

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This paper shows the process of how university faculty master new training programs on professional development courses, held at the RIPD. As a result of the course, the participants expand their professional capabilities by obtaining additional skills, required innovative knowledge and expertise in the education sphere. The program of the courses and the results are being studied by sociological research methods. The high degree of participants' satisfaction on the training content and learning process has been identified.

Keywords: continuous professional development of university faculty, participants of RIPD, satisfaction with professional development courses

Introduction

By unanimous decision of 46 participating countries of the Bologna process, the Republic of Kazakhstan was the first of the Central Asia countries which joined the European Higher Education Area in March 11, 2010. Kazakhstan's joining to the Bologna process was founded in 1997, when Kazakhstan signed and ratified the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications related to higher education. The next year (25/V-1998), in Sorbonne, the declaration was adopted, which could unite all universities around the world. It stated: "We must provide our participants and society in general with the higher education system, which would provide the best opportunity to maximize self-realization. Open European area of higher education has serious prospects which certainly take into account our diversity, but it requires constant effort on removing all existing barriers as well as creating the basis for teaching and learning that is contributive for mobility and closer cooperation."

The implementation of practical steps aimed to introducing new foundations, methods, procedures of credit education program has become an important task

of tactical and strategic operations of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK). These operations are listed in the Strategy of Development of Kazakhstan till 2050. According to them, the MES plans and implements all appropriate measures. These measures include the establishment of two new departments in the Republican Institute of Professional Development for executive and academic staff of the Republic of Kazakhstan education system: Methods of teaching and learning in higher education (MTLHE) and International Educational Programs (IEP).

Goals of the first department include:

- Continuous professional development of executive and academic staff of pedagogical programs in universities in accordance with global trends and the latest achievements of Pedagogical Science, the prospects for their development, as well as considering the needs of the Kazakhstan market economy in the preparation of highly qualified professionals;
- Support of executive staff in innovation, organization and R&D, expert evaluation of the author's programs, guidebooks, training and thematic plans providing professional development in the education sphere;
- Conducting research on current issues of professional development for university faculty.

Achieving these goals will contribute to the formation of professional competence of a new university instructor, who will be able to teach critical thinking for future professionals.

The second department provides the implementation of international education programs, organization of short-term courses on skills development in leading foreign universities of Britain, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Japan, attracting foreign professors for training.

A full training course consists of four weeks, during the first two weeks the participants study on-line (via the website RIPD). At this stage, they learn the syllabus, course materials and guidelines, and they pass a preliminary test on-line. The participants who have positive score are invited to RIPD for continuing their studies full time, which lasts two weeks more. For the participants from other cities the accommodation in the hotel is paid.

All courses include the following units:

1. Modern approaches in the continuous education system;
2. Technologies for self-development, self-improvement, self-realization;
3. Grading educational outcomes;
4. Modern digital technology in teaching and learning.

The professional development program for the Kazakhstani faculty has been developed at the RIDSES (Republican Institute for Development of Staff of Education System) for the first time. Therefore, its quality has been the essence of the nearest problematic situation. It should have been found out:

what sections, topics of the program could have been insufficiently effective or difficult for comprehension from the point of view of the participants. Thus, in order to receive some feedback from the students, determine quality of the training and to improve it, it has been decided to conduct a regular sociological survey of the participants' training. The results of this empiric research that is of descriptive character will help determine further ways and levels of the new investigations. It would be impossible to find a focus of the new searches, which have not been considered before by anybody, without this preliminary analysis. It is a theoretical methodological basis for determination of the problematic situation, the answers to which are valuable in themselves.

Within the period from October 2012 to October 2013 457 participants from 16 universities of all regions of Kazakhstan had their training within the framework of the state order, including – 55 abroad. The participants were divided into five cohorts: 61, 47, 42, 150 and 102 people respectively. 227 of them studied in Kazakh, and 175 - in Russian. Thus, results of our research were dynamic in time and were representative as for language of instruction.

