STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY STIMULATION AS THE DEVELOPMENT FACTOR OF THEIR HUMAN CAPITAL

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Abstract

Universities play an important role in the formation of social communities' human capital. Development of the country's or region's innovative economy is not possible without investment in students' human capital. The system of educational activity stimulation of the students of the Ural Federal University (UrFU) is the object of this research. Its subject is the systems' impact on educational activities and formation processes of students' human capital. The article presents the analysis of the regulatory framework of educational activities stimulation in the UrFU is likewise used in the article. The authors show that the majority of the UrFU students are not satisfied with the current system of material and nonmaterial stimulation of their educational activities. They found out that the system of educational activities stimulation at the level of organization includes the full range of stimulation: both material and nonmaterial. The authors think that the existing educational activities stimulation system in the UrFU does not correspond to the principles of human capital development. Moreover, they offer to transform not only the existing educational activities stimulation system, but also the very model of higher education. It is suggested to make the transition to a non-linear model of higher education.

Key words: human capital, students, educational activity, stimulation.

JEL Code: I23, J24

Introduction

The development of country's and its regions' innovative economy is impossible without investments in human capital, which is the source of its intensive growth. The human capital effectiveness directly depends on the amount of resources invested in it. While there are independent, creative specialists are required in the economy, it is necessary to increase material and nonmaterial investments in human capital, since high professionalism is not an inborn feature, but a skill, that can be reached via elaborate development throughout life (McDowell, Singell & Stater, 2009).

However, the most important, in our opinion, are investments in education that increase the value of human capital (Kucharíková, Tokaríková & Blašková, 2015), as they positively influence the innovative and creative activity of workers, their knowledge and experience (Zlate & Enache, 2015).

Investments in human capital via education are carried out at three levels: at the nation-wide level (by making it easier to enter the higher education system, educational grants); at the level of specific educational organizations; and at the level of the students themselves (and their parents) (Fedotova & Platonova, 2014). At the same time, students (or their parents) make a significant contribution to the structure of investments. However, in our opinion, this is not enough. A wider range of this capital appending sources should be involved. The human capital of students as a social community is formed, at the first place, in the university and it needs various investments, including investments in the stimulating system of students' main activity – educational one.

Human capital development problem is relevant for contemporary socio-economic conception. At the same time, there are many researches on the role of human resources development and management related to business in books. In higher education, mainly tutors' human capital is analyzed (Allui & Sahni, 2016; Jingming & Xiaofang, 2009), whereas students are usually out of researchers' view. The purpose of this article is to try to find out whether the existing educational activities stimulating system helps develop students' human capital in the largest university of the Ural macroregion – Ural Federal University (UrFU).

We consider students' educational activity as a kind of a labor activity. Scientific literature review on the problem of stimulating labor activity as a form of contribution to human capital made it possible to make up three basic concepts (Kibanov et al., 2010). The first one is called 'homo economical'. It considers a person to be a passive economic subject, led by material stimulations. The second concept is the concept of a 'homo social', which emphasizes the importance and necessity of social-psychological satisfaction of a person. The third concept - the theory of "human resources", it focuses on satisfying a wide range of needs that are directly related to the quality of one's life – a person's, a region's, an organization's or society as a whole. In this case, we are talking about the most diverse types of incentives, direct and indirect, that are relevant to a particular person. In our opinion, it is the third concept, which contributes to the development of the students' human capital.

Universities that actualize the 'human resources' theory within their educational activity stimulation system at the same time achieve basic educational purposes. They get

more professional alumni, they form their recognizable local reputation; their students get more loyal.

1 Method

The object of the research is the educational activity stimulating system of the UrFU students. There are more than 30,000 full-time students in the UrFU. Its status (the federal university) allows the university to accumulate and distribute various kinds of resources, including resources for students' educational activity stimulating.

The empirical study was carried out in two stages. At the first stage, more than 20 local regulatory legal documents of the Ural Federal University posted on the university's website were analyzed, concerning the educational activity stimulating system. The purpose of studying these documents was to identify the dominant types of stimulation and the categories of students on which these stimulations are targeted.

At the second stage, a questionnaire was conducted 392 for full-time students of one of the UrFU Institutes (Institute of Public Administration and Entrepreneurship) (N = 1099, 2016). During the research, a stratification sample was implemented. It was formed on the basis of statistical data on gender (30% male, 70% female), the form of education funding (20% subsidized, 80% non-subsidized), student's degree (80% bachelors, 12% specialists, 8% masters).

