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Satisfacción de los graduados universitarios con la calidad de la educación: aspectos específicos de los métodos de evaluación

University graduates' satisfaction with the quality of education: specifics of assessment methods

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Resumen

El propósito del artículo es determinar la satisfacción de los graduados universitarios con la calidad de la formación en los programas educativos. La metodología de investigación se basa en las características de la calidad de la educación, que pueden expresarse en determinados indicadores cuantitativos. Tales características medibles incluyen evaluaciones cuantitativas tradicionales del nivel de conocimiento adquirido, indicadores cuantitativos de la demanda de especialistas graduados en el mercado laboral y el grado de satisfacción con la formación de los propios estudiantes. El estudio incluyó a 120 egresados del grupo ampliado de “Estudios culturales y diseño sociocultural” de los años 2018-2020. Se utilizaron los siguientes métodos: métodos de encuesta: cuantitativos (cuestionario) y cualitativos (entrevistas). La metodología propuesta y probada para medir la satisfacción de los egresados universitarios con los programas educativos puede convertirse en la base para el desarrollo de un sistema universitario de seguimiento de la medición de la satisfacción de los egresados universitarios con los programas educativos y un sistema de gestión de la calidad universitaria.

Palabras clave: Universidad, educación, estudiantes de posgrado, métodos, práctica investigadora.

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to determine the satisfaction of university graduates' with the quality of training in educational programs. The research methodology is based on the characteristics of the quality of education, which can be expressed in certain quantitative indicators. Such measurable characteristics include traditional quantitative assessments of the level of knowledge gained, quantitative indicators of the demand for graduated specialists in the labor market and the degree of satisfaction with the training of the students themselves. The study included 120 graduates of the enlarged group of "Cultural studies and socio-cultural design" of the years 2018-2020. The following methods were used: survey methods-quantitative (questionnaire survey "Factors affecting the satisfaction of graduates quality of higher education"), and qualitative (interviewing). The proposed and tested methodology for measuring the satisfaction of university graduates with educational programs can become the basis for the development of a university system for monitoring the measurement of satisfaction of university graduates with educational programs and a university quality management system.

Keywords: University, education, graduate students, methods, research practice.

Introduction

The research practice in studying university graduates' satisfaction with the quality of educational programs has been developing in Russian universities since the 1990s when higher education had begun to be viewed as a product or an educational service. Students have become consumers of this product, and universities have turned into independent subjects of the market system between which competition develops and grows (Bespalova & Zhirnova, 2015).

Since that time, the assessment of students' and graduates' satisfaction with the quality of educational programs has been gradually becoming a part of intra-university education quality management systems. The first educational quality management system appeared in the People's Friendship University of Russia (RUDN) in 2005 (Filippov & Puzanova, 2015). The satisfaction of customers—students and graduates—became the system-forming indicator of education quality (Kotova & Khasanova, 2016). Universities' education quality management system predominantly focuses on international organization quality assessment systems in accordance with which the certification procedure takes place. The reference point most popular in Russia is the ISO 9000:2000 standard (GOST ISO 9000–2001) (Kriukov, 2009). According to the international standards of ISO 9000:2015, customer orientation presents the fundamental principle of creating an effective and productive management system in organizations including universities; so, quality management is aimed at meeting the customers' demands and striving to exceed their expectations and fulfilling this principle calls for assessing and monitoring of consumer satisfaction and taking corresponding action (Rosstandart, 2019).

Despite quite a long tradition of measuring the evaluation of the quality of obtained education (Vishnevskii & Narkhov, 2019; Stepanova & Chernenkaia, 2015), many problems in this sphere remain unresolved, one of such problems being the lack of a well-functioning comprehensive assessment of graduates' satisfaction with education. The search for an optimal model of education quality assessment and monitoring of consumer satisfaction with educational services continues. The aforementioned facts impede the adoption of appropriate management decisions within a university and the development of economic strategies of a university in the foreign market of educational services (Avramkova et al., 2021).

