

Method to Estimate a Regional IHL (Institution of Higher Learning) Competitiveness

Elena I. Zritneva, Irina F. Igropulo, Nadezhda P. Klushina, Vladimir A. Magin,
Irina E. Panova, Leonid N. Kharchenko and Valeriy V. Shapovalov
North-Caucasus Federal University, Pushkin Str., Stavropol, Russia

Abstract: On the basis of the conducted content analysis of source material a method for estimation of competitive ability of a regional institution of higher learning is proposed. Procedures, instruments and stages of the method implementation are examined. The following criteria are introduced and provided with content: consumer criterion (reflects a possibility of an institution of higher learning to realize services on the regional market in principle. Economic criterion (price of the educational service rendered by a specific regional institution of higher learning which is characterized by comparability with prices on the regional market of educational services of the same level and direction of training and by the level of the specific utility of the educational service for the particular customer on the regional educational market, image (credibility of a regional institution of higher learning on the regional market of educational services and regional labor market (image) quality and availability of the educational service, intensity of advertising, flexible price policy, social programs). For these criteria, the rates of a regional higher education establishment competitiveness are proposed. It is offered to use principles of regionalization and dynamism for estimation of competitiveness of an institution of higher learning, as well as the principle of subjectivism of procedures for estimation of the educational system activity.

Key words: Competitiveness, estimation procedure, regional IHL, possibility, rendered

INTRODUCTION

Substantiation of the method for estimation of a regional Institution of Higher Learning (IHL) competitiveness requires a few prior remarks. In the first place, transition of the national economy to a market system has drawn increased attention of sciences, including the pedagogical one, to the phenomena of competitiveness and services market, first of all educational services market, namely, training of potential (future) and present employees (Akinfieva, 2006; Komkina, 2012).

In the second place, an adequate choice of the method (algorithms, instruments, criteria) for estimation of a professional educational establishment competitiveness makes it possible to identify strengths and weaknesses of the educational process (Bezglasnaya, 2005) to receive accurate and reliable information on its quality (Agronovich *et al.*, 2006) to perform comparative analysis with similar educational establishments and thereby not only to determine the competitive ability of an educational establishment on labor and educational services markets (Danilova, 2006) but also to control the quality of scientific and research, educational and social and cultural services provided by this organization (Ivanyutina, 2007; Faktorovich, 2012; Kharchenko, 2013a, b). In the third

place, estimation of the competitive ability and quality of services provided by an educational establishment (as well as determination of corresponding criteria) is a rather crucial and complex procedure, as many of the characteristics of the competitive ability and services quality do not have a distinct quantitative measure which would help to express them, i.e., they are highly subjective (Scripkina, 2012; Kharchenko, 2013a, b). Apart from that, services are characterized by intangibility of offer and consumption, complexity of their standardization, perishability, etc (Shchetinin *et al.*, 1998). Hence, it follows that a method for estimation of a regional IHL competitive ability must include elements of subjective perception by IHL students of its appearance and educational environment.

In the fourth place, procedure of a regional IHL competitiveness estimation must be implemented on the basis of leading principles determining the image of higher education at the present time, the main of which are regionalism and dynamism (Subetto, 1995). Regionalism as a principle requires consideration of the role of a regional IHL in the ascendant reproduction of quality of life in the region and in disclosing the regional cultural, socio-genetic function of higher education. Social and economic peculiarities of the region, the regional community of employers shape the content and evaluate

the quality of specialist training. Hence, the list of educational professional programs implemented in a regional IHL must be initially oriented at regional economy and regional social sphere. Besides, since ratings of IHLs efficiency are created by the government and have all-Russian character, they are of little use in estimation of an educational establishment competitive ability in a specific region. For this reason, the method must include a regional estimation of an IHL. This is conditioned, first of all by the fact that sociological measurements of the last years show that 90% of school graduates want to get a professional education in their region. In this connection, it is important to note that competitive ability of an educational establishment is determined only by the properties that represent a considerable interest for the regional consumer. This is why the proposed estimation method, criteria and indices utilized are developed based on the regionalization principle.