The structure of the questionnaire consisted of three parts: the motivation of the students' educational activity, their satisfaction with the existing educational activity stimulating system, the awareness of students about the types of stimulation that exist in the university.

Keeping in mind the stimulations that are present in the local normative legal documents, we developed an empiric indicator system that made it possible to measure students' satisfaction with the existing human capital development stimulations in the university. We distinguished two main blocks of stimulations:

1. Material (monetary):

Academic scholarship.

Bursary.

Exhibition.

Discounts.

Grant.

Additory scholarship.

2. Non-material (moral, organizational, free time):

The ability to track progress through a rating system.

The possibility of transfer to a subsidized form of study.

The opportunity to get an academic vacation for a serious reason.

The possibility to take exams earlier.

The announcement of gratitude for special achievements.

The possibility of receiving additional individual tutors' consultations.

The possibility of re-taking the exam (coursework, etc.) for a higher rating.

Awarding letters of commendation for special achievements.

The publication of information about awarded students on the university's (institute's) website, in the university press.

The possibility to graduate earlier.

The acquired quantitative data were processed in the SPSS Statistics program. For information statistical analysis there were used the following approaches: frequency, correlation, crosstabulation. Frequency analysis made it possible to study students' opinions distribution structure regarding their satisfaction with the existing educational activity stimulation system. The correlation analysis made it possible to determine the influence features of students' socio-demographic characteristics on the degree and nature of their satisfaction with the stimulation system by calculating the availability indicators (Chi-square) and connection tightness (Cramer's coefficient). The crosstabulation analysis helped us interpret the relationship structure between the variables. We took associations that had asymptotic significance (2-sided) <0.005 and Cramer's coefficient> 0.200 as substantial ones.

2 Results

2.1 The analysis of local regulatory documents reflecting the stimulation of students' educational activities

One of the empirical study results is the definition of the stimulations types list present in the university and the categories of students on which these stimulations are targeted. The analysis showed that the UrFU's students' educational activity stimulating system: 1) includes the wide range of possible types of stimulation: both material (monetary) and non-material (moral, organizational, free time); 2) focuses on almost all categories of students: from 1 to 5 year, studying both on subsidized and non-subsidized funding form, in all areas and degrees.

However, some disadvantages were found in the UrFU's educational activities stimulating system:

1. Discrimination of certain categories of students in obtaining stimulating resources. For example, an increased scholarship for 1st-year students from foreign countries is appointed for getting 160 points based on the results of the Uniform State Exam (USE), while with engineering and technical and natural sciences students - it is at least 250 points, and with humanitarian and economic departments – it is not less than 290 points. Another fact: while there are discounts for students who study on non-subsidized basis, there are no stimulations for students involved in scientific researches.

2. Transformation of some ordinary legal rules to a mean of stimulation. For example, the right to graduate earlier; in order to implement this right, students must have not less than 4.75 points of average academic performance.

3. The declarative nature of the system itself.

2.2 Students' satisfaction with the existing UrFU's educational activities stimulating system

We relied on the interpretation of the theory of "human resources" as the most productive for stimulating the educational activity of students. Since this theory focuses on meeting the actual needs, we tried to find out the motives for studying among UrFU students.

After the survey it is appeared that more than 65% of the interviewed students agree with the statement that "modern students are not motivated to receive quality education". Moreover, the main goal of educational activities for 57% of students is just to get a diploma. These researches indicate the need not only to stimulate students' interest in learning, but also to create a special "knowledge atmosphere" at the university that would motivate students to acquire professional knowledge and to self-improve.

We measured student satisfaction with the stimulations that are present in the university and that should develop their human capital. We distinguished some difficulties for respondents in assessing how the current stimulating system is focused on meeting their actual needs. As it can be seen in Tab. 1, only 22% of respondents answered that the existing educational activity stimulating system in the university meets their actual needs. However, we note that students from the older years more often evaluate the existing system of stimulating educational activity in the university as unsatisfactory (Pearson Chi-square = 22.453a, Asymptotic significance (2-sided) 0.005, V Cramer = 0.247, weak correlation).