Moreover, the deficit of effective feedback mechanisms in the educational process remains one of the most crucial problems of university education. An essential factor in solving this problem is the choice of pedagogical strategies in favor of students to ensure their actual personal development and professional training sufficient to make them demanded in the labor market and pursue their professional career in the real society (Kennedy, 2016). One of the critical features of the corresponding personality-oriented university pedagogics is the implementation of continuous monitoring of graduates' satisfaction with the quality of training in educational programs (Anufrieva et al., 2020). This research procedure also possesses specific ethical characteristics associated with the observance of students' rights to express their requests and interests considering the content and technology of the obtained knowledge being of vital importance for both their professional and personal growth (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013).

In the light of the context above, it can be affirmed that in the modern world, the problem of university graduates' satisfaction with the quality of educational programs has to be posed and solved in the unity of these four factors—economical, managerial, pedagogical, and ethical—which requires a corresponding correction of the research method which is proposed in the present study.

The calculation of the satisfaction index in general and by factors for the entire sample and different groups of graduates is considered as the basis for compiling a profile of graduate satisfaction lying at the basis of our model for monitoring university graduates' satisfaction with educational programs. These results can be used in advertising and information campaigns. In the course of the admissions campaign, a special emphasis can be put on the professionalism of teachers, disclosing the nomenclature of academic disciplines in each direction of training in greater detail, and providing full information about the order and quality of the educational process organization. The monitoring of graduates' satisfaction with their education has shown that this research procedure is promising for improving the entire organization of university educational activities. It turned out that the students themselves can be considered authoritative

experts in assessing the effectiveness of the educational process. The written survey data was supplemented by interviewing graduates who showed a deep interest in giving constructive answers to the questions posed.

Methodology

Design and methods

A data collection system for monitoring the satisfaction of graduates with the quality of higher education was developed based on a mixed type of research. To collect data, the following methods were used: survey methods – quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interviewing). In this study, we used verification of tools for the validity and adequacy of the research objectives (validation). We used variations of criterion validity to understand how the results obtained for one indicator were consistent with the results obtained for another indicator. To build the model of the relationship between the selected criteria, we used construct validation.

The satisfaction of graduates with the quality of higher education was initially considered in our study as a subjective assessment of the quality of education received by a graduate. To concretize the assessment of graduates, the factors (parameters, criteria) of education were singled out, from which in aggregate this assessment is formed: assessment of the material and technical base; assessment of the management of the educational process; assessment of the professional level of teachers; assessment of the relevance of a set of disciplines; assessment of educational and industrial practices; assessment of conditions for building an individual trajectory of education, self-development, and self-improvement; assessment of the level of psycho-emotional comfort during training (Avramkova et al., 2020; Fatkulin, 2007).

The respondents were also asked to identify three factors that were most important in their opinion or add their own factors. Three parameters of a graduate's self-evaluation allowing making judgments on the education quality evaluation were also identified: evaluation of the level of one's theoretical professional training (self-assessment); evaluation of the level of one's practical professional training (self-assessment); salary expectations; the degree of one's identification with the obtained profession (Miliaeva, 2016; Bobrova, 2018).

Research procedure and instruments

The research procedure included the use of a questionnaire in remote access in accordance with the developed method of computer recording and processing of the data obtained in the SPSS program. The questionnaires were compiled by adaptation (modification) based on the tools that were used for similar studies in monitoring graduates' satisfaction with the quality of higher education. After preparing the questionnaires, we discussed their reliability and identified their strengths and weaknesses with other monitoring participants. Based on the results of the discussion, we made adjustments to the questionnaires before starting to collect data. The respondents received a unique e-mail link to the questionnaire, which was posted on docs.google.com (Sivakumar, 2019). The survey «Factors affecting the satisfaction of graduates quality of higher education» included 29 questions that took under 5 minutes to answer and the interview guide included 35 questions with the interviews on them taking about 1 hour on average.

When testing respondents, the ethical principles of respect to the person's dignity and justice were observed. The respondents were guaranteed the protection of personal data, ensuring that the results of the study will be presented in a summary form. The respondents were provided with detailed instructions on the data collection methods, the duration of the study, the aim of the study, as well as the future use of the results.