Part of background in the research is weak. What is important to professional development of academic staff. The authors must write some information in the literature.

Research method is a questionnaire. The questionnaire has been developed by the Department of methods of teaching and learning in higher education of RIPD. It consists of 14 questions, 6 of them have a similar bilayer assessment scale. The first layer consists of 10 points on the 100 percentage scale. These points are represented in the second layer of assessment in a 5-point scale: “5 – excellent”, “4 – good”, “3 - satisfactory”, “2 – unsatisfactory” and “cannot assess”. The remaining 3 questions were closed, 1 –semi-open and 3 questions were open-ended.

The poll procedure – a survey was organized at the end of the course. The questionnaire has been answered anonymously in the classroom.

The purpose of the research is seeking feedback with the audience to identify the quality of learning and improve it during regular public opinion polls conducted among graduates of the courses.

Research objectives:

1. Providing prompt, regular sociological information and providing recommendations for improving the content of the educational process.
2. Creating a system of sociological support of the RIPD activities in the field of education services quality management for university faculty (monitoring of the assessment of the quality of educational services).
3. Study of participants' opinions on various aspects of the educational process.

The interpretation of empirical data. Results

Answers to the question “How useful for you was a course in general?” (responses in %) are shown in Chart 1. As it can be seen from the chart, the opinions of the participants of all cohorts are the same. If there was no participant in the first three cohorts who thought that the course was “unsatisfactory”, then there was one in each of the last two cohorts among 100 respondents. However, if the quantity of participants who “could not assess” the activity of RIPD was barely noticeable (from 3 to 6%) in the first three cohorts, in the last two cohorts the quantity of such participants was very small (1%). However, the number of respondents who graded it as “satisfactory” and “good” in the last cohorts was more than “excellent”. It provides some area for reflection for faculty of RIPD. Thus, a specific feature of these cohorts was that they were formed from Almaty universities professors. They were not fully released from classes at the workplaces, as it was in case with the participants from other regions. This prevented them from regular attendance. In our opinion, this has a negative impact on the integrity of the course materials perception. The resulting assessment can be considered objective because every survey was conducted after the end of the course. In this case, RIPD faculty could not influence the respondents - graduates of the course. As a result, 94% of participants of all cohorts graded the usefulness of the course as “good” or “excellent”. We think that such assessment shows high effects of training courses in RIPD.

Answers to the question “What section for you was the most difficult?” (in %) are shown in Chart 2 . According to the survey of the participants of the first three cohorts it can be seen that the contents of the 1st section was difficult for small quantity of participants, from 5 to 15 percent (average 9.6 %), the 2nd section was difficult for an average of 15.2 %, the third section – for 15.6% and the 4th section – for 41 % of the audience. We can see that average opinion of audience of the 2nd and 3rd sections of the five cohorts are generally similar, i.e. 15 participants out of a hundred. Range of participants’ opinions of all five cohorts on the 1st and 4th sections is more than 4 times (or more precisely 4.27 times).

During more detailed approach, you can find the following. First of all, the content of the 4th section for the primary part of faculty from Almaty (Cohorts 4, 5) was easier than for the participants of the first three cohorts, where there were more faculty from other regions of Kazakhstan. It seems to be a result of the fact that Almaty universities have begun to use IT- technology earlier, more intensely and successfully than universities of other regions. Secondly, upon studying the results of the first survey, the RIPD faculty, that was teaching the 4th section, started delivering the lectures in a more accessible and easier way for understanding. In any case, the decrease of difficulties in mastering the course materials that are delivered at RIPD is an indication of positive change.

The content of the 1st section of the course was easier than the other sections. It was considered difficult by 15% and 8% of the participants of Cohort 1 and 2 respectively. Only each twentieth participant in Cohort 3 thought that it was challenging. 9 and 11 percent of respondents of Cohorts 4 and 5 considered this section more complex. The average value of participants who considered the content of the 1st section difficult is around 9.6% (5 to 15%).

