform of university system in Sakhalin region (there were 11 local branches in Sakhalin in 2000 and only 4 – in 2015)
- E-learning is constantly on the agenda at the meetings of Academic Council of SSU in 2015-2016.

4. Systems of Financing of higher education institutions

Russian higher education system remains relatively centralized: the Federal Government provides no less than 50% of all higher education institutional expenditures, and it keeps all state-owned institutions' funds under strict control.

Reduced state funding means that higher education institutions have to find other sources of income. Two such sources are letting out facilities and provision of fee-based education (universities are free to enroll students on a fee-paying basis according to market price and demand).

Over a short period public universities have substantially diversified their funding sources:

- Typically a Russian state university receives 50-70% of its funding from the federal budget directly (*the main source for renovation of facilities, equipment, library funds, maintenance of buildings*);
- And additional 10-20% of funds are generated through research activity;
- Plus 5-10% – from grants;
- Plus 10-20% – from tuition fees;
- Plus 10-20% – from different types of educational services.

Income from other sources is used to increase professor's salaries, purchase of computers, etc. (Kitaev, 2008)

5. The reduction in state funding

In 2015 Russian government cut its spending on national universities by 10%. This is a result of the current economic crisis and devaluation of the national currency (the ruble).

The government's plan for universities is to fill the gap created by the planned cuts through allocation of private investments and funds, commercialization of research work, enrollment of foreign students. At the same time the cost of tuition will increase. In such a case education no longer helps a person from low-income families to progress from one social status to another, to use education as a social ladder.

On the other hand the government will keep salaries of faculty at the same level as in 2014 and increase students scholarships.

Even in 2014 state funding of higher and postgraduate education in Russia amounted to RUB537 billion (US\$8.7 billion), which was equivalent to 0.7 of Russia's gross domestic product, or GDP (this was significantly lower than funding in the majority of Western countries, where the figure is estimated at 1.2 to 1.5 of national GDP) (Vorotnikov, E. 2015)

So Russian higher educational institutions have at their disposal much less funds than universities in developed countries. Can they compete with the best universities in the world and

provide high quality education on a permanent basis?

6. Sakhalin State university

Sakhalin State University also had cut its budget for 2015 by 10% with spending on all items reduced, including the purchase of new equipment and repairs, maintenance of buildings, and conducting R&D activities.

Still the situation in Sakhalin is not so bad: it's a new trend that many companies have recently started participating in Russian higher education development. An increasing number of companies that can afford it invest in universities. There are different forms of such cooperation:

- some companies set up their own departments at universities, where they put finishing touches to students' education in full accord with their practical needs;
- others offer university students opportunities for field practice;
- companies give money on urgent needs of higher education institutions;

The latter fully refers to Sakhalin State University. SSU has several sponsors, mainly involved in oil and gas projects in Sakhalin: Exxon, Sakhalin Energy, Rosneft, and others. Sponsors' money cover expenses on new equipment for oil and gas technical institute, support academic mobility of faculty and researchers, new curricula development, etc. (e.g. Exxon spends several million US\$ on university needs every year).

