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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to deepen and to encourage further research for sustaining quality improvement in Kazakh Higher Education Institutions. This paper is explaining the Kazakh education system and is also trying to figure out whether it fits to the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model. The paper is based on literature concerning the Kazakh Higher Education system. The pros and cons are also mentioned in the paper. In accordance to this it is easier to find the strengths and weaknesses of the system and finally a list of factors are given in order to be a guide of excellence for the Kazakh Higher Education Institutes.



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Business Excellence in Kazakh Higher Education Institutions

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I. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to deepen and to encourage further research for sustaining quality improvement in Kazakh Higher Education Institutions. There are a number of researches done to help the improvement in the quality of education in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan education is transforming from cultural planning to a market oriented system, with the government encouraging non-government provision of education and increasingly private sector driven employment opportunities (TA Completion report, 2002). This paper has tried to capture the essence of the issues and challenges faced by the education sector in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has a lot of grants coming from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) which is used to increase the quality of education in the country. The grants were given to identify the key sector issues and priorities and contribute to strengthening the Government's education sector development strategy. In 1995 the ADB has approved a technical assistance grant for an education and training study in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The technical assistance was used to review the education and training sector, formulate the strategic plan for the sector, identify major policy issues and required sector restructuring, and prepare a project to address priority needs within the sector. As the report mentions, since independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan's economic and fiscal crises and its transition to a market-based economy have led to severe cutbacks in educational finance while at the same time placing numerous new demands on the education system. The emerging market oriented economic system needs to adopt to meet new

market needs. Because of this private schools have emerged and there is also a need to ensure the quality of the programs of these new comers. The ADB is also providing a technical assistance grant to help the Ministry of Education and Culture, the project's executing agency, to prepare and implement a rationalization plan and to reform educational management. (www.adb.org, 1997). The government has taken steps to reform the sector. But it faces challenges in maintaining generally high standards and literacy rates, while improving funding, management and quality (www.adb.org, 2003). It should be also cleared that since joining ADB in 1994, Kazakhstan has received 11 loans (for seven projects) totaling \$467 million, supporting reforms and investments in social security, agriculture, education and transport; and programs in agriculture, pension reforms and macroeconomic stability. In the same period, there have been 44 TAs totaling \$21.59 million to prepare loan projects and for advisory activities (www.adb.org/media, 2003).

Another problem is the teacher pay and incentives are low, making it difficult to attract and retain teachers, particularly in rural areas. Reforms should be done to support and strengthen teacher's professional development. Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan's economy has shrunk enormously and cutbacks in public spending, including education, have led to a severe deterioration in educational facilities and equipment and also to the resignation of many teachers due to low salaries which are frequently slow in being paid (www.adb.org, 1996).

The government's goal is to establish an education system that provides universal access to quality schooling for the country's children and young people, according to the country's needs. This is one of the main points were the education should stem on the country's needs, in order to support the country to improve itself with the support of a quality education system. The

government's major priorities under the planned education reform include (i) providing one year of compulsory preschool education to better prepare students for formal schooling, (ii) improving education standards; (iii) providing equal access to education at all levels; (iv) developing information and communication technologies to support the education system; (v) extending school education; (vi) modernizing education management; and (vii) rationalizing the vocational and technical education system through partnership with the private sector to cater to the needs of SME's (www.adb.org, 2006-2008).

“Quality has become a dynamic concept that has constantly to adapt to a world whose societies are undergoing profound social and economic transformation. Encouragement for future-oriented thinking and anticipation is gaining importance. Old notions of quality are no longer enough ... despite the different contexts there are many common elements in the pursuit of a quality education, which should equip all people, women and men, to be fully participating members of their own communities and also citizens of the world” (Ministerial Round Table on Quality Education, UNESCO, 2003, p. 1).

At this point in time, quality education has essential characteristics that can be implemented in many culturally appropriate forms.

Quality education:

- supports a rights-based approach to all educational endeavors. Education is a human right, and therefore quality education supports all of the human rights;
- is based on the four pillars of Education for All – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be;
- views the learner as an individual, a family member, community member, and a global citizen and educates to create individual competency in all four roles;
- upholds and conveys the ideals of a sustainable world – a world that is just, equitable, and

peaceable, in which individuals care for the environment to contribute to intergenerational equity;

- takes into consideration the social, economic, and environmental contexts of a particular place and shapes the curriculum or program to reflect these unique conditions. Quality education is locally relevant and culturally appropriate;
- is informed by the past (e.g. indigenous and traditional knowledge), is relevant to the present, and prepares individuals for the future;
- builds knowledge, life skills, perspectives, attitudes and values;
- provides the tools to transform current societies to more sustainable societies;
- is measurable.

