

UNIVERSITY AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

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The paper analyzes the mission of the university as a social phenomenon which implies, first of all, that having rich cultural and academic traditions as well as advanced facilities and resources, the university is destined to become a major educational, cultural, and business center of the Region, its driving force. There are various mechanisms for the university to perform its multipurpose role. One of them is based on its educational and cultural functions and can be presented by a variety of options beyond its academic curriculum. The paper presents the experience of Kazan Federal University in implementing a life-long learning (LLL) program, its basic stages and achievements. The authors arrive at the conclusion that the LLL program can help to promote social inclusion and personal fulfillment, as well as to increase people's employability and social adaptability. The central point of the program is the idea that people at any age and at any stage of their life should have a chance to take intense training courses in various fields of knowledge. Kazan Federal University offers a multifaceted LLL program that has several levels and profiles (Children's University, Minor University, optional short- and long-term courses for undergraduates in different fields of knowledge, University of the Third Age). The LLL program contributes a lot to further creative development of the people of the Volga Region.

Keywords: university, education, society, student, social role, life-long learning (LLL), LLL programs, Minor University, multidivisional approach

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, as it has done throughout its history, the university accumulates the world and Russian cultural heritage, retains its role of a major center of learning and research as well as an important cultural center. Its academics and students follow the long-standing traditions of the highest moral and academic standards and democratic ideals.

The university's rich potential creates a unique opportunity for pioneering work in various branches of science.

There are various mechanisms for the university to perform its multipurpose role. One of them is based on its educational and cultural functions and can be presented by a variety of options beyond its academic curriculum, life-long learning program (LLL) being among them.

The ideas of life-long learning are getting more and more popular in our world of new technologies and globalization. LLL problems are discussed today by many scholars (Asprin & Chapmen, 2001; Burns, 2002; Green, 2002; Colardin & Bjornavold, 2004; Nordstrom, 2008; Fakhrutdinova, 2016; Rozhko, 2014; Khovanskaya, 2015). Our world is changing so fast that if we do not keep developing

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constantly, we are sure to be left behind. LLL implies the non-stop building of skills, competences, and knowledge throughout an individual's life increasing his/her competitiveness and life quality.

Moreover, it is well known that LLL keeps one's mind sharp. Active mind is supposed to stimulate physical activity and to keep one's spirits high. Besides, LLL may help people to adapt to the changing world and gives them a feeling of self-fulfillment. It is clear that the process of building "learning society" in Russia should be based on the LLL ideas. This paper seeks to describe the LLL system implemented in Kazan Federal University, which is one of the leading educational establishments of Russia.

METHODS

Our study uses both theoretical (literature review, complex and comparative analyses, summarizing the advanced experience) and practical (participant observation, interviewing) methods. Thus, we have interviewed 31 students of KFU Minor University (MU) in order to find out the reasons why they joint the program. It turned out that 42% of them were planning to enter the university after school and thought that MU is the best way to get prepared both for state exams and for future studies here. 37% of the respondents saw MU as a good chance to advance their knowledge in the sphere of interest, to be guided by highly-qualified university lectures, as well as to have access to the up-to-date university facilities. 17% admitted that they were strongly recommended to participate in the program by their parents, who believe MU to be a useful tool to socialize their introvert children.

Besides, our interviewing of the Third Age (U3A) program participants gave interesting results. They were asked if the program helped them in any way. Everybody was satisfied with the program, but the reasons were different. 53% out of 25 respondents came here to widen their social contacts and they did find new friends at the university. 22% of pensioners were eager to acquire new knowledge and skills, while 20% of them wanted to keep their mental health in order through cognitive activity. The rest 4-5% – admitted that they didn't know how to manage their free time.

However, the age of children (5-9 years old) didn't allow interviewing them. Instead, we decided to use the method of participant observation. We attended and analyzed lessons of Children's University during two months. Our observation showed that children don't miss classes; they are active and involved in the process at all the stages of the lesson. They are curious and used to asking questions and analyzing information. They are motivated to solve creative problems and work in teams. All this was achieved thanks to the systematic and intensive work of their teachers (university professors and lectures).

RESULTS

Kazan Federal University has built a multifaceted LLL system on the basis of non-linear multidivisional approach, which allows drawing various social groups into the LLL process.

The program starts with the Children's University (CU) meant for girls and boys aged 5 to 14. It was opened in 2011, and today about 2500 children attend its classes. Its main aim is to promote scientific knowledge and to get children interested in science. Children listen to lectures delivered by the university professors, take part in project work under the supervision of lecturers, and work in the university laboratories with the most advanced equipment. The CU program includes not only attending lectures and classes but also visiting museums and exhibitions. Children may go to the city museums and to the University museums as well. There is a number of famous museums in Kazan Federal University, such as The Museum of History of Kazan University, The Archeological Museum, The Stukenberg Museum of Geology, The Eversmann Museum of Zoology, The Museum of Kazan School of Chemistry, The Ethnographic Museum, etc. Besides, a true gem of the University is Lobachevsky Scientific Library established at the end of the 18th century. It has accumulated over 5 million volumes including 150 thousands old and rare units. Some collections of old book and manuscripts are invaluable and unique. All these riches are available for the Children's University students. The KFE Children's University is a member of the European Association of Children's Universities.

Senior schoolers may choose to enter one of 9 departments of the Minor University (MU), which was established in 1979. It is one of the main areas of activity of the Pre-university Training Center. Its aim is to develop creative activity and cognitive abilities of teenagers, to help them choose their future profession and get ready for the university entrance exams. Children may take special psychological career-guidance and self-identification tests. Today, Minor University enrolls about 500 students at the following departments: Physics and Mathematics, Astronomy, Chemistry and Biology, Humanities, Philology, Foreign Languages, Psychology, Computer Science, Journalism. MU students often win the first places in academic competitions of different levels. They also present their reports at local and all-Russian scientific conferences.

