

BUSINESS EDUCATION: PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY

“Teacher education is a real apple for the teachers.”

The new Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan adopted in July 2007 has introduced the binary system and three cycles higher education with Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's Degree respectively. This Law approaches the educational system of the country to the European standards by one more step. The Law shapes some vital matters for universities toward creating and maintaining systems of quality assessment in a single university or in the whole educational structure of the country.

The standards of education developed to support the major issues of that Law define some criteria to which a future graduate or specialist should comply. It is not the sole reason of the documents; they are created to satisfy the objects of Bologna's process and to follow the goal of the country's President Nazarbayev to be in the row of the fifty most developed countries of the World. It requires from universities to be integrated in the system of education of the Republic and one of Europe that the graduates would be compatible to the world labor market when the country enters WTO.

Kazakhstan, trying to be in the row of most developed countries in the World, undertakes some measures that would improve the living standards of the country's population. For the last years this idea appears in the Annual Address of the President Nazarbayev to the country's citizens. In the Address of year 2006 President Nazarbayev coined the idea about reforms in education "...as one of the most important instruments that would allow real competitiveness of Kazakhstan".¹ Saying that the country "...needs a modern system of education that complies with the requirements of economic and social modernization..." he pointed out that these reforms are only part of the undertaken measures.

An educational service is a very specific product that exists to provide customers with specific benefits – knowledge and skills. The quality of services would certainly depend on a person who provides that service, and in terms of education – on who or what kind of institution renders educational services.

Quality of educational services can be different from institution to institution as well as it would differ from teacher to teacher. That this difference won't be as a huge abyss there should be developed standards that would unify as approaches to education as requirements to students.

Quality is meeting the needs and expectation of the customer. Practically, quality is "...the gap between how good something is and how good it possibly could be, and that we should continually focus on narrowing that gap".²

ISO 9000:2000 defines quality as the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements. In 2000 ISO, as the result of continuous

¹ Nursultan Nazarbayeva, Annual Address to people of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana city, March 1, 2006

² Lynda King Taylor, *Quality: Total Customer Service*, The Sunday Times Business Skills, London 1992, p.140
Sholpan M.Maralbayeva, MBA

improvement, implemented a new approach, strictly based on eight management principles, as follows:

- Customer focus
- Leadership
- Involvement of people
- Process approach
- System approach to management
- Continual improvement
- Factual approach to decision making
- Mutually benefit supplier relationship.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan the standards that regulate relationships between clients and educational institutions have been developed. The National System of Quality of Education has been created in accordance with the State Program named “Education”, that was confirmed by the Decree #448 of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan of September 30, 2000. “...National System of Quality of Education – is the aggregation of methods, tools, and organizational structures for establishing correspondence of quality of education to requirements of the Compulsory Educational Standards and conditions of its [correspondence] attainment through external and internal assessment. The aim of the National System of Quality of Education is to reach quality of education that would assure competitiveness of the National System of Education and specialists of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the International Educational Area as well as in the labor market”³.

One of the major objectives of the National System of Quality of Education is “...assessment of activities of teachers and instructors; sophistication of educational and learning processes...” and “...assurance of sustainability of results of evaluation between different levels of the continuous system of education”. A local system of quality assessment should be developed within the frames of the National System and should serve as a tool that help to assure standards of achievement, quality of teaching and quality of management.

So, when we mention the term quality, this could be understood as (1) a matter of individual perception (taste) and (2) the system of all characteristics (elements) of an educational institution.

A client should receive the value of a product, and the value would be received if only the client is satisfied with the quality of the service. Only in this case the client will feel the “benefit” if his expectations if not exceed, but at least are equal to that payment that the client has paid.

The major goal of an educational institution is to reduce the gap between customers’ perception and satisfaction. As the conceptual model of a quality management process that has been developed in accordance with the ISO 9001:2000 suggests, there is the process of continuous improvement of the whole educational system that consists of management responsibility, resources the management uses, and tools of analyzing the current situation in the institution.