(http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27542&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

II. Policies and Strategies for Improving Education Quality

Effective policies and strategies can be developed in all levels of administrative and management of a university, but the core issue is to fit it to its culture at the same time for the purposes of improving the education quality.

Many of the issues related to improving quality apply to all levels of the education system, including the need for:

- a. Training that procedures well educated, technically competent instruction;
- b. Incentives that reward performance;
- c. Adequate salaries to discourage moonlighting;
- d. Adequate learning materials;
- e. Continuing staff development;
- f. Increased staff productivity;
- g. Management designed to give instructional support and leadership;

- h. National and institutional monitoring of standards.
- i. Quality improvement at any level is interrelated with and, at least indirectly, dependent on supporting changes at other levels.
- j. Improving behavior must address the behavior of the whole education system.

www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Education/NatDevAsia/Quality/policy.pdf

In order to monitor and sustain quality improvement, there is a need at all levels but practically at the local level for both practical technology and, within contexts of decentralization, for participatory decision processes. Head of department, deans and even the president of the higher education institution should be able to assess the quality of their institution and utilize such information in local strategic planning.

Conditions for Sustaining Quality Improvement:

For one to sustain quality improvement in their institution, they have to first understand the current conditions at the classroom, course, university, and staff levels. An example of how to do this may be as follows, which was a research undertaken by ADB. The wording was remedified to suit this research.

Conditions for success include:

(i) Information to interpret the meaningful internal and external environment of the university. The existing and potential influence of such context defines opportunities and limitations of the university as an organization. A basic question is:

How can the organization and its environment be altered to enable teachers, administrators, and students to do what needs to be done to achieve the university's objectives?

(ii) Information in support of university objectives on how given classroom teaching and learning processes lead to specific student outputs. What could academic staff and administrators be doing that could help achieve the various learning and performance targets?

(iii) Information on the somewhat unpredictable process involving a number of community stakeholders in transforming insights on effective university practice and context into acceptable university and classroom interventions. Which potentially useful changes or innovations make acceptable demands on the academic staff?

(iv) Information on the processes of monitoring and evaluating student performance and other learning integral to the process of improving university practice collected and analyzed over time. Which innovative technology is promising, available, and user friendly?

(v) Continued acceptance by academic staff of the validity of the new practice. What opportunities can be developed to share experiences and problems with administrators and academic staff from other universities to provide a useful forum in which academic staff can reassess their support for an innovation in light of the experience of other staff?

(vi) Continued sense of ownership of the new practice by academic staff and administrators. What are the indicators of ownership and lack of ownership?

(vii) In the long term, integrating university-level change into the behavior of the larger education system. What communication channels need to be opened, and what decision processes need to be penetrated in order to extend quality improvements?

III. The EFQM Excellence Model: An integrated approach to total quality management

EFQM excellence model is dedicated to increasing the competitiveness and effectiveness of European organizations, whatever size, sector, function or structure of incorporation. Even though it is not still that common to apply this model to the higher education institutions, there are a number of studies that did prove the applicability of the model to these institutions. For an institution to apply this model it does not have to be a European organization, but just trying to compete within a European market is enough to implicate this model. As if an organization is willing to be in the top levels of competition it must think global and go global.

Organizations which join EFQM or use the EFQM Excellence Model, align themselves with role-model organizations and gain practical exposure to leading edge developments in the field of Business and Organizational Excellence (Pupius, Sheffield Hallam University, UK). The EFQM Model can be equally applied to any organization regardless size, sector and structure. In addition it should also be stated that in the EFQM Model the customer and staff satisfaction and integration into society are achieved via the role of the organizational leadership in setting the policy and strategy and the management of staff, resources and processes, culminating in excellence in key performance results (www.efqm.org).

IV.4.0 Application of the EFQM Excellence Model in Kazakhstan Higher Education Institutions

The research done for the Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom was chosen to be the

guide or benchmark for the universities in Kazakhstan as they are the leader in using the EFQM Excellence Model in education.