Dynamism as a principle is oriented not only at ensuring of an IHL adaptation to sociocultural, economic and business, demographic dynamics in the region and country development but also at the rates of renewal of the discipline's content, scientific and research, educational and pedagogical and material and technical base at ensuring professional mobility of graduates on the regional, federal and international labor markets which must be introduced into the "expert model" and be ensured by a high level of educability, self-learning and re-qualification. Dynamism reflects as well in the principle of primary, double and triple advance in specialists training: primary advance of the quality of real knowledge got by a student during the training process over the knowledge embodied in technologies, organization, management; double advance in high school teachers training; triple advance in highly qualified workers training, i.e., candidates and doctors of science conducting research of problem domains in higher professional education (Kharchenko, 2013). In the fifth place, at the moment, the teachers in Russian higher education are perplexed by effective contracts, IHLs are preoccupied with their efficiency and Ministry of Education and Science tries to find efficiency in optimization. Briefly, everybody is busy hunting for efficiency which at the present moment has a pronounced commercial character. Apparently, this is warranted (Kharchenko, 2013). It seems that the problems related to the search for efficiency achievement ways have a specific Russian flavor and are persistent and systemic in nature.

The aim of this study is to present to the scientific and pedagogical community the author's variant of the estimation methodology to assess a regional IHL competitive ability as it seems to be one of the most important elements leading to its efficiency.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The content of the issues discussed in this study is obtained by the researchers from varied sources and processed with the aid of content analysis. Content analysis was performed in compliance with the following logic: study of different sources (scientific and publicistic literature, mass media, laws and regulations, public statements by the leaders, expert evidences) containing information on the status of the researched issue, invariant by structure and subject matter content but externally for the most part, representing unsystematized, disorderly organized textual material.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of texts and interviews with the purpose of successive comprehensive interpretation of discovered regularities. Reflection, analysis and self-analysis of a subjective scientific, pedagogical and managerial author's experience with a view to reveal contradictions between the data of educational experience and their theoretical interpretation.

Ascension from the variety of textual and cogitative material to an abstract model of the article text content (formulation of a conceptual-categorical instrument in the shape of criteria of an educational establishment competitiveness and methods of their estimation).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Method for estimation of a regional IHL competitive ability includes a few procedures for example, estimation of a regional trend of an IHL activity, subjective perception of an IHL and IHL environment by its students use of generalized criteria and determination of an IHL competitive ability by comparison with other IHLs in the region. As a preliminary one, a procedure for identifying the regional orientation in the scientific and educational activity of an IHL according to the indices presented in Table 1 can be proposed.

It is reasonable to perform data collection and table indices analysis on a regular basis in order to trace the trends and to determine the problems. The next estimation procedure can be a study of student's subjective opinion on the IHL. The study of student's opinion is justified from the position of the student-centrist concept of education. Students can estimate their own (subjective) perception of an educational environment quality.

Table 2 perception of an educational establishment quality (Table 3). It is also reasonable to analyze the data presented in Table 2 and 3 with a certain regularity. It is worth noting that the conducted studies showed that students are not indifferent to the exterior of

Table 1: Regional orientation indices in scientific and educational activity of an IHL

Regional orientation indices	Dynamics of regional orientation indices by years					
	2010		2013		2016	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Mission orientation (reflection in the concept and development program, scientific and methodological materials of an IHL) towards educational demands of the region	-	50	-	56	-	60
Extent of informing consumers and feedback from them with respect to the quality of scientific and research and educational services (information channels)	4	-	5	+20	7	+28
Dynamics of quantity of different groups of scientific and research and educational services consumers in the region (a share of enterprises and organizations in their total number in the region)	67	-	71	+6	88	+20
Rate of consumer's engagement into procedures of education content development and educational services quality estimation	4	-	7	+43	11	+37
Share of students-services consumers studying within the framework of the special admission project	42	-	60	+30	68	+12
Level (share) of educational programs updating in compliance with the demand for educational services in the region	13	-	19	+32	24	+21
Orientation of scientific and research efforts towards the needs of consumers and interested parties in the region	12	-	14	+15	15	+7

Table 2: Subjective estimation by students of educational environment of a regional IHL for example by 100-point scale

Criterion	Index	Estimation of criterion by students, points
Noticeability	Presence and state of material components of educational establishment environment which make it more tangible (ambience of offices and classrooms, equipment, educational materials, appearance of all personnel)	0-100
Reliability	Educational establishment fulfils assumed responsibilities, operates hand over hand, always ensuring the required level	0-100
Outgoingness	Administrative, scientific and pedagogical and educational and supportive personnel strives to respond always and everywhere to any needs of its services consumers (students, employers, parents, etc.)	0-100
Availability	Ease in establishing both physical and psychological contact with administrative staff or the IHL instructors	0-100
understanding	Regional IHL strives to understand specific (individualized) needs of its services consumers	0-100
Communicability	Educational establishment in the person of administration and educators communicates with the consumers (students, employers, etc.) in a comprehensible language adapted to peculiarities of every target group	0-100
Confidence	Determined by educational establishment reputation guaranteeing a serious approach to consumers of its services	0-100
Complaisance	Politeness, respectfulness, attentiveness and amiability of all employees of the establishment to consumers of its services (educational, research etc.)	0-100
Openness	Possibility for services consumers (students, employers, etc.) to receive various information on scientific, educational, social activity of the establishment	0-100
Empathic ability	Involvement of educators into personal and professional progress and failures of students	0-100

