



Educational Strategies of Kazakhstan Universities Graduates

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ABSTRACT

The article shows the relevance of higher education (HE) in the light of the strategy "Kazakhstan-2050"; it also explains the need for upbringing of modern youth, aiming at building their own life and educational strategies (ESs), the main point of which is a subject to scientific study. In general, this study is focused on the universities graduates' professional self-determination at the entering the labor market. The article deals with the students' ESs based on their views on the purpose of HE and expected prospects for future employment. Graduates expected from the forthcoming employment in the first place, career, and only secondarily - professional, which is typical for the societies focused on the development of the market type of the state. In the educational process, at the same time, students, on the one hand, understand the need for the acquisition of professional knowledge, on the other hand, they seek to receive universal basic skills. Positive trends in education aimed at the intellectual renewal of the nation are not possible without the formation of new ESs. The authors believe that it is necessary to immediately begin the implementation of the "Strategy 2050," in practice, with the simultaneous modernization of the HE system. Without the implementation of this program the potential of HE in the Republic of Kazakhstan will not be implemented.

Keywords: Human Capital, Higher Education, Educational Strategies

JEL Classifications: I210, I230, Z130

1. INTRODUCTION

Modernization and improvement of the educational policy in the modern global world order are not possible without a radical change in the socio-economic relations, without developing new thinking, adopting dynamism as a norm of each individual's life (Romanova and Noskova, 2014). The rapidly changing conditions of life in the information-oriented society make people search for new approaches aimed at qualitative change of higher education (HE) system. This case refers to the increased volume of new knowledge, the lack of a transitional period from the acquisition of these skills to applying them.

According to the President of the Kazakhstan Republic, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbaev, "a new type of economic development leads to the need for workers to change their profession several times during life, constantly improving their skills. The concept of education itself is being transformed and expanded. Increasingly, education is no longer

equated with the formal school and even university education. The transition from the concept of functional training to the concept of personal development. The new concept provides for individualized education that takes into account the ability of every human being and contributes to his self-realization and development" (Lecture by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, 2006).

Currently, human capital is the foundation of any civilized state (Coleman, 2001). Hence, education is the foundation of any society.

In this regard, the President of the Kazakhstan Republic, Nazarbayev in his word on "Strategy 'Kazakhstan-2050': New policy of the prosperous state" paid much attention to education matters, emphasizing that knowledge and skills are the key milestones of the modern educational system, and the Republic is ready to provide young people with a better education and guarantee a decent employment. "Kazakhstan people need to

2. METHODS

become a highly educated nation in the world, otherwise we will not achieve our objectives” (“A message from the President of the Kazakhstan Republic Nursultan Nazarbayev,” 2012).

The head of Kazakhstan stressed that in line with the strategy “Kazakhstan-2050,” the education system is designed to solve a number of new challenges, among which there is a full meeting the needs of Kazakhstan’s economy in highly qualified specialists.

In this word, the President of the Kazakhstan Republic Nazarbayev makes a special emphasis on the need to modernize the process of teaching itself. Therefore, through the entire text of the message, we can follow the idea that it is necessary to educate young people who will be able to not only develop the economy and technology, but also to find new life paths and ideas, to shape their own life, including educational, strategies.

According to some researchers, in the post-Soviet states, economic liberalization had led to changes in the traditional hierarchy of professional status: Market demand gradually turned professionals into the “experts-miners of money,” requiring from the workforce to have a high degree of mobility and skills to quickly switch over when the labor market changes (Romanov, 1998).

Considering the relationship of HE and the labor market, it should be said that the first component is responsible for the content and structure of the professional community through training of professionals for various spheres of economy and production, and the second represents requirements for the training process and controls the quality of the acquired education. For example, the rating of the university depends directly on the success of this university graduates’ employment (Zborovsky and Shuklina, 2008). Naturally, no university can provide an absolute guarantee of their future employment, however, the acquired HE is surely a significant factor for the future success of their work (Starostina, 2003).

In this connection, the economic theory of human capital, which has a deserved authority, considers getting a HE to be an investment into a student’s human capital, which will affect his well-being, as a derivative of the success in the labor market (Woods, 1983).

In this regard, of particular interest are issues of the universities students’ behavior in the process of getting HE: Their future orientations, actions taken to achieve the success, the current educational strategies (ESs) for future success in the job market.

Analysis of the students’ ES makes it possible to comprehensively assess the connection between the motives of acquiring education with life goals. However, following the researchers, we will consider a university graduate’s actual ES to be a student’s stable conduct pattern aimed at achieving objectives and based on an individual assessment of the situation in a certain time perspective (Fursov, 2007; Anderson et al., 1994; Ryan, 2001; Bakhov, 2015).

Of particular interest in the analysis of graduates’ ES is the motivational component of the ES, a set of requirements for further work, as well as the goals of HE acquisition and key steps in this process.