The EFQM Model comprises five "enablers" criteria:

1. leadership;
2. policy and strategy
3. people and management;
4. resources and partnerships; and
5. processes It also comprises four "results" criteria:
 - customer satisfaction;
 - people satisfaction;
 - impact on society; and
 - key performance results (EFQM, 2000)

In order to imply this model to education or even more specifically to higher education institutions in Kazakhstan it is better to deepen the key important criteria for education.

Five "enablers" criteria:

1. Leadership

The leaders behavior is the mirror to how the institution creates a clarity and unity of purpose within the organization and an environment in which the organization and its people excel. The leaders of the institution should develop a strategic vision and share this with all staff and students.

2. Policy and Strategy:

Policy and strategy should be based on total quality concepts. The Higher education institutions policy and strategy should be clear based on improvement of quality in education as well as the management of the organization.

3. People and Management:

There must be effective top-down and bottom-up communication system. Participation of all staff, rewarding systems and performance management systems should be included in this criterion. The staff should be aware of the decisions made in the top management, plus they should also be involved in the decision making process.

4. Resources and Partnership:

When an institution is the subject, partnership is usually done with other colleges, businesses and local organizations to get their support and involvement in this higher education system. Continuous improvement in TQM goals and increasing investment in facilities to match increasing class size must be done. The main resource should be to fund research plus the infrastructure requirements due to the growth in the student numbers.

5. Processes

Institutions should map and make a model of all the processes and show how they work in the hierarchy e.g. faculties and departments. Each process should have a standard and should be measured by time-to-time. Having a list of critical success factors would ease the application of this criterion.

Four "results" criteria:

1. Customer Satisfaction

As the customer is the final authority to judge your quality of your product or service and customer loyalty; retention and market share gain is best optimized through a clear focus on the needs of current and potential customers. In education the major step is to identify the customer. In higher education institutions customers would include parents, businesses, local, regional and national

agencies and students who are paying their own fee.

2. People and Satisfaction

Satisfying the needs and expectations of staff is very important. The people in an organization are the most important criteria to take care of. Their satisfaction depends on how you as an organization satisfy them. Trust is a must for process working. The work environment for lecturers, research students and administrative staff should be improved. Job security should be provided especially in the private universities. The high level of absenteeism and employee turnover should be decreased, as it is very high in Kazakhstan, regarding the foreign faculty staff.

3. Impact on Society

A Higher Education Institution should satisfy the needs and expectations of the community at large through increased involvement in community initiatives. An institution has a public responsibility as well to its people to serve the best and even exceeding the expectations and regulations of the community at large. For an institution, this would include defining a role within the local community, region or country to enhance the social and economic well-being of the people. (Pupius, 2002).

4. Key Performance Results

The key performance results should be based on the annual capital allocations, cash flows, research ranking and league tables, performance league tables, and stakeholder value (Osseo et al, 2002). A Higher Education Institution should also meet the requirements of the higher education council of Kazakhstan, and then it should be able to get accreditation. The institution should also be effective in dealing with student complaints. Adapting effective performance measurements systems e.g. EFQM, Benchmarking with worlds best HEIs etc. HEIs in Kazakhstan should also

improve research ranking and position in performance league table.

5.0 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to deepen and to encourage further research for sustaining quality improvement in Kazakh Higher Education Institutions. This paper explained the Kazakh education system and also tried to figure out whether it fits to the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model. The paper was based on literature concerning the Kazakh Higher Education system.

As the EFQM Excellence Model has the potential to enable an education institution to build on existing quality management systems for ways to achieve excellence in the core learning, teaching and assessment process and associated support processes it will be also useful to Kazakhstan HEIs to improve the quality in education.

The pros and cons were also mentioned in the paper. In accordance to this it is easier to find

the strengths and weaknesses of the system and finally a list of factors are given in order to be a guide of excellence for the Kazakh Higher Education Institutes.

The research done for the Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom was chosen to be the guide or benchmark for the universities in Kazakhstan as they are the leader in using the EFQM Excellence Model in education. There is not much other HEIs using EFQM excellence model so it was decided to choose the one which best uses this model in the same field. Each and every EFQM Excellence Model criteria was mentioned in detail which was also reworded in order to fit to the situation on Kazakhstan. Each criteria definition includes the key areas, strengths and areas of improvement regarding Kazakhstan HEIs. There is a reality that for successful implementation of any change program there is a requirement for adequate education and training to the staff that will be involved in the implementation process.

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