

ANALYSIS OF APPROACHES TO UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS' PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY EVALUATION (THE CASE OF RUSSIA)



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Evaluation of university professors' professional activity has big significance: it is used in international university ratings and also helps to improve the quality of education. But the main reason to work out different procedures of professors' evaluation is to create a reliable system that will constantly contribute to the professional growth of faculty members. The research investigated main types of the professors' professional activity, their preferences in working time distributing as well as their attitude to those mechanisms that are able to estimate their contribution into the process of education, research and consultation at university or in community. The results show a great difference in main professional tasks perceiving among Russian and foreign professors. Findings obtained from this study can be used for comparative pedagogy as well as to organize a system of continuous professors' professional development.

Key Words: university professor; higher education; professional education activity; professional evaluation; research and educational activity

Introduction

The universities all over the world have always paid great attention to the professional activity of the faculty. The image of the university and its rank on the international educational arena depends on their professors' efficiency, abilities and talents (Ast, 2012; Kehm & Stensaker, 2009). Michael Shamos (2002), describing the peculiarities of the professor's labour, accentuates that high intelligence, developed research skills, different techniques and methods of information transferring and students motivating have always been the main characteristics of a professor. As Kelly Farrell (2009) notes, nowadays faculty's achievements in research and education are considered as one of the most significant indicators of the university's potential to occupy a leading position in educational services sphere of and to be attractive for the students from the overseas.

Though there is still no unanimity concerning evaluation criteria of the university professor's professional activity. A number of the attempts have been taken by different scholars (Yurevich, 2012; Kim, 2014; Learning Point Associates, 2011; Strategic Evaluation

of the Faculty of Arts, 2014) set the list of requirements to a professor, but the problem of his/her professional merits and activity evaluation has not been solved yet. It happens because every university professor conducts a versatile activity, which realizes in teaching, educating, researching, consulting, transferring knowledge, etc. Moreover, the functions and a scope of responsibilities of a modern scholar have changed greatly in the recent years (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2013). That is why, while defining criteria for evaluation some scientists concentrate their attention on the results that have been reached by professor. For example, describing the process of getting tenure and staff promotion, Theresa Ast (2012) enumerates some professors' achievements (a number of scientific publications, grants, social projects, etc.) that can be fixed and compared to the intensity of the other professors' activity. Other scholars, as Kim (2014) prefer to estimate inner readiness of the professor to realizing his/her activity by means of forming a complete description of the professional, managing and personal competences.

To clear up the situation it is necessary to single out the most typical requirements to a professor and to find out why academic communities in different countries insist on their complexes of methods in evaluating teacher's professional activity.

Objectives, methodology and research design

The above mentioned problems made us to determine the purpose of our research as an identification of the most popular criteria to evaluate professors' professional activity generalizing character for higher education in general. Taking into account a complex character of this problem and various approaches existing in different countries, this objective can be gained through a number of the following objectives:

- a) to compare the main types of activities that the professors are supposed to be engaged;
- b) to find out what types of professional activity are considered the most important for professors' evaluating;
- c) to compare professors in different countries attitudes to the existing procedures of evaluating their professional activity.

We have used a person-centered (Rogers et al., 2014) and competence-based approaches (Competency-Based Education, 2013) as a methodology of our research.

In order to compare the most important aspects concerning professors' work in Russia and some foreign countries we conducted a survey among the professors of the Russian universities and analyzed scientific literature on the investigation problem (Yurevich, 2012; Weinberg et al., 2009), universities' promotional documentation on the requirements of conferring of the 'Professor' title (University expectations of a Professor, 1994) as well as the standards where the expectations to their professorial-level staff were given (Average Monthly Disposable Salary; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).

The survey was carried out for a period of 6 months in January – June 2015 with 210 participating professors from 15 Russian universities.

The structure of our research was designed as a number of consequent stages.