Introducing the study, we will define its basic tenets, requiring a pilot acknowledgment.

- First, a complex of views, describing the HE getting process and the forthcoming sphere of work activity, can be described by a number of factors that motivate the students’ educational activities: A factor of “time and space” (schedule, location of work place, etc.), the status of the future profession (prestige, rate of payment, career prospects), the content of professional activity (professional self-improvement and self-expression possibilities, passion for work, etc.), conditions of work
- Secondly, the requirements for future work are aligned with the goals of getting HE, so in the individual minds of students, getting a HE and finding a job, being located in different time periods, however, form a common event-conceptual space
- Thirdly, on the basis of earlier described factors that motivate the students’ educational activities, the latter can be grouped according to different “collections” of judgments about HE and work, i.e., according to the use of different ES in order to achieve the set objectives of education
- Fourthly, the students’ choice of specific ES is defined by the following environmental conditions: The university specifics, the acquired specialty, the family financial capacity, the individual actions of the student in the learning process.

For the purposes of this study, we will consider an “ES” to be a student’s continuous individual conduct, which includes the following: First, the trend towards the achievement of the set objectives, secondly, the use of available funds and, thirdly, the conditions that are necessary for this.

Thus, there are two levels of ES formation: The first level is mental, including the student’s ideas on the future work, on the present HE system available and his/her possible actions, including motivation; the second level is the practical, including the real actions of the student in the learning process.

Thus, the student’s own view on ES develops from the student’s individual experiences acquired and the combination of all the student’s available resources. Collectively, personal ideas and resource potential of the student define his/her actions.

Let’s analyze the individual components of the ES in detail.

We will assume the aim of HE getting to be the student’s idea about his/her own future, correlating with the process of getting HE. Thus, the objective is a set of situations that a student may appear in as a result of various actions undertaking. Each of the situations, described from the position of the level of claims, causes the need for various means to achieve it. In turn, the goal of HE getting is a means of achieving the objectives of employment.

Thus, there are two levels of objectives:

- The first level of the objectives — HE objectives are the totality of what the student is seeking to obtain from the educational process as a result of training activities (including the motivation of HE getting)

- The second level of objectives — Objectives of employment are a set of requirements that are mentally laid to future employment.

In connection with the above-mentioned, the overall objective of the student is to achieve certain promotion in the labor market. The set of requirements for future work, included into the common goal, are a farther perspective in comparison with the goals of HE getting, which are the means to achieve it.

“Means” are assumed to be the existence of potential resources, owned by the family of the student (or himself/herself), as well as independent activities taken by the students in the learning process (presence of sport achievements, additional education, extra-curricular activities, etc.).

“Conditions” are a characteristic of the external environment and learner-neutral circumstances (the profession being prestigious and competitive, employment difficulties, etc.).

3. RESULTS

The 4-5 year students of Kazakhstan high schools made up the sample of the study, because it is the last course of high school when the students need to be more specific about their future working life that actualizes the need for studying and further work priority setting.

During the research, the students had to formulate their own goals of HE getting and evaluate the proposed goals of HE getting by importance using a 10-point scale.

The data obtained gave a chance, at first, to rank the combination of HE getting goals by importance and, secondly, to group objectives according to a number of factors, thereby identifying a unified target structure.

Our analysis of the results identified three target groups based on the following grounds.

The first target group — Acquisition of professional knowledge and skills. The respondents of this group put the acquisition of abilities for analytical thinking, efficiency fostering, creating liability on the first place. Not less important objectives are acquiring vocational-oriented practical skills and high-level theoretical knowledge. A little less important is the establishment of self-development capability, which students understand as the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills independently. In meaningful aspect, this target group includes students who believe it is important to obtain sufficient baggage of professional skills and knowledge, while developing the necessary professional personality’s characteristics. This target group also includes indicators of the students’ openness to learning new and their readiness to accept it.

The second target group — The acquisition of basic skills and work experience in the chosen field of work. This target group is an aggregate of intentions to acquire a minimum set of knowledge

and skills needed in the modern conditions in virtually every area of employment. First of all, the mentioned objectives include knowledge of a foreign language and computer skills. Next in importance, the first-hand work experience and the acquisition of the “demanded” profession, widely needed in the labor market, are named as targets. In general, this target group aims to acquire a minimum set of skills that are in demand in the current climate. The aim, like in the previous case, is not the aspiration for self-development, or achieving a high level of professionalism. Only practical experience in their chosen field of work is recognized sufficient.

The third target group — Getting HE and a profession as a status characteristic. Such a feature as the significance of receiving a diploma can describe this target group in the first approximation. The key indicator is the diploma itself that is the main goal and has value in the future for getting a good job, as a result of its prestige and because of its presence. In general, this target group is focused on the HE status and the acquired profession. The measure of the prestige of education is either the diploma or the status of the profession.