Having entered the university, the students have a lot of opportunities not only to master their future profession, but also to take optional short- and long-term courses in different fields of knowledge. Thus, the linear structure of the KFU LLL program turns into a branched system. The long-term courses (2–3 years of study) presuppose that learners acquire a new additional profession (psychologist, lawyer, interpreter, etc.). Short-term courses (2–10 months) aim to deepen and advance students' knowledge and skills in a certain sphere. The Department of Additional Education for Students (DAES) established in 1993 includes the

following centers: Spanish Center of Education and Culture, Independent Attesting and Methodical Center, German Center of Education, Science and Culture, Training Center of Computational Mathematics and Information Technologies, Training Center “History and Modernity”, Training Center “Modern Biology”, Training Center “Modern Philology”, Training Center of the Oriental Studies Institute, Training Center of the English Language Department, Training Center of the French Language Department, Training Center of the Law Faculty, Training Center of Economics and Management, Training Center of Journalism and Social Science, Training Center of Tatar Language and Culture, Montessori Pedagogics Center, Center of Mediation, Conflict Resolution and Extremism Prevention. DAES is aimed at providing the opportunity for acquiring supplementary knowledge, competences and skills. The graduates of the Department significantly improve their competitiveness in the labour market.

Both undergraduates and graduates of the university may choose to continue their education taking one of the following retraining courses to acquire an additional qualification: Interpreter in the sphere of professional communication (English, German, and French languages), Practical Psychology, Landscape Design, Physical Training, Sports and Remedial Gymnastics. Besides, the university offers a number of refresher training programs, such as Methods of Teaching Russian as a Second Language, English for Business and Professional Communication, English for Academic Purposes, School of Leadership, Mediation, Extremism and Terrorism Prevention, Effective Negotiations, Non-confrontational Communication, Cross-cultural Effective Communication, Family Disputes Regulation.

To crown all this, the program includes the University of the Third Age (U3A) founded in 2007. It is a unique and exciting project. Retired and semi-retired people come together and learn together, not for qualifications but for their own pleasure. They share their skills and life experiences: the learners teach and the teachers learn, and there is no distinction between them.

The slogan of the KFU U3A is “One stays young while he is learning” (Confucius). Learning here not only helps to keep one’s mind sharp but also supports elderly people in overcoming psychological barriers and maintaining healthy social relationships. This project encourages people to gain self-confidence, to develop their creative abilities and to share their knowledge and experiences with each other. U3A offers the following programs: Economics and Law, Political Science, Philosophy, Basics of Computing, Pedagogy and Psychology, History of Religions, History of Kazan. The LLL program is very popular not only in the University but also in the whole Volga region of Russia.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the literature on the problem shows that the idea of learning through life is not new (Lindeman, 1926; Yeaxlee, 1929; Schwartz, 1974; Duncan, 1984;

Gelpi, 1985; Knapper & Croyley, 1985; Longworth & Davies, 1996; Levine, 1998; Spring, 1998; Nordstorm & Merz, 2006; Mascle, 2007; etc.). For instance, we find in (Lindeman, 1926) that education can have no endings, and vocational education should be followed by “adult education”, the purpose of which is to bring meaning into one’s life.

In 1929, another educationalist, B. Yeaxlee, wrote about education as part of living. “Life, to be vivid, strong and creative, demands constant reflection upon experience, so that action may be guided by wisdom...” (Yeaxlee, 1929: 28).

Later, the term “life-long education” was transformed into “life-long learning”, a wider and more accurate term, since it includes both formal and informal forms of learning.

The concept of learning is seen here as an individual entity and a personal duty. It should be noted that formal learning proceeds within an organized and structural context while non-formal learning implies activities that are not explicitly designated as learning. In fact, LLL comes against two structural axes that characterize the modern school model – the spatial and the temporal axes. It goes beyond the space of the school with regard to its educational practices and steps outside the temporal limits of school system since it gives the possibility to negotiate schedules with the necessary degree of flexibility. The role of the school with regard to LLL changes completely because the basic education is now perceived as only a prelude, aimed to provide people with means of communication and to develop their ability to obtain information independently. Therefore, the ideas of LLL change the entire understanding of the modern concept of education. LLL is closely connected with the notion of the learning society since it is expected to maximize the existing educational potential in local communities. In this sense, the society can also be seen as educational.

LLL is supposed to have a number of undoubtful advantages, since it results in the life enriching because of the self-fulfillment, helps people to establish valuable relationships, and keeps them active participants in society. It opens people’s mind and makes it curious, as well as helps them to fully develop their natural abilities. It shows how to adapt to changes and face challenges. LLL brings meaning into the life thus making the world a better place.

Nowadays, adult learning is part of a much broader process, as individuals less rely on traditional institutions and can select from a variety of learning centers including distance education and e-education.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, in knowledge-based economy, those having the lowest levels of knowledge and skills, as well as the weakest updating capacity are less and less likely to earn a place in the sun. A life-long learner will keep up with the society by staying aware of changes in such areas as technology, finance, politics, etc. Job

promotions will go to the employees who are better trained in their job fields. New specialties open up all the time, and life-long learners remain at the top of their fields so that when opportunities come they can catch them immediately. Moreover, LLL is constantly enriching life with new chances, ideas, and desires. We are sure that it is the mission of universities to become the center of these processes. Our theoretical and practical research of the KFU's experience in this field shows that its LLL system presents one of the most effective models to be used by other higher education institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present paper reviews the basic characteristics of LLL and sums up the rich experience of Kazan Federal University in this field. Therefore, it can be recommended to those who wish to know how to organize the process at their colleges and universities.

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