Statistical analysis

To interpret the results obtained, we used a correlation model. Self-assessment and the assessment of the educational process by factors were carried out by the respondents on a metric three-point scale ranging from (1) low, to (2) average, to (3) high mark allowing us to calculate correlations, use the average value as evaluation by parameters, and calculate the satisfaction index. Statistical analysis of the experimental results obtained when comparing two empirical distributions according to the Pearson χ^2 test was carried out using the SPSS statistical software package.

The correlation model included the identification of the following correlations: the dependence of the level (high, low) of education on other factors of the educational process (material and technical base, level of teaching, etc.); establishing the ranks of the greatest (least) given dependence; dependence of the degree of relevance of disciplines and assessment of the level of education; dependence of identification with the profession on the level of theoretical, practical training, industrial practice; dependence of the selected factors of the quality of the

educational process and the assessment of the level of education; desire to choose the same educational institution from satisfaction with education.

Results

Satisfaction index

The pilot study included 120 graduates of the enlarged group of specialties 51.03.00 “Cultural studies and socio-cultural design” of the years 2018-2020. The gender composition of the sample was as follows: female respondents represented 66.7% of the sample and male respondents composed 33.3% of it. The sample composition by the levels of the obtained education: Bachelor’s graduates – 61.5%; Master’s graduates – 17.9%; graduates of both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees of the university – 20.5%. The composition of the sample by the forms of education: full-time – 53.8%; extramural – 43.6%; full-time and part-time – 2.6%. Sample composition based on tuition: students receiving free education (budget-based education) – 87.2%; students paying tuition (contract-based education) – 12.8%. Sample composition by the region of residence: Moscow and the Moscow region – 94.9%; regions of the Central Federal District – 2.6%, regions of the Northwestern Federal District – 2.6%.

The index of the respondents’ satisfaction with education in the pilot study was 73%. Considering satisfaction with the quality of educational programs by individual parameters, the highest scores were received by the parameters of “the development of interest and professional motivation” (satisfaction index equaled 87%) and “the level of teaching” (satisfaction index equaled 79%) and the lowest results were obtained in the parameters of “educational and production practice” (index – 60%) and “management” (index – 64%). Considering that the pilot study results showed that 68% of graduates were generally satisfied with their professional training, improvement of the work of practice bases is quite achievable and does not require excessive managerial effort (Table 1).

Table 1
Satisfaction index by parameters (in %)

Parameters	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Bachelor's and Master's degrees	Overall
Overall evaluation of education	56	81	87	73
Material and technical base	74	86	71	75
Management	57	76	75	64
Teaching	72	95	88	79
Relevance of disciplines	67	90	79	74
Identification with profession	64	81	75	69
Theoretical training	68	86	79	74
Practical training	67	71	71	68
Practice	57	57	71	60
Conditions for self-realization	74	81	71	74
Psycho-emotional comfort	69	86	79	74
Electronic environment	72	86	62	72
Interest	84	95	88	87

To analyze satisfaction with the educational process in general and by individual factors, we conducted a comparison of the satisfaction index in Bachelor's and Master's graduates, graduates who received their education for free and paying the tuition, and graduates who received their education in various forms and different directions of training (Bolotov & Efremova, 2007; Eliseeva, 2013). Overall, it can be stated that the satisfaction index was higher in Master's graduates and graduates of both Bachelor's and Master's degrees of the university compared to Bachelor's graduates. The satisfaction index was also higher in graduates who received their education tuition-free compared to those who paid for it. Finally, the satisfaction index was significantly higher in extramural students compared to full-time students (Ermakova & Nikulina, 2017).

It did not appear possible to use the satisfaction index as a guide for the intra-university training quality assessment by comparing the satisfaction index in different directions of training since the differences in the number of budget-based and contract-based places for applicants, the different forms of training, and other factors. The calculation of the satisfaction index by factors and in general for different groups of graduates is viewed as the basis for creating a profile of graduate satisfaction lying at the basis of our model for monitoring university graduate satisfaction with educational programs.