The content of the 2nd and 3rd sections was at about the same level of difficulty. Their average values are 15.2 and 15.6 percent. More difficult for participants of almost all cohorts was the 4th section. It should be noted that if it was difficult for 64 % to learn IT-technologies in Cohort 1, in Cohort 2 it was 55%, and in Cohort 3 – 52%, in Cohorts 4 and 5 this proportion dropped to 18 and 16 percent, respectively. From this continuous decline of the share of participants who believed the content of IT-section to be complex, it can be concluded that the methods and ways of explaining the material in this section were getting better, more intelligibly. It can be said that the improvement was four times ($64/16 = 4$). [However, the last word cannot be understood in a literal sense, although the probability of truth is closer to reality. In this case, you cannot disregard the high level of preparedness of participants in different cohorts on the content of different sections.]

In any case, reducing the difficulties of the materials in the last cohorts is an indicator of positive change in the activity of RIPD, its professors.

During the training the RIPD instructors used such forms of learning as: training, case-study, on-line training, consulting, etc. Communication with colleagues in an informal atmosphere was considered as a special form of training. Their results are presented in Chart 3. According to it we can make the following conclusions. First, with each new cohort, a lecturer improved methods of training. 22 % of participants of Cohort 1 liked it, and up to 57 % of the participants in Cohort 5. This factor is the most important for prestige of our institution. And international experience of implementing the credit program shows that training is the most effective method of learning.

Secondly, communication with colleagues in the form of informal relations is the most attractive for the audience from a psychological, recreational, cognitive, value, and other sides. This criterion was the most attractive for participants from Almaty (Cohorts 4 and 5). Apparently, this was due to the fact that they worked in the same city and had an opportunity to talk to each other more closely and for a long time in RIPD. With great confidence we can assume that in the course of this dialogue they discussed particular difficulties or implementation of new methods of teaching in their educational institutions. By studying a variety of new teaching methods in RIPD they had an opportunity to discuss it in more detail.

Thirdly, the question of the quality of consultations of the RIPD teaching staff in the first three cohorts showed that from 6 to 18 percent of the audience thought

that this quality was high. And in Cohorts 4 and 5 this quantity increased several times (up to 53 and 56 percent). This discrepancy can be explained as follows: 1) in the questionnaire, used for the survey, participants of the first three cohorts were asked to choose one answer from variants of answers (total amount on various forms should be 100%). Because of this, participants in favor of more important answer option ignored the answer “consulting with instructors”, 2) as a result of good training sessions and lectures that participants had no further need to receive consultations from instructors in extracurricular time, and 3) in the course of full-time study they had limited extracurricular time, because the participants had to study independently additional materials in two weeks, paying special attention to the methods and techniques of digital technologies and prepare a portfolio (final work) to be submitted for the commission.

In the modified questionnaire for the participants of Cohorts 4 and 5, the respondents could assess any form of training on any scale of assessment. This provides a higher average level of assessment in various forms of training.

On-line training was rated as a favourable form of teaching by fewer participants in all cohorts (from 12 % to 34 %). This is because, firstly, in Kazakhstan on-line training is not used extensively. It means that it is not widely used. All classes in our universities are organized in a classroom form. Secondly, the use of on-line equipment and technology in education does not have its own special didactics. Such training is still presented as a kind of classroom lectures, held just via web-camera.

Professors of the department and MTLHS were interested what kind of difficulties the participants had during the course. Answers are shown in Table 1.

Almost for all cohorts the most difficult was “too high speed of learning”. This answer was given by 28-29 % of respondents of four cohorts. The second challenge was “lack of sufficient proficiency in IT-technology”. In average, every fifth participant (19.6 %) found it difficult to answer this question. And here, as in previous questions associated with the use of computer technology, Almaty universities faculty had fewer difficulties on IT- technologies (15 and 18%) than university faculty from other regions (21-23 %). “Challenges with delivering the material” were observed at the beginning of the MTLHS department’s activity (25% in Cohort 1) and in the beginning of academic year 2013 (18 % in Cohort 4). And then decrease of this tension was seen (in Cohorts 2 and 3 respectively, 17 and 12% and Cohort 5 - 16%). Different cohorts complained differently about “too many materials”. However, in the last two cohorts one of five participants pointed out the fact of “too difficult course material”.