³ www.edu.gov.kz

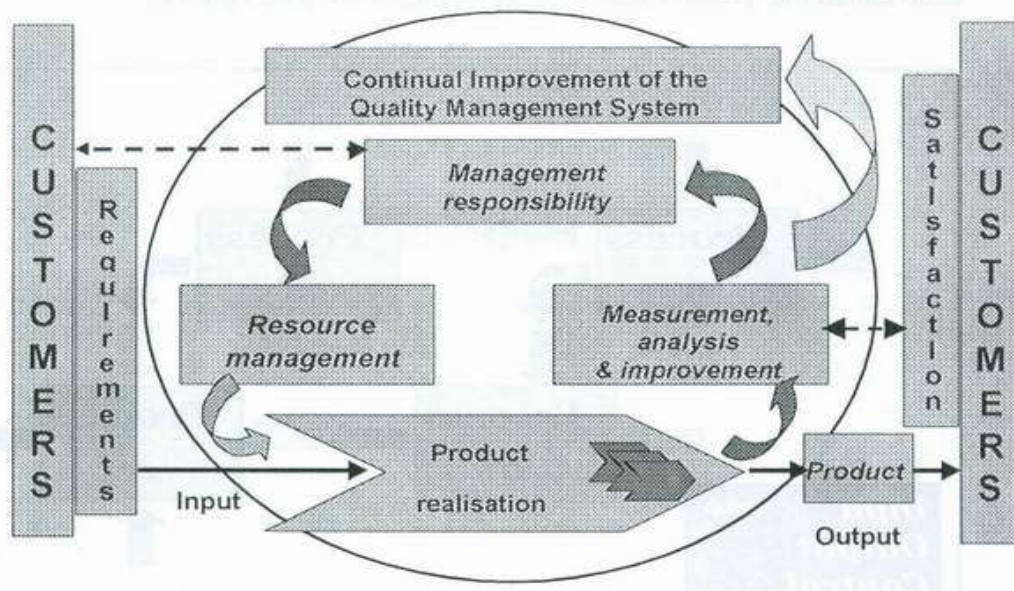


Figure 1. The conceptual model of Quality Management System.

An educational institution that works in accordance with the State and International Standards, especially one that has day-time students, should pay attention not only to fulfillment of methodical complexes but also to such aspects as relations between students and teachers, teachers and teachers, and teachers and management (administration). To diversify educational services can only that institution that correctly approaches the issue of a Curriculum design according to the number of credits that has been prescribed by the State Educational Standards for obtaining a degree. The credit technology exactly allows universities and educational institutions to diversify Curricula by elective courses.

Diversification of educational services means not only having a number of modern courses to be taught, but also the extended number of teachers and instructors. So, diversification of educational processes is not only the obligation of a teacher, but mostly it is the obligation of an institution as the major strategy developer. Once, when the number of courses and teachers is extended due to the credit technology, the administration of a university should find some compromises by reconstructing or attuning the curriculum and teachers' workload. The quality of educational services provided by an instructor would be higher if he had fewer hours of the workload and, as consequence, the opportunity to be concentrated on one direction.

For students it is very important who teaches them. This is about the quality of resources as labor in considered the major resource for any company, not depending on the industry. Quality of teachers or educators largely depends on teachers' ability to adopt and acquire new knowledge. Very often quality of a teacher is associated with the degree he or she possesses, and this should be the major indicator of an educator's quality. But here is the question: is the degree a real measurement of the holder's quality as a specialist?

In the former traditional approach quality was considered as compliance to high reputation in the academic environment. The modern market approach and, namely, the credit technology require compliance with the students' perceptions about the institution and assessment at the level of educators' qualification.

As the research conducted in Kazakhstan by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic shows the number of people who have obtained Doctorate and Candidate of sciences degrees increases by year 2002 significantly from year 1995, especially the latest group.⁴

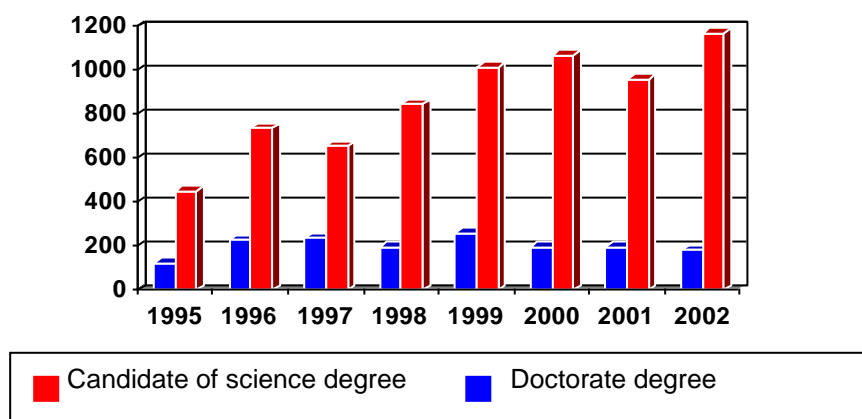


Figure 2. Number of people obtained degrees in RK in 1995-2002.

The numbers are not steady year by year. Especially it is about years 2000 and 2002 when the number of those who obtained Doctorate degree declined. It is probably because the educational system of the country started adopting the new European system where doctoral degree named PhD seemingly could substitute the traditional Doctorate degree existed in the large space of the CIS countries.

And the same research revealed the total number of Professors with degrees that contrarily increases steadily year by year.

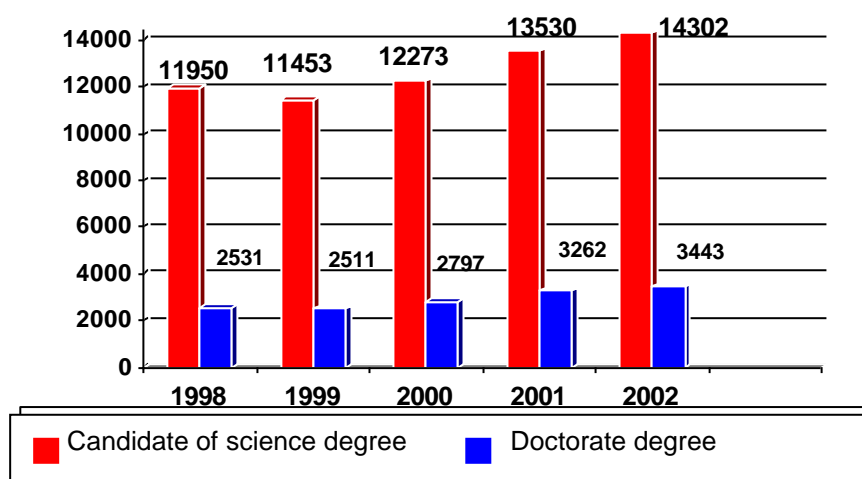


Figure 3. Total number of professors holding degrees in RK.