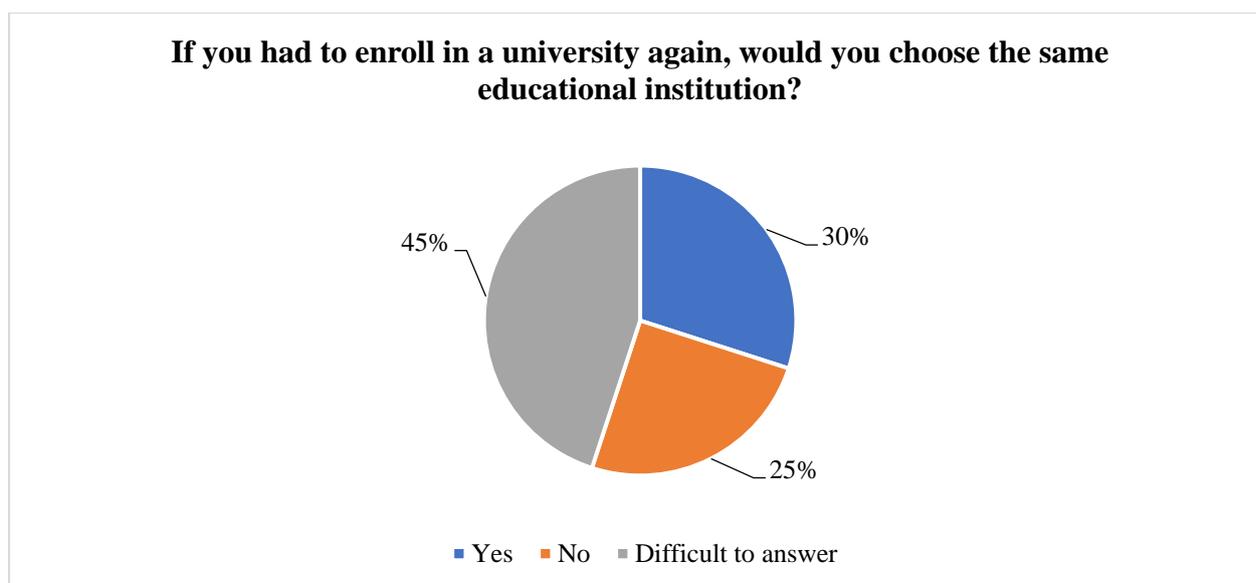


Figure 1
 “If you had to enroll in a university again, would you choose the same educational institution?”

An interesting result in the satisfaction index was observed in the three respondent groups that formed according to the answer to the question “If you had to enroll in a university again, would you choose the same educational institution?” (Figure 1). The satisfaction index of the respondents who answered “yes” (about 30% of the sample) was 86%, of those who answered “no” (25% of the sample) – 55%, and of those who answered “difficult to answer” (45% of the sample) – 75%. This question has to be reformulated in the monitoring in a more specific fashion, without the subjunctive mood to differentiate these groups more clearly (for instance, “Will you recommend this university to your acquaintance to receive higher education in?”).

Overall, based on the analysis of the results of this question, we can assume that the condition ensuring the highest graduate loyalty which allows them to recommend the university to their friends and acquaintances (that is, the condition for the launch of the “word of mouth”) was reaching the graduate satisfaction index of 86%. This assumption is also supported by the fact that approximately the same satisfaction index (87%) was demonstrated by the group of graduates of both the Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees who had already demonstrated a high degree of loyalty to the university. The formation of a holistic loyalty program is considered by modern researchers as a factor in the university competitiveness (Grace & Kim, 2008) and student loyalty is becoming the basis for the financial well-being of universities in the modern world (Reznik & Savenkova, 2009).

Satisfaction index

The overall satisfaction index of those surveyed in the pilot study of graduates is 73 percent. If we consider satisfaction with the quality of educational programs by individual factors, then the parameters (“development of interest and professional motivation” (the satisfaction index is 87%) and “the level of teaching” (the satisfaction index for this parameter is 79%) received the highest ratings, and the lowest – parameters "educational and industrial practice" (index 60%) and “management” (index 64%).

To analyze satisfaction with the educational process in general and by factors, a comparison was made of the satisfaction index among graduates of bachelor's and master's degrees, graduates who received education on a budgetary and contractual basis, among graduates of different forms of education, as well as areas of training.

