

# Innovative Management in Higher Education in Russia: Global Demands versus Local Experiences

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Received 20 March 2015

Revised 18 August 2015; Accepted 20 December 2015

**Abstract:** The paper explores new management policies in the context of fundamental reforms in higher education in Russia. The dramatic changes in the education system during the last two decades were conditioned both by the shift on the global educational landscape and by the radical transformation of economy, politics and social environment inside the country. The desire to approach the international standards in higher professional education in the time of the rapid globalization forced the government to follow new strategies in reforming universities structure, management and programs which were adopted from the West. However, not all innovations were positively received by academic circles, potential employer organizations and by students themselves. The paper highlights such contradictory issues and argues that all innovations in higher education management should be adjusted to the national interests, traditions and mentality. The arguments are illustrated by the examples of the universities which could implement the reforms considering local context and thus achieved efficiency even in a short timeframe. These examples mainly deal with education in economic sciences regarding the interest to the problem by the International School – VNU. The materials and conclusions of the paper could be useful for Vietnamese managers in education since the Vietnamese system of higher education which was based on the Soviet model is undergoing the similar transformation from the governing solely by the state to the diversity of the innovative modes of management.

*Keywords:* Innovative management, education reforms, globalization, local context.

## 1. Education reform in Russian context

The dramatic changes in the education system of Russia during the last two decades were conditioned both by the shift on the global educational landscape and by the radical transformation of economy, politics and social environment inside the country. The desire to approach the international standards in higher professional education forced the government

to follow new strategies in reforming universities' structure, management and programs. These strategies were adopted from the West, mainly from Europe. Considering new economic demands at the epoch of globalization European countries began to form the common educational space nearly two decades ago and in 1999 had signed the Bologna agreement which was focused on unification of the national higher education systems. Russia has joined the Bologna agreement in 2003 and by now basically has

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completed the education reform. However, the reform had faced a lot of problems - mainly the resistance of universities and educators themselves since not all innovations were positively received by academic circles, potential employer organizations and by students themselves (Dobrenkov, 2004). The paper highlights such contradictory issues and argues that all innovations in higher education management should be adjusted to the national interests, traditions and mentality.

Discussing new management policies in the context of fundamental reforms in higher education in Russia we illustrate our arguments by the examples of the universities which implement the reforms considering local context and thus have achieved efficiency even in a short timeframe. These examples would include the education in economic sciences regarding the interest to the problem by the International School – VNU. The materials and conclusions of the paper may be useful for Vietnamese managers in education since the Vietnamese system of higher education which was based on the Soviet model is undergoing the similar transformation from the governing solely by the state to the diversity of the innovative modes of management.

An uneasy goal of governments of contemporary states to reconcile the integration of national education into the regional or global along with consideration of historical and cultural specificity of national education is accentuated in some internationally approved documents on cooperation in education:

Whereas the technological and economic changes and their consequences for the labour market pose new challenges for higher education institutions and whereas, in view of the challenges of global competition as well as the ever increasing influx of students into higher education institutions, Member States face the task of organising their higher education systems and their relationships vis-à-vis State and society in ways which respect existing academic standards, training objectives, quality standards, the autonomy

and/or the independence - in terms of the relevant structures in each Member State - of higher education institutions, and the need to be accountable to and inform the public (98/561/EC: Council Recommendation, 1998).

In the context of specificity of Russian education system the major challenge of the reform was the task to switch from the 5 years training with the diploma of the specialist at the end to the multilevel system: bachelor (4 years) – master degree (2 years). In Russia bachelors are regarded by employers as half-educated and often can't find good jobs since society hesitates in capacity of the universities to form a qualified specialist in 4 years, while masters are not in demand in many spheres, especially in agriculture and industry. Moreover, the reform caused concern that the achievements in teaching of fundamental sciences for which Russian universities got the world's recognition may be lost. However, the long resistance of the leading universities and hot debates of educators remained behind since the relative freedom of universities allowed them to keep a five-year period of study for undergraduates of some specializations, mainly for the engineering professions.

## **2. New management strategies in higher education: obstacles and achievements**

Other significant challenges of the education reform were related to the new principles of management of higher education in the situation when along with the central state management, regional, municipal and universities' own forms of management were developed both for the state and private universities. The fundamental strategies in management of national higher education were defined by the Concepts of long-term socio-economic development of Russian federation till the year 2020 (Concept of long-term socio-economic development, 2008). In order to ensure the innovative character of reforms the following main goals were announced:

- Reconstruction of the educational institutions net according to tasks of innovative development, formation of federal universities and national research universities;

- Guaranty of competent approach to secure interaction of academic knowledge and practical skills;

- Expansion of diversity of education programs;

- Improvement of financial mechanisms, increase in funds allocated to support of scientific researches in universities, etc.

