

Utilizing the Responsive University Model for Sustainable Higher Education and Student Civic Engagement

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Abstract: The article discusses the development of the sociocultural potential of youth in the university environment as a factor of sustainable development based on a survey of undergraduate students in four regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The study offers a solution to the identified problems through the implementation of the concept of a "responsive university", based on a prompt response to the extracurricular needs of students and their satisfaction with the priorities of the state youth policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the conditions of rapid changes taking place in modern Kazakh society, economic and political transformations, attention to the needs of young people as the most necessary resource for the reproduction of society is increasing. It is the education of stable values of statehood, the formation of an active civic position, environmentally responsible behaviour, and the development of mechanisms for youth participation in the public and political life of the country that require the close attention of the state and society. In these conditions, universities are a fundamentally important link that ensures the development of the necessary qualities of the younger generation.

Every year, universities receive and graduate thousands of young people. However, considerable attention is paid mainly to the development of professionally valuable skills, often paying insufficient attention to the development of socially essential qualities. Increasingly, society has a problem when young professionals don't have any striving and possibilities to communicate, performing only passive roles to obtain a stable income. At the same time, the level of their civic engagement is also sufficiently low.

Despite the stable percentage of active youth who seek to promote their initiatives while still studying, only a non-significant part retains the desire to be involved in public activities to take an active civic position. There is a significant fading interest in

realizing their social potential among third- and fourth-year undergraduate students in Kazakhstan universities.

In this study, we have attempted to identify the causes of "expectations' burnout" and discuss several preventive measures to reduce such situations. Creating a basis for understanding the complex system of training competitive specialists relevant to the needs of employers and rapidly developing society requires a holistic approach to the higher education system, likewise studying the needs and expectations of students.

Such an integrated approach can be implemented with the help of the concept of a "hearing" university, capable of responding sensitively to the needs of the state, business, industry, and students.

Following the priority goals of state regulation of education and science, the formation of the worldviews of young students in the context of vocational education should be based on universal values, which will contribute to improving the global competitiveness of Kazakh education. In these conditions, the identification of conditions for the development of the socio-cultural potential of young people is of particular importance as a factor in ensuring the formation of global and interdisciplinary competencies of the 21st century, including volunteering, civic and social responsibility, leadership, communication, research, and entrepreneurial skills. The socio-cultural potential of young people in these conditions acts as a set of qualities and capabilities of the younger generation,

formed under the influence of certain factors and a professionally oriented educational environment.

According to the National Report "Youth 2020", a new structure of value orientations of the youth of Kazakhstan is being formed, modeled on the top 5 popular social trends among young people: commitment to a healthy lifestyle (48.5%), volunteering (47.1%), travel (28.7%), civic engagement (23.1%) and environmental issues (17.7%). Following the OECD recommendations for 2020, The focus of educational programs should be on providing high-quality professional and social skills demanded by employers and meeting the current and future needs of the labor market. A more knowledgeable and active workforce with a broad outlook and international thinking capable to provide a valuable contribution to the development of the economy and society.

Based on the above, the research hypothesis boils down to the assumption that the development of the socio-cultural potential of youth in the university environment can be realized through the concept of a "responsive" university implying to the needs of students, industry, the state, and society, which will avoid the "burnout of expectations" of students.

2 REVIEW

The conducted research includes several stages: analysis of students' opinions on the need to develop the socio-cultural potential of youth in the context of higher professional education, the evaluation of the socio-cultural environment of universities and the opportunities provided for young people, interviews with representatives of the administration and student activists about the problems of "burnout of expectations" of students.

The method of collecting information is a survey (questionnaire) of students and teachers of the vocational education system. This method allows us to obtain the most objective information about the current situation and characteristics of the socio-cultural environment in Kazakhstan organizations of high education and subsequently identify problems and needs occurring in the development of the socio-cultural potential of the youth of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The territory of the sociological research covers the city of Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Karaganda, and Mangystau regions. The volume of the sample population of the survey based on a multi-stage stratified sample was 709 undergraduate students enrolled in various educational programs, of which

33,99% were men, 66,01% were women; 5,03% were under the age of 18; 94,15% were 18-23 years old; 0,4% were 24-29 years old, and 0,42% were 30-35 years old.

In the next stage, a series of 15 interviews were conducted with representatives of the teaching staff, administrative staff of the university, and representatives of student activists.

3 METHODOLOGY

Respondents were asked to assess the need for the following types of extracurricular activities while studying at a university.

- Creative clubs
- Sports sections
- Debate clubs
- Support of a healthy lifestyle
- Activities of student councils
- Charity/volunteer movements
- Activities of corruption prevention units
- Additional language clubs/courses
- Scientific circles/laboratories.