In general, the satisfaction index is higher among graduates of the master's degree, as well as bachelor's and master's degrees, compared with graduates of the bachelor's degree. The satisfaction index is higher among graduates who received education on a budgetary basis than among those who studied on a contract basis. The satisfaction index is significantly higher among graduates of the correspondence department in comparison with full-time students.

Table 2

Satisfaction index by parameters (percentage)

Parameters	Total
Assessment of education in general	73
Material and technical base	75
Management	64
Teaching	79
Relevance of disciplines	74
Identification with the profession	69
Theoretical training	74
Practical training	68
Practice	60
Conditions for self-realization	74
Psycho-emotional comfort	74
Electronic environment	72
Interest	87

It is not possible to use the satisfaction index as a benchmark for an intra-university assessment of the quality of training by comparing the satisfaction index in different areas of training. A significant factor here may be a different number of budget and contract places, forms of training, and other factors. The calculation of the index of satisfaction by factors and, in general, for different groups of graduates is considered as the basis for compiling a profile of graduate satisfaction, which is the basis of our model for monitoring the satisfaction of a university graduate with educational programs.

Foreign higher education institutions separate the objective and subjective education quality indicators and evaluate both the demand for graduates in society and the actual perception of students of their educational experience at the university (Ginsburg, 1991; Munteanu et al., 2010). In the course of the study, we compiled two significance rankings of the satisfaction factors, the first one reflects the direct evaluation provided by the respondents and the second demonstrates their indirect evaluation which ends up being more objective. The first rating contains the factors that were highlighted by the respondents in their answers to the direct question: “What factors, in your opinion, play the most important role in achieving a high quality of education at a university? Please select three options”.

1. The professional level of teachers (32).
2. Relevance of the content of academic disciplines (26).
2. Educational process management (19).
3. Practical professional training (16).
4. The development of interest and professional motivation (15).
5. Psycho-emotional comfort (14).
6. Educational and production practice (11).
7. Theoretical and practical training (11).
8. Conditions for personal improvement (11).
9. Material and technical support (10).
10. The development of the electronic educational environment (3).

The leading positions were occupied by the parameters of “The professional level of teachers”, “Relevance of the content of academic disciplines”, and “Educational process management”. Now, in the second significance ranking of satisfaction factors (indirect evaluation by the respondents), the factors were placed in order of the level of correlation with

the respondents' overall assessment of education. The absolute values of correlation coefficients were also provided to allow grouping the education quality factors according to the degree of influence on the overall assessment of the quality of education. The pilot study did not reveal strong and very strong correlations between the parameters of the general and specific evaluation. Therefore, the factors can be grouped by two degrees of significance: weak and average.

1. The professional level of teaching.
2. Psycho-emotional comfort.
3. Practice.
4. The relevance of the academic disciplines.
5. Management.
6. Theoretical training.
7. Interest.
8. Practical training.
9. Conditions for self-realization.
10. Electronic environment.
11. Material and technical base.

The highest values of the coefficient of correlation with the variable of "General assessment of the quality of education" were demonstrated by the variables "Assessment of psycho-emotional comfort", "The level of professionalism of teachers", "Practice", and "Relevance of academic disciplines". In both rankings, the first place was occupied by the factor of the professionalism of teaching. However, there were also noticeable discrepancies in the rankings compiled based on the respondents' direct and indirect evaluation. The second rating provides a more realistic picture of the formation of graduates' real satisfaction with educational programs and its results can be used in intra-university quality management.

Data on the graduates' employment and professional identification development factors

The fact of employment in the obtained profession is viewed by researchers as one of the main indicators of university graduates' satisfaction with educational programs (Sandler et al., 2018; Sushhenko et al., 2019; Abramov et al., 2016). The pilot study demonstrated the following results: 25% of the respondents were employed in the obtained profession, 40% of the respondents worked in a different profession, and 35% of them were unemployed (Figure

2). The dynamic of this parameter across the years can become a guideline for the intra-university education quality management system, as well as a method of the advertising self-presentation of the university on the educational services market.