7. Financing of education in Sakhalin

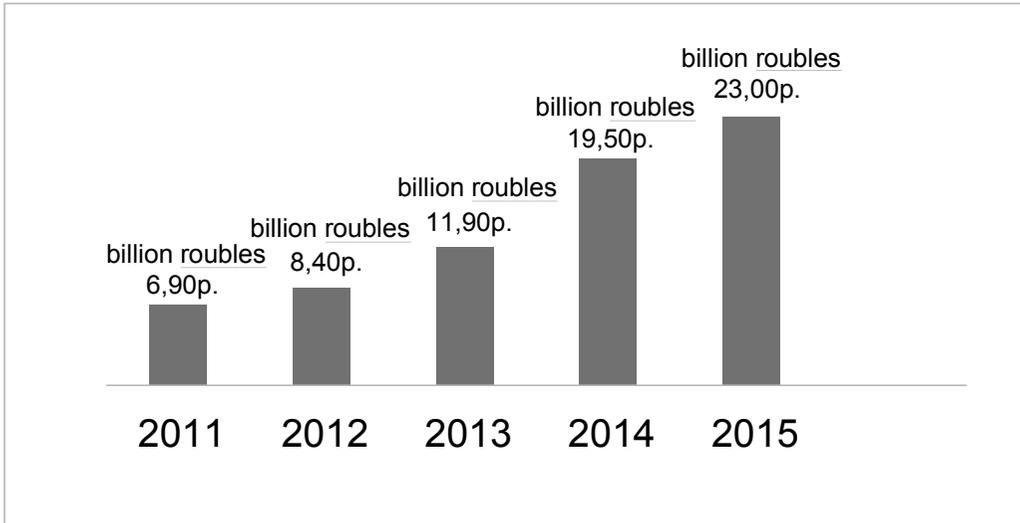
The situation in Sakhalin is not typical. As presented in Table 1 expenditures on general education are constantly rising all these years due to Sakhalin regional budget (money from oil and gas projects).

For example, according to 2015 regional budget 2,547 million roubles were spent on preschool education – only on building 4 new kindergartens (available for 660 children). Expenditures on education in regional budget in 2015 reached 17,7 %.

8. Russia's Demographic Crisis

Some of the most important challenges facing Russian higher education is demographics. Russian higher education institutions experienced huge growth in the 1990s and can now easily absorb the million annual graduates from Russian secondary schools.

But they are facing a huge competitive challenge all these years when the demographic crisis, which originated in the hard times of the 1990s, reduces the number of graduates to close 600 000 (Confronting Challenges to the Liberal Arts Curriculum, 2012).

Table 1. Regional budget subsidies for education

(Source: System of Education in Sakhalin Region. Annual Report of Ministry of Education (2015))

9. The same with Sakhalin

In 2016 the number of secondary school graduates in Sakhalin was 2618. But about 10-12 years ago the number of school graduates was quite different: it varied from 5,000 to even 7,000 in Sakhalin region. And the reason of this phenomenon was the same-demographic crisis in the post-soviet Russia that caused a decrease of school population in the country, including Sakhalin region. As can be seen in Table 2 the number of applied and enrolled students in Sakhalin State University was decreasing all these years. It concerns both: so called “budget” (non fee-paying) and self-financed students.

Still it is no surprise that in 2016 the number of school graduates from the 9th form (non-complete secondary education) is 4,500. One reason for a rapidly increasing student population is a baby boom of the last decade. Children born in the mid-2000 are the main target audience for new education policy and newly designed academic programs. It is expected that this trend will become apparent in higher education as well.

10. Conclusion

In this paper the emphasis is made on issues of financing education and demographic tendencies and their negative consequences. Recently one of the main trends in Russian

Table 2. SSU: Freshman admissions

SSU : FRESHMAN ADMISSIONS

	2013		2014		2015	
Applied	<u>4084</u>		<u>3433</u>		<u>2529</u>	
	Full -time 2639	Part -time 1445	Full -time 2012	Part -time 1421	Full -time 1414	Part -time 1115
Enrolled	budget / self- financed					
	<u>524 /208</u>	261/490	<u>464/156</u>	120/793	<u>382/64</u>	133/459

Official data of admission committee of SSU

education has been to make education a social ladder. Russian government has attempted to bring together the task of developing economy with that of developing secondary and higher education, to make graduates more employable and, restore the prestige of certain professions.

Reduction in state funding of education and high tuition fees in universities do not help a person to change one's social status. On the other hand demographic crisis and growing number of public and private universities offer additional opportunities for families with low income to give their children a competitive advantage in the sphere of higher education.

The picture looks rather multiple-valued, still it's clear that the situation must be changed. The measures on the agenda in the framework of universities include implementation of high quality professional education, strong university research and others. But the main thing is that funding of education should be increased.

As far as it concerns Sakhalin region the situation is not typical here for expenditures on education are covered not only by state funding but by sponsor's money as well.

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