Only one out of ten participants pointed to “the lack of sufficient attention from the instructor” as one of the challenges of the learning process. Finally, every 20th participant pointed to “lack of interest (motivation) to the course as a whole” as the

reason of learning difficulties. There were slightly more such participants among Almaty universities faculty (6 – 7 people out of a hundred) than among professors from regions (less than 4 people in a hundred).

We can provide the following opinions as a part of qualitative interpretation of the quantitative indicators. RIPD faculty used the most innovative, new methods of interactive teaching in their lectures and workshops. Except for one aspect of the learning process – “too rapid learning” – noticeably smaller part of the audience pointed other aspects. And then, this criterion does not show a lack of structural quality of the educational process. On the contrary, it shows only completeness of the education content. And it cannot be taken as a lack of educational process.

The next aspect of the study – “lack of sufficient proficiency in IT-technology” – is not a negative indicator of the learning process. This difficulty mainly points to the lack of “proficiency in IT-technologies” among participants themselves rather in educational process in RIPD. More specifically, the training of these technologies at RIPD reveals the participants’ lack of these skills. This indicator indirectly specifies lack of attention to IT-technologies at the periphery or inactive use of it by the participants themselves.

Such indicators as: “too many materials” and “too complicated training material” are not demerits of training in the RIPD but they indicate a low level of knowledge of their participants.

It should be underlined that all challenges discussed above were specified by a very small (an average of 1/4 on the first indicator to 1/20 of the seventh indicator) part of the audience. Therefore, for the primary part ($\frac{3}{4}$ to 19/20) of the participants the training courses are an important and necessary process.

Finally, the following answers were received (Table 2) to the question “How are you going to use the material in your teaching practice?”, firstly, number of participants in each cohort who stated: “revise academic disciplines using knowledge” was growing continuously – from eight hundred (in Cohort 1) to one hundred forty participants (in Cohorts 4 and 5). The context of this fact can be different. Among them, in our opinion, the most obvious one is that instructors of RIPD explain the importance, necessity and obligation of interactive methods of learning and self-development, self-improvement and self-realization, the application of new methods of assessment, as well new IT- technologies for participants to be used in teaching.

Secondly, the proportion of participants expressing desire to “develop a new part in the learning process” in each cohort has been certainly decreasing. If there were nine of ten respondents in Cohort 1, in the last cohort their number decreased to four out of ten, i.e. it dropped by more than a half. While the share of university faculty who wanted to revise the whole university course has grown almost five times.

In our opinion, the latest figures are the most important and final for all the RIPD's activities within such a short period of its establishment. The responses expressed the essence of not only self improvement of audience, but also a great desire of self-realization in using new interactive teaching methods that meet international standards of teaching for faculty of universities.

Of course, such studies in the future will be regular. On the one hand, it helps improve activities of RIPD. On the other hand, as the accumulation of a database of empirical sociological research continues, it allows us creating a wide and deep, and most importantly - a systemic study. Tracing the process of improving our graduates as instructors at universities using methods such as cohort and longitudinal study of the RIPD participants, you can reach new levels of analysis of the implementation process and improve the quality of teaching in higher education in the long term. Our future plans include organization of such studies on international level. This allows to ensure a comparative analysis with foreign universities – partners.

Speaking about our relations with foreign partners, it should be said that our participants who took professional development courses in foreign universities, informed us about the high efficiency of this form of learning. In addition, they highly appreciate a full-time and on-line study conducted by foreign scientists, educators, being organized for the participants of RIPD in Almaty. As the practical steps of experience exchange at the international level, along with scientists from the U.S. and the UK, in September 2013 there was a very interesting training with the Kazakhstani universities faculty and Bulgarian scientists – Doctor of Education, Professor Irina Koleva and Violeta Dobichina. Their lectures and workshops have generated considerable interest. We think it would be interesting in the future to continue this partnership and conduct international comparative studies at universities in Bulgaria and Kazakhstan on the basis of specially prepared multi-stage and long-term program. We believe that it would be useful for the universities of our countries.