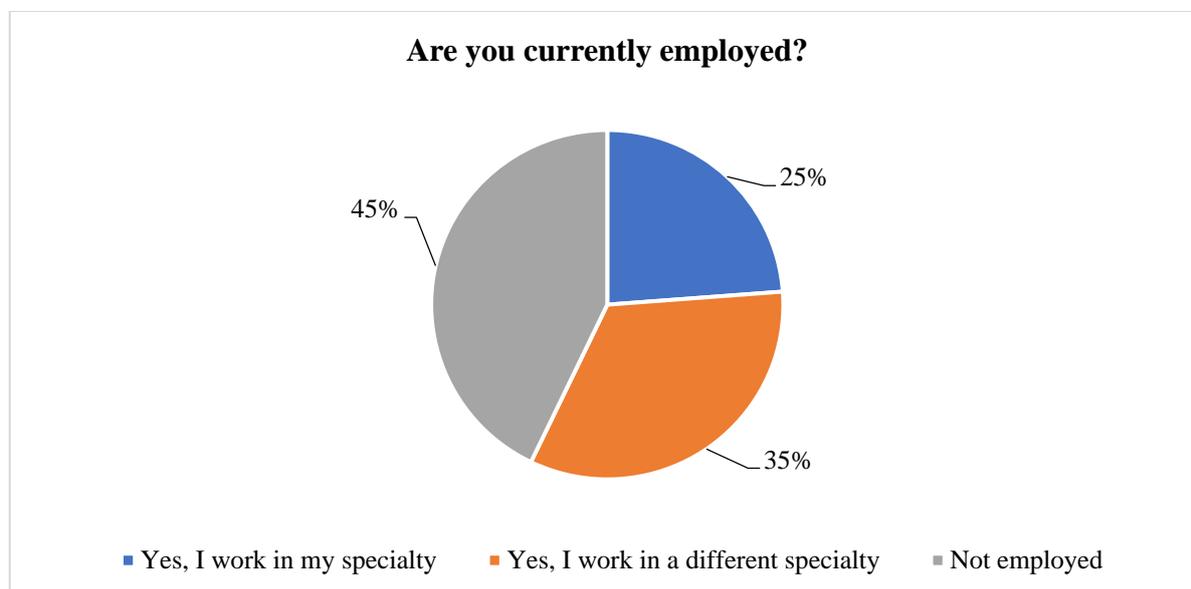


Figure 2
The graduates' employment

In our opinion, an important factor in graduates' readiness to work in their specialty in the long-term perspective is presented by the level of their identification with the profession indicated in the higher education diploma. According to the pilot study results, a high level of identification with the obtained profession was experienced by 17.9% of the respondents, the average degree of identification was demonstrated by 71.8%, and the low level of identification was observed in 10.3%. What is curious is that professional identification correlated with the level of the graduates' theoretical training.

To ensure a deeper understanding of the results, in addition to the acquired quantitative results, the pilot study involved qualitative sociological methods – open survey questions and interviewing. Overall, the advantages and disadvantages stated by the graduates in the open questions revolved around the previously identified factors and indicators except for one: several respondents argued that universities need to work on graduates' employment.

Discussion

Based on the study results, all the factors of the quality of professional educational programs that we identified have an impact on the satisfaction of graduates. Therefore, in the

future, when conducting monitoring, it is necessary to measure the influence of each factor on the graduate's satisfaction with professional educational programs (Gopal et al., 2021). As in the research of Sandler et al. (2018), it can be proposed that the factors that form the graduates' satisfaction with professional programs: material and technical base; educational process management; the professional level of teaching; relevance of the set and content of disciplines; educational and production practice; conditions for self-development and self-improvement; conditions for the development of interest and professional motivation; psycho-emotional comfort; electronic educational environment; all of this is compared with the study of Anufrieva et al. (2020).

This study wanted to complement the list of factors that can influence the satisfaction of graduates as much as possible. Therefore, by asking respondents to evaluate the significance of each factor or add their own, we were able to obtain data that corresponded to our expectations. One of the main indicators of the satisfaction of university graduates with educational programs is employment in the profession they acquired, as in Sushhenko et al., (2019); Abramov et al. (2016), which was confirmed by our results.