Table 3: Subjective estimation by students of an educational establishment by 100-point scale

Estimation criterion	Estimation of criterion by students, points
Exterior of the IHL educational and auxiliary buildings	0-100
Design of the IHL adjoining territory	0-100
Popularity of the IHL among peers	0-100
Opinion on the IHL of the student's parents	0-100
Estimation by students of the regional IHL, including	
Educators	
Representatives of educational-auxiliary personnel	
Administrators	0-100
Estimation of potentiality of the whole scientific and pedagogical team of the regional IHL	0-100
Comfort of staying in the IHL	0-100
Pride of studying in the educational establishment	0-100
Confidence in employment assistance after graduating from the regional IHL	0-100
Average value	

a regional IHL. They are demanding on the pedagogical staff and constantly evaluate them, they want to feel comfortable when staying within the IHL. Perhaps, the most important thing for the conducted research and practical work of a regional IHL is the fact that it is important for the students to be confident in the employment assistance after graduating from a regional IHL (Kharchenko, 2013).

Moreover, estimation of a regional IHL competitive ability must be diversified and imply use and study of opinions of the whole row of estimation subjects (educators, employers, representatives of professional communities, administration). That is precisely the essence of the estimation of an IHL on principles of subjectivity of procedures for evaluating activity of educational systems. Data thus obtained can be used to

establish generalized criteria of an IHL competitiveness. In the proposed estimation method the criteria of a regional IHL competitiveness were formulated in the following way.

Consumer criterion: Which reflects an IHL's possibility of realizing services on the regional market in principle. Thus, the sale of educational service is considered possible if all main parameters of the service correspond to the current qualitative indices, norms and standards of educational service. If any one of these parameters does not meet this condition, the educational service should be regarded as non-competitive. In particular when analyzing an educational service in the sphere of higher education, normative parameters should include a license for training activities in different streams (professions) accredited professional educational programs in compliance with the current Federal State Educational Standard (FSSES). One of the determining bases of an IHL competitiveness is quality of an educational service (conditions of education and quality of specialists training) in this case as a set of educational environment properties preconditioning ensuring of a normative level of specialists training required from the perspective of a consumer (student, employer) and FSSES

Economical criterion: Or a price of the educational service rendered by a specific regional IHL which on the one hand is characterized by comparability (can be higher, lower, equal) with prices on the regional market of educational services of the same level and direction of training; and on the other hand, by the level of the specific utility of the educational service for the particular customer on the regional educational market, including employment opportunities in the obtained profession, quick return rate (salary level satisfying the customer, duration and return ratio of means spent on professional training) access to postgraduate and doctoral studies, satisfaction of private interests and cognitive needs, social security.

image criterion: A regional IHL's credibility on the regional market of educational services and regional (perhaps, even federal or international) labor market (image) quality and availability of the educational service, intensity of advertising, flexible price policy, social programs. Powerful image of IHL and attractiveness of its services for consumers is a confirmation of the fact that the educational establishment and its scientific and pedagogical staff possesses unique business abilities (special and psychological and pedagogical skills and competencies) contributing to increased value of services offered to customers and perceived by them.

Introduction and use of these criteria in the estimation procedure makes it possible to determine a regional IHL competitiveness ability of the IHL to keep competitive advantages to meet the consumer, economical and image criteria at all stages of functioning and to successively compete with other regional educational establishments on the regional, state and world market of educational services and labor market due to constant improvements. Later, having obtained the data on an IHL competitiveness, we shall be able to compare this data with values for similar criteria of higher learning educational establishments and get an idea about the IHL rating in the region.

CONCLUSION

Thus, use of the method of content analysis for substantiation of the method of a regional IHL estimation allowed a research of such integral characteristic of the IHL as competitiveness. By studying and improving this characteristic, a regional IHL can estimate its place in the rating of regional educational establishments and achieve not only educational but also social and economical effects of its activity.

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