As a result of the study, the following was revealed: 70% of respondents agree with the statement that in addition to teaching a profession, conditions for comprehensive personal development should be created in the educational organization, while more than 72% state that they have never engaged in these types of activities, less than 13% express a desire to engage, 7% claim that this there is no necessary type of activity at the university, and only 8 percent are regularly engaged (fig. 1).

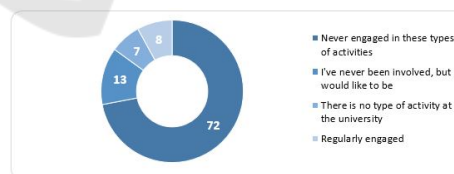


Figure 1: Students' engagement to extracurricular activities

At the same time, 58.4% indicated that they receive information about the activities of interest on the website, stands, from tutors and representatives of youth organizations. 23,4% are informed randomly through other students, the rest of the respondents stated that the information is difficult to access or irrelevant (fig. 2).

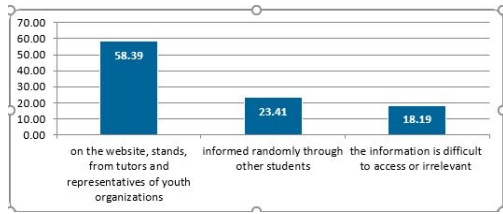


Figure 2: Ways for students to get information about opportunities for self-development

More than 50% of respondents highly appreciate the conditions created for the development of communication skills, the ability to work in a team, legal culture, financial literacy, literacy in the field of a healthy lifestyle, culture of behavior, adaptation skills in a new team, the ability to communicate with representatives of other worldviews and cultures during training. The highest rating was given to the conditions created at universities for teamwork. While, according to 32% of respondents' view, the opportunities for the development of religious and political literacy are at a low level.

Among the factors that have a positive impact on the development of students' opportunities in the social and cultural fields, the most popular are students' awareness of existing opportunities, existing clubs, circles, sections (49,2%), encouragement of participation in the work of clubs, circles, sections by the university administration (33,5%), promotion of student youth proposals for comprehensive development personality (28%). Such factors as clarification of civil rights and duties, increasing religious and political literacy within the framework of general education disciplines and curatorial hours, holding meetings and meetings with representatives of the university or college management, members of non-governmental organizations, law enforcement agencies on issues of concern to students gained less than 20% support, another 24,6% found it difficult to answer.

The reasons that do not allow students to develop their potential are the following: lack of information about opportunities for additional development; heavy workload in academic disciplines and assignments; unwillingness to waste time; the conviction that participation will not change anything and will not affect anything; also indicate a lack of necessary capabilities (fig.3).

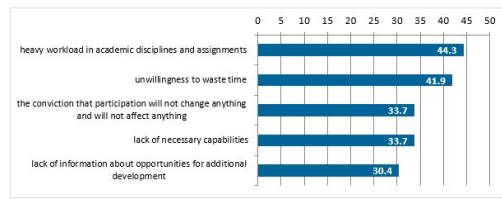


Figure 3: The causes hindering the development of student potential.

Creative clubs (49,4%), additional language learning (42,9%), and sports sections (39,5%) have the most popularity among the types of activities that students need during their studies for the full development of their personality. At the same time, such activities as the anti-corruption, the study of the culture and traditions of other peoples, and volunteering scored less than 15% of the votes.

Different levels of satisfaction with the conditions provided for the development of youth at the university (in addition to training) were recorded: 38.4% are fully satisfied, 37.4% are partially satisfied, 7.8% are not satisfied, 16.4% found it difficult to answer.

The most significant factors for the self-realization of young people after graduation are the demand for the profession (83%) and the formation of a respectful attitude towards family and marriage (77,3%). Maintaining a healthy lifestyle (32%) and regular sports (34,7%) are the least popular.

As the types of activities in which respondents are capable take an active part as the representatives of the modern youth of Kazakhstan, respondents chose official meetings with government representatives, non-governmental organizations (in online and offline format), and creative festivals for youth. Participation in youth projects, activities of branches of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, and participation in surveys and interviews are less popular.

The analysis of qualitative data shows that according to the prevailing opinion that modern universities pay quite a lot of attention to the comprehensive development of young people, and the realization of their social and cultural potential, there are still several problematic issues.

«It is not the first year that we have seen a tendency that students who took an active part in all possible activities by the third or fourth year don't have the

urge to do anything besides study at all. A most likely, general education department for complete the university's plan overload students and discourage all strives for the initiative in the future actions».

Dean of the Technical Faculty, Karaganda region.