Based on the calculation of the satisfaction index of graduates who graduated from both the Bachelor's and Master's level at the university in question (and thereby showed the maximum loyalty to the university), the target value of the graduate satisfaction index was obtained. We considered the calculation of the satisfaction index by factors and in general for different groups of graduates as the basis for compiling a profile of graduate satisfaction, which underlies our model for monitoring the satisfaction of a university graduate with educational programs, as in the study of Ginsburg (1991). We believe that our research, conducted at a Russian university, has confirmed the international trend aimed at separating objective and subjective indicators for assessing the quality of education. In foreign higher education institutions, objective and subjective indicators of the quality of education are divided. Both the demand for graduates in society and the actual perception of students' educational experience at a university are assessed (Munteanu et al., 2010).

In the course of the pilot study, two significance rankings of satisfaction factors were compiled. The first ranking demonstrates the direct evaluation provided by the respondents which can be used in advertising and information campaigns in the educational services market (Miliaeva, 2016). The second ranking reflects the indirect evaluation providing a more realistic picture of the actual impact of different factors on the formation of graduates' satisfaction with educational programs and its results can be used in intra-university quality management (Blankenship, 2011).

Summarizing the results, in both rankings, the first place was occupied by the factor of the professionalism of teaching. However, there were also noticeable discrepancies in the rankings compiled based on the respondents' direct and indirect evaluation (Avramkova et al., 2020). The second rating provides a more realistic picture of the formation of graduates' real satisfaction with educational programs and its results can be used in intra-university quality management.

Researchers are actively paying attention to the development of quality management in universities. In particular, in the works by Shatskaya (2021), the most important tool for measuring key indicators in education is their continuous monitoring. Monitoring in education is "a system for collecting, processing, storing, and disseminating information about an education system or its elements, focused on information management support, which allows one to judge the state of an object at any time and can provide a forecast of its development" (p. 447). Such monitoring allows evaluating the work of each teacher and helps them develop professionally. In turn, as the results of our study show, the introduction of such an assessment affects graduates' satisfaction with the quality of university educational programs.

The open questions included in the survey, as well as the interviews conducted with the graduates, make it possible to obtain a wider range of subjective assessments of professional programs. Nevertheless, most of the feedback revolved around the previously identified factors and indicators (Simsek, Turan & Simsek, 2017). The introduction of qualitative studies in the university graduates' satisfaction monitoring system allows one to "depressurize" the quantitative methodology ensuring the possibility of quickly tracking and taking into account new factors and circumstances that arise in the social reality and university life and may require appropriate comprehension and response strategies (Munteanu et al., 2010). Moreover, the opportunity for graduates to give anonymous feedback on the quality of education in the university has a positive psychological effect: overall, the expressed positive and negative emotions normalize the consumer's evaluation and are favorable for the existence of the university in the educational services market (Blankenship, 2011).

Limitations relate to the fact that the data on the skills and knowledge of students is sparse and has limited temporal coverage and even less is known about how the performance of students with respect to these outcomes has changed over time (O'Donovan, 2017). Also it is necessary to take into account the psychological characteristics of students, as well as obstacles that often arise in the learning process. The results obtained differ from the ongoing studies due to the introduced learning satisfaction index as an integral indicator, which makes it possible to carry out a multivariate analysis of the educational process and an overall

assessment of the real quality of university training based on the diversity of the conditions and characteristics of university activities.

Conclusion

The results of the monitoring carried out allow us to conclude that there are real prerequisites for the further development of the university not so much due to additional material and human resources, but due to the optimization of the organization of the entire educational process thanks to a well-thought-out system of interconnections of various specialists without infringing on the rights and excessive production overload of all university employees. The system built in this way should include the following interrelated functional blocks: the material and technical base of the university, the teaching staff, administrative and managerial personnel, students, financial and legal support. If one of these blocks operates without communication with the others, imbalances arise in the organization of the university's work, which significantly negatively affects its effectiveness.

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