Thus, our work experience with the participants during this period has shown high efficiency of training programs for university faculty on such key indicators of quality such as:

- Compliance of training topics with strategic directions and objectives of the State Programme for Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020;
- Increase of number of professors that have adjusted their teaching activities regarding the use of innovative educational technologies;
- focus of the training programs at determination of education challenges by university in general and the problems of quality training of future teachers in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan in particular;

– Satisfaction with the content and the results achieved as a customer (represented by Ministry of Education) with training programs for university faculty and participants themselves;

– The degree of implementation of the results of training by the participants in the educational-methodical activity at their workplace, reinforced by the fact that results obtained in the RIPD, knowledge and skills are delivered to the colleagues (who did not attend these courses), then there is a transfer of innovative experience through our participants to all faculty members of the universities.

By implementing a new system of training we state an important goal: professional development of faculty, strengthening competitiveness and attractiveness of pedagogical skills for young people, and thus, updating the academic environment. The words “teach the teacher - teach the nation” –are the key ones in our responsible mission.

Conclusion

The results showed that a large majority of university faculty of Kazakhstan who took part in the survey is mainly satisfied with the content and the results of their studies, but only 48 % to 60 % of all respondents are absolutely satisfied.

2. The quality of education can be improved if information technology is applied more and more actively in a classroom.

3. Proportion of faculty members who are planning to revise their training materials after training at RIPD is 92 %.

4. Analysis of the received comments from faculty allowed identifying the strongest points of the learning process at RIPD as highly qualified instructors and a high level of training of graduates.

5. The new program of university faculty training courses is modern and relevant. At the same time, we can provide more detailed improvement of its structure by taking into account the participants’ opinions.

6. Thus, the problem, which has been defined at the beginning of the research, indefinite quality of the training program of the RIDSES has been responded: it turned out to be a reliable basis for academic process focused at quality enhancement of teaching by the faculty of the Kazakhstani universities.

7. The received answer has challenged us by two tasks: firstly, to find out practical efficiency of the obtained knowledge by the participants in their teaching career (it requires panel research in the future); secondly, to conduct comparative analysis of the content structure of similar programs in the international professional development centers by the university faculty.

Annex

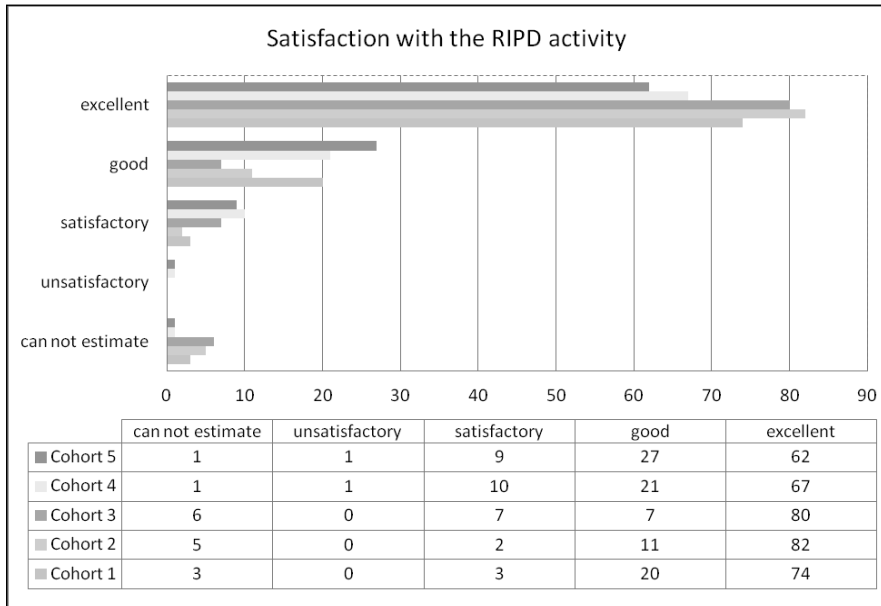


Chart 1. In general share of participants assessed the RIPD activity (in percentage)