The concept of the Federal university was developed in early 2000s. It involves the formation of a new educational institution based on alliance of the existing ones. The central aim of such autonomous institutions is to assist to the social and economic development of particular territory, usually - the Federal Region (Federal Okrug – administrative territorial entity in Russian Federation). Ten Federal universities were created from 2006 till 2015, mainly during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. The Federal universities usually have extensive lists of faculties and host a large number of students: from 16 000 in a smaller one (Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University) till 57 000 in the biggest (Ural Federal University). The number of factors such as special financial state support, close relationship with regional economy and industry, consideration of the local employers demand, innovative management and the autonomy which facilitates the international accreditation of universities programs, - all these make these universities incredibly attractive for potential students.

Another new type of the university in Russia which has appeared after 2009 is the National Research University (NRU), this status can be acquired by the best universities via competition. This type of the university has to effectively accumulate both research and education activity, to generate new discoveries and to transfer them to economy. NRU aims to combine both basic and applied researches and

to develop exclusively efficient system of training cadres of high qualification along with retraining qualified personnel for high-tech economy needs. From the Western point of view this is a normal practice but it is a virgin territory for Russian educational landscape where science and education traditionally were separated, science was prerogative of the Academy of science and research institutes while scientific explorations at universities had been not widely developed. However, 29 best universities got this title of NRU in the period from 2009 to 2015 and accordingly their financial support by government has significantly increased. Meanwhile, it's expected that NRU will use the instruments of innovative management and will find sources of self-financing such as from industrial and economic sectors, through new researches in demand and advanced educational programs.

Though some universities successfully implement new education strategies there are still a lot of discussions both in the academic circles and society about financial side of reforms and its impact on traditional social values. The advocates of the state's support in science and education argue that reduction of financial infusions from the government may transform the universities into the business structures which will be obliged to do more profitable researches to the detriment of fundamental. Long-term needs in the development of science, economy and culture of the nation thus are replaced by short-term market demands and the academic function of the university becomes secondary. Vassalage of universities from the market and preference of narrow professional education to general one evoke concerns about the whole traditional Russian education system which was based on the ideas of Fichte and Humboldt and aimed to develop the understanding of all interconnections and processes in nature and in human existence.

Another obstacle in reformation of education system is introduction of fee paying education in the country where the higher

education was free for more than 70 years. The society is worried that it will create inequality regarding the access to intellectual resources and will strengthen social stratification of youth in the present economic situation when many families have difficulties to pay for their children education.

Radicalism of reforms, partly explained by the special addiction of Russian mentality to extremes, at the first stage created resistance within university circles and social tension. However, during the last decade when the transformations in education became more gradual the state in many aspects succeeded in implementation of its policies and became convinced in necessity to continue reforms according to changing situation in the country. Moreover, both the government and universities developed their own instruments to overcome financial and psychological obstacles in the process of shaping refreshed and competitive education system.

For example, the direct government support of reinforcement of science at the universities now is complemented via system of grants for collective and individual researches from various state and independent foundations; the biggest are Russian Foundation for human sciences and Russian foundation for Fundamental researches. Another lucrative source discovered within universities is providing additional to the main program education, which is especially popular among students if it's accompanied by a certificate or an additional diploma. The programs of professional retraining of the specialists who have got their qualification years before are also in a huge demand. It worth to mention that the marketing strategies adopted from the western system of education have taken roots on Russian educational soil, but the respective vocabulary such as "marketing educational services", "education service provider" and similar was regarded as negative by the nation which perceives education and knowledge as high spiritual values rather than merchandises. This resulted in lexical camouflage of

marketing in education and in return to familiar expressions such as "sphere of education" instead of "market of education", "educational activity" instead of "educational service" and so on – which can be seen as a marketing tool as well. To relieve financial burden for students' families the government keeps the proportions between free and fee-paying education in favor of the first and develops the system of various scholarships (including the scholarships for studying abroad) while the universities provide different type of discounts. The establishment of prestigious Federal Universities and of NRU in provincial cities also facilitates quality education since the potential students can get it at their residence place and families are thus exempt from necessity to support their children in expensive central cities.

