THE INFLUENCE OF LEGAL CHANGES ON THE EVALUATION AND PROMOTION SYSTEMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION – A CASE STUDY FROM POLAND

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Abstract

Polish higher education has been operating in a market economy environment only for twenty-seven years and there are still a lot of problems to solve. One of them is offering the best level of education and research for international students and partners. To achieve this goal the legal system is still modified and developed, what certainly has benefits, but also introduces uncertainty and is not conductive to individual career development.

In the contemporary conditions, it is hard to deny that development of universities and strengthen their positions in international rankings is one of the main challenges facing governments and educational managers. Nevertheless, the success of this task is largely dependent on quality and competences of human resources and could not be guaranteed only by legal changes. Therefore, the main aim of the article is to identify and assess the influence of legal changes on evaluation and promotion system in higher education in Poland.

To achieve this aim in the first part of the article the research backgrounds of evaluation and promotion system in higher education are presented. Then the legal changes in Polish higher education are described with their main directions and expected results. After it, the evolution of the employees’ evaluation system - caused by legal changes - is characterized in a form of the case study from one of Polish universities. The case study on the influence of legal changes includes: the description of evaluation rules, the recent evaluation effects and perceiving the changes by employees.

The main results show that introduced changes have increased the publication number and they have accelerated the process of professional advancement. Nevertheless, the outcomes of legal changes are now visible and perceptible mostly in domestic perspective. Additionally, their undoubted side effect is: the increase in job insecurity and the fears of further radical changes.

Keywords: Legal changes in higher education, promotion system of academic system, evaluation system of academic teachers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Polish higher education has operated in free market economy since the early nineties of the twentieth century. During the last 25 years it has undergone many transformations [5]. One the earliest changes was introducing the private system of higher education in parallel with existing public universities [1]. As a result the number of private schools rapidly increased and in 1997 it exceeded the number of public units (Fig. 1).
The highest rate of private schools was reported in 2011-2013 and then the net scholarisation rate reached the record level of 40.8% (in 1990 it was only 9.8%). Since 2013 we have observed the decrease of the private schools and students number due to the demographic decline and the discussion on the need of holding a higher education and the quality of education which also includes the problems of academic staff quality, academic teachers’ experiences, educational skills and research competences [8], [9]. The quantity of students began to be replaced by the quality of education. It required also a deep modification in the system of academic employees’ promotion and education. The first step in this area was introducing the new Law on higher education which:

- shortened the time needed to obtain the DSc degree from 15 to 8 years,
- clarified and exacerbated the scientific and research requirements for obtaining the DSc degree and full professor title (which now focus on publishing in the high-regarded international journals; reaching the highest Impact Factor; internationalization of research and academic mobility),
- made the financing level of public universities dependent on the scientific parametrization (defined as the scientific category: A+, A, B or C).

Since 2015 the requirements for public universities and academic teachers have been strengthened because Poland would like to improve its position on the shanghai list, that is the ambitious but long-term and complicated task [4]. The current reform is modelled on the systems already implemented in Germany and Russia in which the universities have to compete for financing [3]. Nevertheless, the indicated law changes forced the necessity of changing the employees’ evaluation rules in particular universities in order to adapt to new government rules and to guarantee the sufficient funds and survival in the conditions of dramatic drop in the number of population and students [2], [7].

In the light of the above circumstances, the main aim of the article is to identify and assess the influence of legal changes on evaluation and promotion systems in the higher education in Poland and the key research question is: Did the legal changes and the corresponding changes in the employees’ evaluation system influence the publication activity of academic teachers and the number of their promotion? The attempt of the answer for this question is elaborated on the basis of the statistical data about Polish higher education sector and one of the internal units of Polish public university [6].

2 METHODOLOGY

As it was mentioned the research are conducted in Polish the higher education system and one of the Polish bigger public university. The research period which includes the years 2006-2016 is divided into two parts: (1) before introducing the new Law on higher education and (2) after introducing the new Law on higher education. The main change quantifiers are:

1 in a case of the higher education sector: (a) the number of granted PhD degrees, (b) the number of granted DSc degrees, (c) the number of granted full professors titles and (d) the shares of the mentioned professional advancements in the population of academic teachers,

2 in a case of the examined university (a case study): (a) the total number of publications, (b) the number of publications in journals from Journal Citation Report, (c) the number of publications in Web of Science and (d) the share of mentioned publications in the total number of publications and (e) the number of publications per an employee.

Based on the examined changes and tendencies, we observe whether the changes have brought required results in macro and micro perspective. Additionally, in a conclusions section we present the opinions of employees on the new rules and evaluation system.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Academic degrees – research in macro perspective

In the first part of the research the number of the granted scientific degrees is analysed and the results are presented in the Fig. 2.
According to the data shown in Fig. 2, after the introducing of new law the number of granted scientific degrees increased. The increase is significant it the case of habilitation degree and doctor degree and is less visible in the case of the full professor title. This tendency is confirmed by the analysis of relative changes presented in Fig. 3. Therefore it could be concluded that due to new educational law the academic career path became faster and staff development became intensive.

3.2 Number and structure of publication – research in micro perspective

The micro perspective concerns one of the faculties of Polish public university and is established on the basis of publication data from the years 2006-2016. There are four internal units of various scientific fields and areas of study. The Faculty employs 150 academic teachers and educates about 2500 students at four courses. After 2011, the employees are obliged to increase the total number of publications and the number of publications in highly-regarded journals. And the Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 presents the results of these obligations.
According to the data, the number of publications in total, significantly increased in two of four departments (2 and 3), but in the department two it was only the increase in the quantity of publications, not in the quality of them. Nevertheless, in three of examined departments the share of publications in the highly regarded journals are impressive and shows the positive results of the legal changes.

Additionally, in the Fig. 6 and Fig. 7 the number of publications is presented for one employee in a year period.
Figure 7. The average number of publications in the highly-regarded journals per employee in examined faculty in 2006-2016 [yearly]

The data confirms that there are no significant differences in the total number of publications between particular departments but there is a huge gap between the quality of publications among the internal units of this faculty. Therefore it could be stated that not all departments and employees could easily and fully adapt to the legal changes.

4 CONCLUSIONS

According to the research conducted in the article we could conclude that the legal changes in higher education brought the required results in the increase of the number of scientific degrees in all areas connected respectively with: the doctor degree, the habilitation degree and the full professor title. The level of this increase was the lowest in the case of full professors degree. This career path is still not available enough and too difficult for scientists. Analysing the publication range at the examined faculty we found that most of the internal units intensify the publication activity and the improvement is visible in the quality and quantity part of the published articles. Nevertheless, there are also some units that did not manage the challenge and did not achieve the increase in the quality of publications, but we could treated it as a side effect of strictness of the legal changes. In spite of improving the parameters the reform disturb the academic staff. According the survey conducted at the examined Faculty, the employees are afraid of losing their jobs and are not satisfied with introducing the new law in higher education in Poland.

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REFERENCES