Tab. 1: The respondents' opinion on whether the current educational activities stimulation system satisfies their actual needs (% of the respondents number)

The respondents' opinion on whether the current educational activities stimulation system satisfies their actual needs	% of the respondents number
Satisfies	22,0
Doesn't satisfy	35,9
Don't know	42,1
Total	100,0

Source: author's calculation

At the same time, 52.5% of students are not satisfied with non-material stimulations, and 80.4% of students with material ones. In addition, as can be seen from Tab. 2, it is material stimulations that are relevant for students. This situation, in our opinion, is due to the fact that the majority of students (80%) study on non-subsidized basis, and in the conditions of the economic crisis, the reduction of family spending on education is the dominant stimulation.

Tab. 2: Reevant stimulation types for UrFU IPAE students (% of the answers number)

Stimulations types	% of the answers number
Transfer to a subsidized form of study	65,7
Discounts	61,3
Higher scholarship	38,7
Academic scholarship	36,5
Additory scholarship	31,5
Grants	16,6
'A' grade student status	13,3
Letters of recognition	6,1
Other stimulations	1,1
Total	270,8

Source: author's calculation; total is more than 100%, because respondents could choose more than one answer.

Along with material stimulations (56.0%), 41.2% of respondents noted that it is possible to increase the activity of students in the educational process by introducing an individual studying schedule, i.e. stimulating by the use of free time. This suggests that time as a value, as capital begins to manifest itself, albeit in an undue measure (Ambarova & Zborovsky, 2016).

Students' awareness about the types of stimulations present at the university is positively assessed by only 17.4% of the respondents. In addition, the higher marks the student has, the more negatively he assesses his awareness (Pearson Chi-square = 53.492[a], Asymptotic significance (2-sided) 0.0, V Cramer = 0.315, average correlation).

First of all, material stimulations are known among students of the IPAE. As can be seen from Tab. 3, the non-material stimulations are less popular with the students. This is due, first of all, to the students' preference of material incentives, and secondly, to low level of informational openness. The second factor leads to the fact that the students simply do not know about the possibilities of using some resources within the educational process (for example, the possibility of getting education in a shortened time frame).

Tab. 3: Stimulation types known to IPAE students (% of the answers number)

Stimulation types	of the answers number
Academic scholarship	76,5
The ability to track progress through a score-rating system	73,1
The possibility of transfer to a subsidized form of study.	63,0
Expulsion	61,3
Discounts	58,8
Bursary	46,2
The opportunity to get an academic vacation for a serious reason	46,2
Exhibition	42,0
The possibility to take exams earlier	41,2
Increased scholarship for special achievements	38,7
The possibiity to re-enter the university	30,3
The possibility of re-taking the exam (coursework, etc.) for a higher rating	28,6
Awarding letters of commendation for special achievements	26,9
The possibility of receiving additional individual tutors' consultations	25,2
Gratitude announcement for special achievements	19,3
The possibility to graduate earlier	16,8
The publication of information about awarded students on the university's (institute's) website, in the university press	15,1
Total	709,2

Source: author's calculation; total is more than 100%, because respondents could choose more than one answer.

The main sources of information about the educational activities stimulation types in the university are: friends and acquaintances (61.0%), tutors (52.5%), university website (36.4%), faculty website (22.9%). The least informative are the stands (14.4%). This indicates that interpersonal communication remains the dominant information channel for students, and insufficient student awareness is directly related to the university administration's reluctance to tell students about the stimulation system in the course of direct communications (in particular, the abolition of the supervisory control institution).

Conclusion

The analysis of the educational activity stimulating system of the students in the UrFU makes it possible to conclude: despite the availability of a wide range of possible types of

stimulation available to all categories of students, the existing system does not contribute to the development of the student's human capital. And this is due to: 1) a certain informational closeness; 2) the presence of administrative (organizational) barriers; 3) the fact that the current stimulating system in the UrFU does not meet the students' true (actual) needs.

In this regard, we offer to transform not only the current students' educational activities stimulating system, but also the model of higher education itself (Nonlinear model of Russian higher education in the macroregion..., 2016). It is suggested to make the transition to a non-linear model of higher education, as it will contribute to changing the current educational knowledge to the future both educational and scientific knowledge, that is able to change the students' motivation to a qualitatively different level. From our point of view, only in the conditions of transition to a nonlinear model of higher education based on the principles of openness, flexibility, activity, participation, freedom of choice, there can be an opportunity for the development of the student's human capital.

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