Thus, the goals of senior students when getting a HE can be subdivided into three target groups.

The next step in the analysis was a review of the students’ existing requirements and claims to their future work. As shown previously, work is the purpose of the second level, specifying the level of claims, serving as a guidance in the labor market for the university graduate.

During the research the students were asked to rate the suggested features of a possible work by importance.

Analysis of the results identified four groups of claims, based on the following grounds.

- The first group of claims is spatial-temporal comfort. This group of claims includes, first of all, the spatial and temporal parameters of the work. In other words, the most relevant here are itinerary and place of work, the free schedule and home-office style work are ideal. Other important characteristics are a sufficient amount of free time, and close location of work place. This group also includes the chance to travel abroad. For this group of claims, such a characteristics as career growth does not matter. In general, the studied group of claims is basically characterized by spatial-temporal preferences and possibility of business trips, replacing the prospects for promotion
- The second group of claims is interesting work and the prospect of personal growth. This group includes factors that characterize such pithy parts of the work as interest in the work and its content, as well as its correspondence to the student’s ability, aptitude. In addition, the work should provide an opportunity to acquire new knowledge, abilities and skills. The pay issues aren’t of special importance. In meaningful terms, this group of claims includes the description of the chosen profession
- Third group of claims is about the high status of the work. The group includes a set of preferences for the employment status indicators: Decent pay, career opportunity, the prestige

of the profession. However, working from home is excluded completely; the place of work can only be an office.

- The fourth group of claims is devoted to comfortable working conditions. This group includes only two requirements: Firstly, a positive psychological climate at the workplace and, secondly, a comfortable workplace. In fact, this group includes, on the one hand, the desire to enforce the employment rights of the employee, on the other hand, the intention to work in the favorable psychological atmosphere. This group reflects values of social security and labor comfort.

Thus, the structure of the requirements and aspirations of university graduates concerning the upcoming work is divided into four groups.

As shown earlier, the goals of getting HE over time are the means of achieving the requirements and demands in the labor market. Therefore, the next step was the identification of target groups, on the one hand, and groups of claims, on the other, to find the matching pairs “objectives-requirements” and the allocation of specific graduates’ ES with their characteristics description.

Analysis of indicators reflecting the HE getting and demands and claims to future work identified seven different ES types, specific for seven groups of graduates.

ES #1 – “Personal fulfillment in work” is characterized by a desire for self-realization in the chosen profession, what causes the need for development of specific professional indexes in learning process, for example, such as the responsible attitude, ability to work hard. This circumstance means getting a considerable amount of theoretical knowledge as well as skills of self-organization. A distinctive characteristic of this ES is not the presence of standard professionalism signs, but its only substantive component, consisting primarily in self-development. In the forthcoming work, the determining factor is the development of professionalism, the amount of remuneration and career opportunities fade into the background.

Schematically, this ES is as follows:

- A high level of professional knowledge and skills → Interesting and informative work → self-development and self-improvement
- ES #2 – “Concentration on the growth”- Brings together those students who are focused on the prospect of career growth. The representatives of this ES are characterized by low levels of general knowledge and skills, such as computer skills, language skills or work experience. At the same time, the followers of this ES demonstrate demands to high-status indicators of future work: Big salary and career opportunities. Therefore, they are busy establishing useful contacts. The primary way of this ES realization is getting a prestigious diploma and/or obtaining an additional education.

Schematically, this ES is as follows:

- Low level of professional knowledge, skills and abilities + useful links and contacts (+ additional education) → Prestigious work

ES #3 – “self-determination in career growth” is typical for the graduates, dreaming of a successful career through the development of basic general knowledge, abilities and skills in the learning process. It’s important to establish personal contacts too. This ES is different from the concentration on the growth (ES # 2) because it denies obtaining an additional education and is aimed at self-determination in forthcoming work. This ES is for confident people, who find the presence of big salary and career prospects most important, while other claims are realized over time.

Schematically, this ES is as follows:

- The minimum required level of professional knowledge, skills and abilities + useful links and contacts → prestigious work + self-development and self-improvement
- ES #4 – “Specialist formation” is largely defined by conditions and potential of the existing situation of learning, on which the demands and claims to work are formed later. The greatest significance for the followers of this ES is the formation of their professional knowledge, skills and competence proven by an appropriate diploma, which defines requirements and claims to work. Level of payment and prestige of the profession do not have much significance, but the presence of psychologically comfortable environment (good staff) and the provision of social guarantees are mandatory. Search for the future place of work begins during studying, which is confirmed with the importance of such a measure as the establishment of useful contacts.

Schematically, this ES is as follows:

- A high level of professional knowledge, skills and abilities + prestigious education → good working conditions + interesting and informative work
- ES #5 - “Receiving a diploma” is externally similar to the “formation of specialist,” where the main purpose is in getting a diploma. Not less important indicators of future work are the existence of a close-knit team and comfortable working conditions. However, the main difference is in the high expectations about the possibility of a career, and high wage demands.