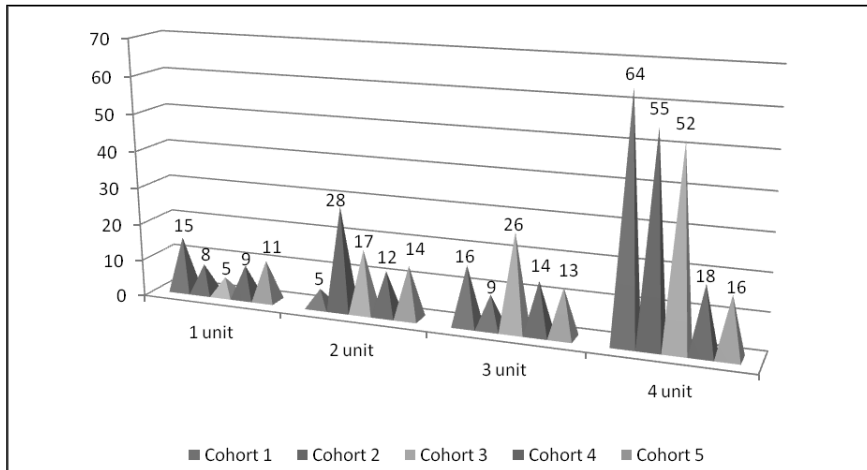


Chart 2. Assessment of the level of challenge of every unit for each cohort (in percentage)

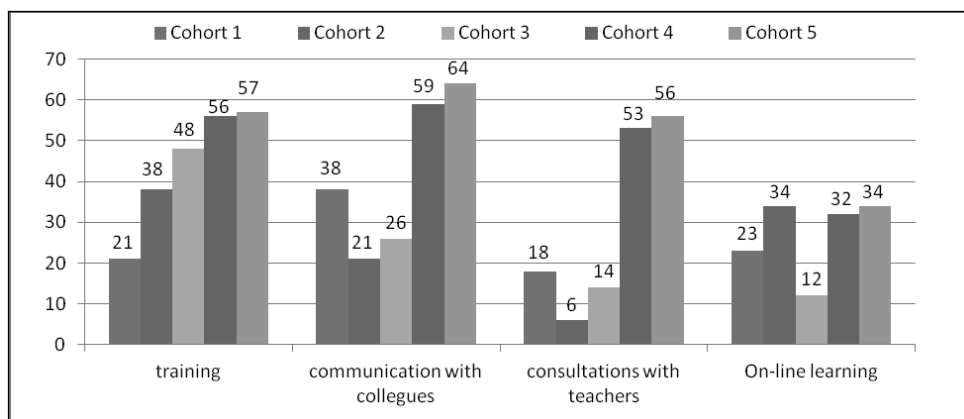


Chart 3.Favourable forms of training

Table 1. Primary challenges shown as with decrease of average indicators

	Answers	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5	Ave-rage
1	Too high speed of learning	28	15	29	29	28	25,8
2	Insufficient IT-proficiency	23	21	21	18	15	19,6
3	Challenges of delivering the material	25	17	12	18	16	17,6
4	Too many materials	10	19	12	20	19	16,0
5	Too difficult material	8	9	12	21	21	14,2
6	Insufficient attention of an instructor	3	13	12	13	10	10,2
7	No interest to the material	3	6	2	7	6	4,8

Table 2. Desire of using new materials in professional activity in future.

	Answers	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5
1	Revise using new knowledge	8,2	14,9	19	39,4	39,4
2	Develop new methods in the studying process	91,8	85,1	81	41	40,8
	Total	100	100	100	80,4	80,2

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