On the first stage we made a list of the university professors' main professional activities, then, on the second stage, we conducted the questionnaire among the Russian professors. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section was aimed at finding out what types of Russian scholars' activity are considering as the most important for them and how they prefer to distribute working time among them. The second section was related to the procedures of professors' evaluation and faculty's attitude to them. The questions of sections 1 had a five-point graded response scale. The statements of section 2 suggested a rating. The questionnaire was handed out directly to the professors when we met them during conferences or work-shops, or send to them by e-mail.

Discussion of the research outcomes

As our first goal was to find out main types of activity the university professors are engaged into, we made a list of 15 professional activities in higher education and asked Russian professors, participating in the survey, to rate them using 5-point scale. We split all the answers into two categories: according to a number of years of service and according to academic rank.

Even at the stage of making the list of the professional activities (we used both Russian and foreign literature on this problem (Ast, 2012; Kim, 2014; Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2013; Role of the Professor; Strategic Evaluation of the Faculty of Arts)), we concluded that there was some difference in professional responsibilities activities among Russian and foreign professors and the results of the survey proved this fact. For example, nowadays scientific work in all the universities gained a priority, because it brings grants, higher salary and prestige in the academic circles. But for Russian professors participation in teaching (4,6) and assessing the students (4,7) is still very important. On the other hand, educational work in the community is not popular among the Russian scholars. The largest what they can do in this sphere is to attract potential applicants by means of visiting schools and telling the school-leavers about the advantages of education in their university.

The results of the survey show that there is a great difference in the rating of the most important professional activities among the university professors with a minimum teaching experience and, correspondingly, the lowest academic titles and their colleagues who have achieved academic recognition. It goes without saying that the responsibilities of the full professor or head of the chair are much more complicated than those of his younger colleagues.

There is a strong tendency to participate in different activities connected with scientific research among the young staff who have recently begun their professional career and are striving to get a doctorate degree (4,1) as well as the full professors (4,7) who usually lead

research of the postgraduate students and actively participate in different conferences and scientific projects (4,7) (Tab.1).

Table 1 – The most important types of professional activity
(as per Russian university staff)
(made by author)

Professional activity	University labour experience					Academic position		
	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 15	16 – 20	> 20	Assistant, Lecturer	Associate Professor	Professor
Scientific research	4,1	3,8	2,8	3,8	1,7	3,7	2,8	4,7
Publishing of scientific articles and monographies	4,2	2,7	2,5	2,6	2,2	3,6	3,9	4,6
Consultations for the postgraduate students	1,3	2,8	3,2	4,0	2,4	2,1	2,6	4,2
Scientific consultations for the undergraduates	3,5	3,1	3,9	2,7	2,9	2,5	3,4	3,5
Conducting of the conferences	1,5	2,8	3,2	3,7	2,9	2,1	4,0	4,7
Lectures and practical studies	4,8	4,3	4,5	4,5	4,0	4,3	4,7	4,6
Online consultations and master-classes	1,8	2,9	4,3	1,8	1,1	2,7	4,1	3,4
Viva and written exams	4,8	4,9	4,6	4,7	4,6	4,7	4,5	4,7
Making of the tests	3,7	4,2	4,5	4,1	3,2	4,1	4,3	4,2
Writing of teaching programs and other papers	2,1	3,7	4,6	4,2	3,1	3,1	4,8	3,2
Revising of the programs and teaching documents	0,3	0,7	2,5	3,9	1,7	2,1	2,4	3,7
Advertising work among the potential applicants	2,4	3,9	3,3	4,2	4,0	3,6	4,3	2,2
Membership in different boards and committees	1,1	2,7	4,8	3,8	4,3	4,2	4,4	4,6
Free educative work in the community	0,3	2,1	1,6	2,3	1,7	2,8	1,8	1,3
Heading of the chair	0	2,2	3,7	2,9	3,9	1,7	4,6	4,8

It is also possible to see different approaches of the faculty to the activities which are connected with a use of computing skills, for example: making tests or consulting on-line. Usually professors who have served at the university more than 25-30 years do not have these skills (3,2 and 1,1 correspondently). That is why they try to compensate this gap in the activity with other forms: attracting potential applicants (4,0) or writing educational programmes and methodical literature (3,1).