This ES does not see the need for professional development, aiming at obtaining general knowledge and skills only. Thus during this ES implementation the stress is made only on receiving the diploma of HE.

Schematically, this ES is as follows:

- The minimum required level of professional knowledge, skills and abilities + prestigious education → prestigious work + good working conditions
- ES #6 – “Professional career” is typical of the largest number of university graduates. Its ultimate goal is the realization of career growth, implying a high level of pay with possible (albeit with less weight) prospects of self-realization in the working activity.

In the course of training, the representatives of this ES find it important to obtain high professional status by acquiring a

diploma (and not just “a document”), which in fact reflects the level of professional knowledge, skills and abilities of the student. As part of the ES, one needs to exercise serious work on self-development.

Unlike ES “self-realization in the labor force,” which, in the first place, presumes inner satisfaction with work, this ES is focused on external characteristics of the status and HE itself (high school diploma status), and future profession (career outlook and salary level).

Description of the ES in general lets one say that the basic requirements for employment are the potency of self-realization and professional status. The goal of HE is to form a fully developed personality, with the intention to get the maximum effect from the process of studying in order to achieve work success in the future.

Schematically, this ES is as follows:

- A high level of professional knowledge, skills and abilities + prestigious education → Prestigious work + self-development and self-improvement

Therefore, we have six ES that are based on various combinations of judgments about the HE purposes and requirements/claim for the forthcoming work.

Next, we’ll examine the personality characteristics and activities of the students depending on the choice of this or that ES.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the study results provides an opportunity to outline the typical portraits of universities graduates preferring implementation of this or that ES.

Those graduates, who concentrate their attention primarily on studying, choose ES “self-realization in work” as a landmark. They are not very active in public and ordinary life, if it doesn’t concern the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills. An important factor, when choosing this ES, becomes the student’s chance to get employed according to the studied profession.

ES “concentration on growth” is a more “feminine” version of ES, which is preferred by those graduates, who aren’t permanently or temporarily employed. This ES is also more typical of humanities graduates who lack the knowledge required to take the prestigious job. To acquire the missing skills, they tend to opt for continuing education.

ES “self-determination in career growth” in which the graduate’s self-determination, first of all, in the career, not in professional growth (but not necessarily within the acquired profession), is usually chosen by “general profile” university students, as the breadth and depth of the acquired knowledge rule out the need for compulsory binding to a specific area of work, because a “generalist” specialist can realize his/her abilities in virtually every segment of the labor market.

ES “specialist formation,” which involves work in a restricted area, is more likely to be elected by the senior students of technical high schools (including agricultural) receiving creative specialties, as well as representatives of pedagogical, historical, sociological specialties and those studying foreign languages. Most likely, this is due to the importance of the diploma that confirms the presence of specific knowledge, skills and abilities.

Young people, characterized by low levels of achievement, select ES “a diploma getting,” as a rule. That is, this ES representatives are usually called “negligent” students, generally working, but whose work has nothing to do with their future profession.

ES “a professional career,” which involves work of high prestige and career prospects, is usually chosen by the students of state universities, distinguished as high achievers and completely yielded to their studies. The followers of this ES have the high level of expectations from their future work. Here not only the potential for self-realization is important, but also status indicators of the activities scope. This ES is not typical for the humanities students, except for future economists, lawyers and managers. A distinctive characteristic of this ES is a clear level of expectations from future work and a wish to start working immediately after graduation.

Summarizing the analysis of the typical ES representatives, it should be said that the choice of any ES depends on a number of factors: Demographic (age, gender of students), behavioral (actions of the students when studying), institutional (university status and the obtained specialty).

5. CONCLUSION

It should be noted that, according to the results of the study, there are different types of ES of senior students. The basic expectation from the future employment is the potential for career growth and only after it – for the professional growth, which is typical of the society with a market-oriented economic ideology. In the educational process, at the same time, the need to gain deep professional knowledge contrasts to the need of getting generic skills. More than a half of the ES determine the relevance of generic skills mastering, which is undoubtedly due to the evident needs of the employment market.

We are currently at a crossroad: We need to begin the implementation of “Strategy-2050” in practice immediately while simultaneously modernizing the HE system. The success of this plan determines what potential target of HE in the Republic of Kazakhstan will be in the next post crisis period of economic growth. Surely it is clear that without the emergence of new positive trends in education, without creating new ESs aimed at the intelligent update of the nation, as the Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev in his lecture Kazakhstan in the post crisis world: “Intellectual breakthrough to the future,” Kazakhstan’s national idea cannot be realized (Lecture of the President of the Kazakhstan Republic N.A. Nazarbayev, 2009).

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