The research also has revealed the age of instructors who work in higher educational institutions. The fewer are those who aged up to 30, and the largest group consists of those who in the range 41-60. It says that in several years the largest part of universities professors will be elder people and that fact might negatively reflect

⁴ Presentation of the research results in MES of RK, www.edu.gov.kz
Sholpan M.Maralbayeva, MBA

on the ability of institutions to undertake modern technologies. This fact is twofold: from one side it is good for still traditional approach used in most universities; from another – the elder people are very often somehow conservative and some of them are reluctant to undertake new technologies. But still these people are currently study the new technologies and they will be able to launch the transfer to the credit system of education.

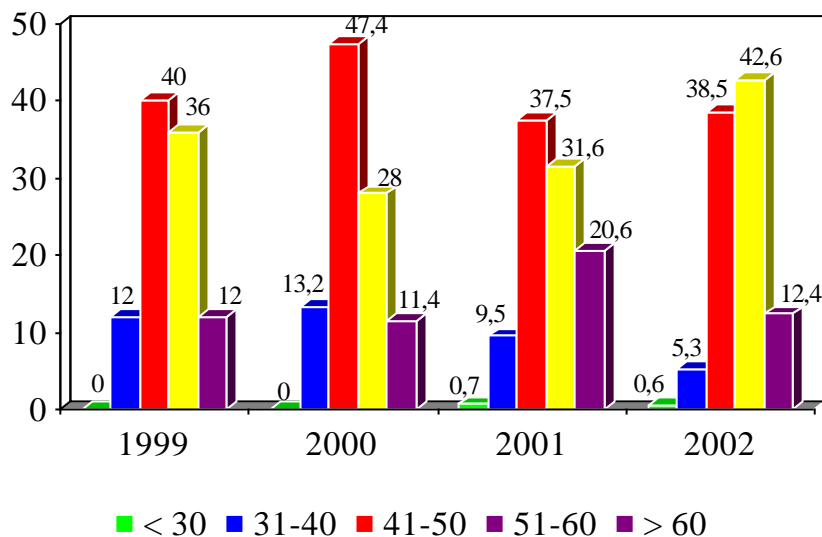


Figure 4. Age distribution between professors of RK in 1999-2002.

The quality of education would rely on the personality of a professor. And the professor’s age is not the obstacle to that. It is only the issue how active would be professors in accepting the new technologies and trends in education.

For instructors (even for those who hold a degree) it is very important to be not only trained, but developed. As it is known, that training and development are not the same, because training is “teaching how to perform current jobs” and development is “building the knowledge and skills to take on new responsibilities challenges”.⁵ That is why management of an educational institution should provide educators with the opportunities to be trained and developed either “in-class” or “on-field”. As the National Science Education Standards describe “at the classroom level, some of the most powerful indicators of opportunity to learn are teachers' professional knowledge, including content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and understanding of students; the extent to which content, teaching, professional development, and assessment are coordinated; the time available for teachers to teach and students to learn science; the availability of resources for student inquiry; and the quality of educational materials available”⁶.

When assessing the quality of an educator management counts all the aspects that would add to student’s abilities and attitudes that will have resulted in the award of their qualification as specialists and future labor for the country’s economy. Along with requiring from educators to undertake some development courses management

⁵ Gareth R. Jones, Jennifer M. George, Contemporary Management, 3rd edition, McGraw-Hill, 2003, p.380

⁶ National Science Education Standards

should also encourage them to conduct scientific researches and give them opportunities to implement the results of these researches during teaching processes.

As the State Program of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Science Development for years 2007-2012” underlines that conditions for preparing scientific and engineering specialists considers doing this in the frame of preparation of PhD persons, creating scientific infrastructure on the basis of educational institutions, and larger involvement of students to scientific research projects.⁷

To accomplish that task educational institutions should integrate their efforts into one that would benefit all the stakeholders and within some national, regional and institutional contexts would provide educators with training and development courses. For these it is might possible to invite foreign educators to share their methodology and views on education and allow teachers to attend their classes as well.

Management itself can also boost its quality by conducting courses on different issues for the staff. Teachers in that case could be the key persons who can share their own experiences with the staff. Giving teachers the opportunity to share what they know is the way of enlargement their duties and one more tool to develop them. This should be one of the strategic issues for management of educational institutions if they want to be competitive – educators preparedness to accept new knowledge and development. Efficient and effective quality management is the key to strategic survival of a university.

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⁷ Государственная программа развития науки Республики Казахстан на 2007 – 2012 годы, Астана, Аккорда, 20 июня 2007 года.