In the result we were able to enumerate the most common types of professors' professional activity that have a unified character:

- performing advanced scientific research;
- writing and publishing various scientific and educational articles, text-books, etc., explaining the use of innovative methods and technologies;
- conducting lectures and seminars in the fields of their scientific study for undergraduate and graduate students;
- estimating students during the examinations in the fields of their expertise;
- participating in administrative, expertising or managing activities as deans, members of different committees, councils, academic groups;
- conducting online consultations and workshops for younger colleagues and students;
- heading the chair, managing the work of a number of teachers in some academic disciplines;

It should be noted that in Russia the professors are deeply engaged into educational activity aimed at development of students' morality, striving for studying, forming of their general culture and research abilities. So we can also add to the list some more responsibilities of the professors:

- attracting potential applicants to the university by motivating them;
- consulting scientific research of the undergraduate students;
- organizing different conferences and meetings on the social and civic problems.

Besides in the recent years Russian scholars also have been actively engaged into different methodical activities, concerning working out new documentation which is required as a part of new federal educational standards. So the following activities can be mentioned:

- writing educational programmes and methodical literature for courses;
- expertising of the programmes;
- making a complete set of testing materials for measuring students' progress.

However, the professors in all the universities of the world can not hope to achieve tenure or other type of promotion without providing:

- free of charge consultations in the community, schools, colleges, funds, libraries and nonprofit organizations;
- consulting graduate students who are writing master or doctor dissertation on the problems of research;
- participation in the expertise and promotion committees, etc.

The second section of the questionnaire was aimed at finding out the attitude of the professors to different procedures of evaluating of their professional activity. Taking into account that these methods and procedures differ in Russia and other countries we suggested the participants of the questionnaire short information on each of them and asked them to rate all the 12 procedures, putting numbers from 1 (to the most valuable) till 12. We used the classification of the procedures given by M.A. Yurevich (Yurevich, 2012) and Ronald A. Berk (Berk, 2005). The attitude of the foreign professors was shown according to the popularity of the procedures described in the university instructive documentation (Use of the Title Associate Professor; Illinois Institute of Technology Faculty Handbook; Role of the Professor).

The comparison of the attitudes of Russian professors and their foreign colleagues shows a complete difference in rating of the main procedures and strategies of evaluation. The most striking is the difference towards the ability of the students to estimate their professional activity. In their answers Russian professors completely deny the fact that the students are able to give a just evaluation of their professional activity first of all because the students do not realize all the aspects of the professors' work, secondly, because the students are incompetent in pedagogy and psychology (Tab. 2).

Table 2 - Attitude of the professors to different procedures of their evaluation
(made by author, data from Yurevich, 2012; Berk, 2005 was used)

No	Procedures	Ranking	
		Russian professors	Foreign professors
1	Students' rating	10	1
2	Evaluation by the experts	4	2
3	Self estimation	3	10
4	Video records of the lessons	11	9
5	Students' questionnaire	9	3
6	Opinion of the alumni	12	11
7	Evaluation by the university administration	7	6
8	Special committees and commissions	6	5
9	Professor's portfolio	5	8
10	Colleagues' evaluation	2	12
11	Awards and incentives	8	6
12	Complex evaluation	1	4

There are similar arguments in the surveys of the western scholars, but they note that if students' evaluations are conducted on a regular basis and they are given reliable questioning lists then the results can be more valid (Chen & Hoshower, 2003).

The fact that alumni's opinion and video records of the lessons are not used in Russian universities for professors' evaluation has also decreased their rating in the answers of the Russian scholars.

Conclusion

The analysis of different strategies of evaluating the professors' professional activity has been presented in this paper. The study of this problem showed a considerable difference in the main aspects of the professors' work in Russian universities and higher educational institutions in other parts of the world. Moreover, because of the existing differences in approaches to the criteria of this evaluation, the strategies and procedures of analyzing the professors' contribution into the educational process also vary.

The finding of the research investigation can be used by the administration of the university in creating a continuous system of professional development of the faculty.

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