### 3. Examples to follow

The success of reforms in the country education system wouldn't be possible without efficacious methods of management within a university. Let's look at examples of effective new management which ensured unprecedented rapid development of some universities. The most extraordinary shift from the newly established small center for Master in economics program in 1992, through the transformation into a university with four faculties in 1995 and finally into NRU in 2009 was made by Higher School of Economics (HSE), which now has campuses in four cities (Moscow –the main, St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod and Perm), 25 000 students, 2500 teachers, from them 1730 with high academic degrees, 59 programmes for undergraduate studies, 112 programmes for graduate studies, 24 international laboratories, 31 research institutes, 89 research centers to mention among other impressive figures (here and in subsequent the factual information about this NRU is from the HSE official website).

How it was possible to make such a progress in relatively short period? Which

managing tools did help to university rise? Let's list the main management strategies of the university:

- From the beginning the founders of HSE set an ambitious goal to replace obsolete economic theories by the new ones based on principles of world economic sciences.

- Though the HSE was founded as the economic university its leaders were aware of the fact that modern economic education as well as modern education and science in general, is based on interdisciplinary approach. Thus they took as models MIT and Caltech structure and management system and gradually opened various specializations from law, philosophy, cultural studies to telecommunication, computer sciences and cosmic technologies.

- Taking into account the specificity of national mentality which not always accept the market and benefit based values, HSE announced such common university values which attract the youth as striving for truth; collaboration and commitment to one another; honesty and openness; professionalism, self-discipline and accountability; academic freedom and political neutrality; public engagement.

- The HSE has designed a clear program of development till the year 2020 and persistently follows it.

- The HSE has created an extensive net of research units which provide connections to the real sector of economy and help to university self-financing through numerous researches on demand.

- The lecturers of the university are not only professional academics but also specialists from business structures and consulting companies.

- The university stimulates students by the flexible system of rewards – the scholarships are directly dependant on students' academic success.

- The ambitious aim to create the innovative educational, scientific, analytical and

consulting centre of the international standard and to broaden world-wide relations induced the university leaders to form the International Advisory Committee with the leading specialists on economic and education management as members: Eric Maskin, Committee Chairman, Adams University Professor at Harvard University and Nobel laureate in Economics, 2007; Philip G. Altbach, Research Professor and Director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, USA, one of the most renowned experts in higher education; Michael Barber, Chief Education Advisor for Pearson; Manuel Castells, Professor at the University of Southern California Los Angeles and Professor at the Open University of Catalonia in Barcelona, Honorary Professor at the HSE who created a theory of information society and made a significant contribution to the theory of globalization and others renowned academics and professionals.

- The international experts advices on internalization policy of HSE along with advanced strategy and monitoring of development resulted in establishment of international relations of the university with foreign educational structures in different forms: HSE has over 200 partnerships with international universities and research organizations from 49 countries including Vietnam (Vietnam – VNU, University of Engineering and Technology, HSE - Faculty of Computer Science), more than 130 students exchange programmes, more than 20 international summer schools, more than 40 double degree programmes with 23 leading foreign universities. About 100 internationally recruited faculty members work at the HSE. The number of foreign students also increases.

The faculties of economics in other universities in addition to the similar management ideas in their international policies have their own specific strategies. Thus the well known Peoples' Friendship University of Russia which was established in 1960 with the main aim of training specialists for the

developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America from the beginning of its functioning developed a special programme for Russian students – an in-depth learning of foreign languages (1500 academic hours) at any of its faculties. This tradition exists till now and includes 9 languages, it allows to students during four years of studies to obtain the second degree of interpreter in professional communication. The faculty of economics and the Institute of World economy and business both provide the opportunity to get the second degree of interpreter from English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Chinese. The university has signed agreements with many foreign universities on students' exchange programmes so those who want to refine their foreign language can take 3-10 months language courses in different countries from Spain to China. Master students of economic and business specializations can also choose to complete their main professional programs in English or in Spanish. Moreover, they can also enroll in the joint (double - degree) programmes with the French and Great Britain universities and Business schools. Such exceptional attention to professional language training significantly contributes to students' mobility and increases their chances to get better work in the globalized world. It's worth to mention another uncommon way of university promotion for potential students and collaborators in research and educational activity – the university multi-faceted website functions on seven languages.

The need for the efficient universities' operation at the time of globalization and internationalization of education served as impetus for design of new programmes in management of higher education. Since in the local context professional knowledge is considered more important than pure executive management skills these programmes mainly

address master's degrees students and professionals of different specializations: HSE has launched the programme for innovative management in economic education, some pedagogical universities – for management in teachers training. Thus modernization of higher education system offers hope that soon all the country's universities will have innovative management based on specificity of particular area of studies as well as on the latest achievements of education management.

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