«We are constantly working with first-year students, but there are very few people who want to take part somewhere. In words, they are ready to do a lot, but in fact, only a few wants and do something. I don't know how else to attract them. »

Head of the anti-corruption club at the university, Karaganda region

«We have a very acute problem involving young people in active social activities. Now we talk, for example, not about volunteering while only taking part in events for young people that we hold».

Representative of the Youth Affairs Committee, Mangystau region.

«Of course, we would be happy to take part everywhere, but there is no time at all. So many tasks»

Student, Nur-Sultan

«All events are planned for the evening or on the weekend, so it's inconvenient. I'd rather spend this time with friends.»

Student, Nur-Sultan

«We observe certain problems with the information exchange. Every day we have information about some urgent activities. Consequently, often we attract students for getting a certain amount of people somewhere. It's a very formal attitude».

The 2nd course's adviser, Almaty

«Students are not sure that they will be heard, and it is worth wasting their energy on a useless thing».

University teacher, Mangystau region

In addition to the above, respondents also indicated that the quality of dissemination of information about additional activities is rather low. Most students just don't know about the opportunities provided by the university, and are also not motivated to take part anywhere. At the same time, a certain low motivation of students to engage in the business processes of the university, silencing their needs can lead to the

formation of “group thinking” in the academic environment, which occurs when there is strong cohesion in the group, isolation of the group from opposing opinions and the presence of a directive leader who makes all decisions. In our case, the university administration can act as such a leader.

The implementation of vertical communications “student-administration” at the same time can acquire such characteristic features as:

- Limitation to several alternatives in solving issues;
- Lack of tendencies to revise decisions taken by an absolute majority, even if certain problems arise during their implementation;
- No need for expert evaluation of solutions;
- Selective attitude of communication participants to the content and use of information;
- The upper level of communication flows is so confident in its ideas that it does not consider action plans in non-standard situations.
- An example of such a situation can be the recent competition in one of the Kazakh universities for the development of a logo, when a small number of people took part in the voting. Subsequently, all the others who ignored the vote expressed obvious dissatisfaction with the result in conversations.

In general, the assessment of the intensity of vertical information flows, the level of feedback, the efficiency and reliability of data; the nature and methods of its transmission can be carried out by projecting G. Hofstede “Cultural dimensions Theory” on the communication processes in higher education institutions [1, 8 p.].

This theory allows us to evaluate communications by the parameters of power distance parameter and the "individualism-collectivism". The distance of power is a parameter associated with solutions to the main problem of human inequality. With a very high power distance, the administration exercises control over all the actions of the student, while with a decrease in the distance, the initiative passes to the student. The parameters of "individualism-collectivism" in the educational process are associated with the

integration of individuals into primary groups. The following dependence is estimated: the higher the indicators of collectivism, the lower the effectiveness of discussions.

Thus, the conducted research made it possible to identify several problematic issues in the development of the socio-cultural potential of young people in the process of obtaining a specialty, including:

- Low level of student involvement in the university's extracurricular activities;
- Insufficient level of awareness about the opportunities provided by the university;
- Insufficient universities' attention to the needs of students for their development as a person and citizen;
- Low interest of students in additional development due to high academic load;
- Formal attitude (in some cases) to the involvement of students in university events of various levels, the implementation of measures to support student initiatives and meet the needs of personal development;
- Lack of motivation of young people to participate in youth projects, volunteer activities, anti-corruption clubs, studying of culture and traditions of other peoples, as well as other social activities.

To solve these problems, can be used a new vision of a model of "responsive" university. The model provides not only a sensitive response of the university to the needs of industry, business, and the state, but for the comprehensive disclosure and realization of the socio-cultural potential of the studying youth as the main resource for the reproduction of society.

The definition of responsiveness can be approached by analyzing the list of stakeholders in the field of higher education, including primarily students, teachers, university administration, government, industry, and business. Of particular interest is a study by Stoessel, Jonathan W., offering an analysis of the responsiveness of American universities [2, p. 1]. According to Silver, universities should become functional organs of society [3, p. 547-548], acting based on a "social contract" between stakeholders inside and outside the universities [4, p. 568-569].

Thus, in the conditions of academic freedom in Kazakhstan higher education, universities take responsibility for the quality of educational services provided, exercising internal management and control. At the same time, the idea of a "social contract" is aimed at providing an opportunity to develop flexible educational and extracurricular initiatives following the needs of stakeholders. The significance of the "social contract" will increase as the quality of communication between stakeholders improves.

In these conditions, universities themselves build a systemic or situational policy of responsiveness, following emerging needs. According to Kerr's definition, systemic responsiveness is defined as the ability of universities to be internally oriented, responding to the direction and needs of a changing society and production [5, p. 187-193]. At the same time, the responsiveness of the education system is closely related to the internal level of development of human resources and the material and technical base capable of responding to external challenges.

C. Argyris argues that effective organizations are those that successfully integrate the needs of an organization with the needs of individuals in them [6, p. 431-432].

We will consider the roles of students within the framework of the Stakeholder Map, taking into account the influence and contribution, as well as expectations and interests in three concentric areas:

1. The area of authority or responsibility, including interested persons who are in conditions of vertical subordination: students, obeying the Internal Regulations and Academic Policy of the university, should be able to openly declare their needs, to participate fully, not formally, in decisions concerning intra-university youth policy, issues of education and upbringing. At the same time, it is necessary to establish the responsibility of youth leaders for their activities and the achievement of their goals.
2. The area of direct influence includes interested persons and organizations involved in the relationship and exchange of tangible and intangible resources: students take part in regional youth projects, movements, and initiatives and enter into communication with youth representatives from other universities and regions. At the same time, an essential condition is forming a clear civic position, a

high legal, political, and religious culture, stable civil law values, and the ability to communicate in a multicultural environment.

3. An area of indirect influence in which relations are established with the involvement of third parties interested in obtaining support or resources: student initiatives are supported by the authorized body in the field of education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, youth movements, and non-governmental organizations of various levels.

Based on the stakeholder map, we can identify several levels of responsiveness:

1. Responsiveness of educational programs of universities both to the requirements of production and fluctuations of the economy and to the needs of the state as a whole, including the development of socially significant qualities, patriotic education, civic engagement, respect for the culture and traditions of the people of Kazakhstan within the cycle of general education disciplines and curatorial hours;

2. Responsiveness of the university to the personal needs of students, contributing to the realization of their capabilities, the formation of a comfortable socio-cultural learning environment;

3. Responsiveness of teaching staff, including those acting as tutors of groups, to solving emerging problems both in academic and extracurricular activities, motivating students to personal development, and maximizing their capabilities in all areas (Project of UCT Social Responsiveness) [7];

4. Responsiveness of the university's infrastructure, as in the field of creating a comfortable educational environment including people with special educational needs, so as providing psychological assistance and support to students.

How can the concept of a responsive university be implemented?

The responsiveness of curricula contributes to broader changes throughout the system with an emphasis on changing the needs of students and population groups.

Systemic and academic responsiveness respects the “social contract”, focused on the needs of various stakeholders inside and outside the institution of

higher education. The responsiveness of curricula is based on communication channels between the internal structures of universities and society, providing social contract strength. The term “social responsiveness” includes all forms of interaction between higher education and external non-academic audiences. Following the realities of Kazakh education, in this case, we can talk about the development of civic participation, including the social work of students.

Students interact with external audiences in four different ways:

- Professional practices as part of the official curriculum;
- Volunteer and social activities, including ecological projects;
- Participation in cultural events;
- Daily communications.

All of these forms should be supported by the university, as they provide students with the opportunity to participate in solving real-life problems and, thereby, potentially help to promote a commitment to critical and active citizenship.

An essential feature of a responsive university should be not only a sensitive response to the needs of stakeholders, including the social needs of students, but the possibility of forming these needs in the long term based on a dialogue with stakeholders. Universities need to promote the long-term perspective necessary for social and economic development and participation in society.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conditions of constant economic and social changes in society, university graduates should, in addition to professional competencies, possess such formed skills of critical thinking, communication in a multicultural environment, stable socio-cultural and civil-legal values, and show an active civic position based on a deep understanding of the political and socio-economic situation in the country.

The study results allow us to conclude that universities, in addition to focusing on meeting the educational needs of students within the framework of student-centered learning, also need to focus on improving the quality of conditions for the

development of the socio-cultural potential of students. This goal can be achieved through the implementation of the "responsive university" model, characterized by high sensitivity to the extracurricular needs of students. Within the framework of a responsive university, a high level of quality and feedback of vertical communication flows "student-administration", "low power distance" in the implementation of communication, support for student initiatives at a non-formal level should be provided to ensure students' confidence that their needs will be heard and promote. At the same time, special attention should be paid to increasing the motivation of students to engage in the business processes of the university and to participate in various clubs, universities' cultural and scientific events voluntarily. These conditions are not only aimed at the effective realization of the potential of the studying youth as a social group but also at avoiding "burnout" - the refusal of students to participate anywhere for reasons of fatigue, excessive workload, or uncertainty about the effectiveness of their actions. Thus, the implementation of the concept of a "responsive university" will contribute to increasing the self-awareness and civic engagement of future specialists.

The results obtained will be used in practice for further research of conditions for the development of the socio-cultural potential of youth in the context of higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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