

ACADEMIC ETHICS – A FACTOR FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

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Abstract: The socio-economic changes in our country over the past 33 years have put our educational system in front of a number of trials and challenges. Against the background of the proclaimed quality of training and education, the results of the metamorphoses that Bulgarian education is going through, diverge from the expectations of high quality and literacy. Rather, the percentage of illiteracy, lack of permanent knowledge and skills, lack of interest and reluctance to implement is increasing. The reasons are multidirectional in this direction, primarily of a subjective nature. The impression is that for the period from the changes after 1989 until now, the results of the experiments in the education system have diverged from the quality requirement. It went through numerous legislative and by-law amendments with a number of defects, through new curricula and programs at each educational level, through a number of unfounded administrative regulations, through the selection of textbooks, often difficult to understand by the students, through a study load incompatible with the age of the various educational groups and levels, insufficient relationship between individual educational levels, especially between secondary and higher education, etc. But in the public space, the discussions seem to be focused primarily on the consequence - the deteriorating quality of education, without emphasizing the causes. The statements of a number of apologists are accompanied by normative changes, far from the requirements for the quality of the educational product, with a large amount of retroactivity and political overtones. And quite reasonably, the main question is who is interested in all this? It is logical that the answers are ambiguous, multifactorial and require a thorough, detailed analysis of the entire educational system. Of course, within the scope of the present publication, such could hardly be imagined. Our research is limited to the study of one of the factors for the quality of higher education, which is academic ethics. From here, the aim of this publication is to answer the question of the role and place of academicism and academic ethics for a quality educational process in higher schools. The author's scientific research is based on his personal observations as a teacher and direct participant in accreditation procedures, without imposing a definite opinion with his judgments. Of course, there will certainly be disagreement, but the problems in this direction are not one and two, which determines the need for a public debate. Moreover, the unity among the academic community will contribute to their solution.

Keywords: education, higher education, quality of education, academicism, academic ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

After a "cult" statement by a politician at the end of the first decade of the 21st century regarding the system for the awarding and acquisition of scientific degrees and titles by the Higher Attestation Commission (HAC) under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria and as a result of the inclusion of our country in Euro-Atlantic structures, serious changes are taking place in the legislative framework of higher education, which determine the appearance of academicism and academic ethics in our country. With the adoption of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (2010) and the Rules for its Implementation (2010), a fundamentally different system was introduced in this regard. Amendments and additions to the overall legislation regulating higher education and academic development are being made in stages. The criteria system for accreditation is also being changed in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European area of higher education/ESG/ - part 1 (2016). And yet, criticism of the quality of higher education in our country does not stop. Undoubtedly, when talking about quality education, we should take into account the multi-layered factors that determine its appearance. In a number of publications, incl. and the author, various aspects of one or another of these factors have been explored, but that of academicism and academic ethics seems to be left aside. This provokes our scientific research in this direction. From here, the aim of this publication is to explore the role and place of academicism and academic ethics for the quality of the educational process in higher education.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The starting point of our scientific research is the understanding of academicism and academic ethics. According to the Dictionary of foreign words in the Bulgarian language, the etymology of the concept is the French word "academisme" from the Latin "academia" from the Greek ακαδημία" (Sofia, 1982) Literary interpretation is "adherence to certain established traditions and currents in science and art...purely theoretical, detached from practice direction in scientific and educational pursuits..." (Sofia, 1982). From the positions of art, it is treated as "a trend in the visual arts that arose in the 16th century, which dogmatized the external aspects of ancient and

Renaissance art and held back the development of progressive and innovative currents." (Institute of the Bulgarian Language, <https://ibl.bas.bg/>). We are interested in the literary interpretation of the concept of academicism, which in the modern dynamic social development, although it has lost its meaning, we believe that academicism should be treated in a broader sense than the one indicated. In other words, academicism expresses certain traditional norms of behavior of the academic community, compatible with academic ethics, scientificity, creativity, innovation, erudition. In confirmation, a number of scientists associate the concept with "a measure of certain behavior in the higher education community, which is based on traditions, professionalism, scientific correctness and permanently established moral categories" (M. Bachvarova, 2017; V. Daskalov, 2016) Makes an impression, that the very concept of academicism in its sense overlaps with academic ethics. Moreover, according to experts, "academicism is rather a shorter synonym, which practically has the same content - it refers to the moral values and rules of behavior on which the overall activity in a higher education institution is built and developed." (V. Daskalov, 2016.)

Speaking of academic ethics from a substantive point of view, it should be understood as a system of rules of conduct in the field of higher education and science. The basis for this is given by the very genesis of the concept "ethics", whose origin is "from the Greek "ἠθική"(ethos)" - Russian. "ethics", German "Ethik, from Latin "ethica"...1. Philos. Teaching about morality as one of the forms of social consciousness, about its essence, class content and role in public life. 2. The moral principles that determine the behavior of the members of some social group; morality. 3. The moral principles of a person (Sofia, 1982)... Teaching about morality, about its development, principles and norms. 4. A set of norms and rules of conduct; morality' [<https://rechnik.chitanka.info/>]. Hence the thesis of certain scientists that "ethics, also called moral philosophy, includes the systematization, defense and determination of what behavior is right and what is wrong." (D. Popova, 2010) On this basis, in confirmation of the judgment about academicism as the shorter synonym of ethics, academic ethics is a set of principles and norms for moral behavior of the academic community in higher schools and scientific organizations. In other words, academic ethics is "a system of interrelated unwritten rules of conduct, which find the basis of their content in permanently established moral values and traditions, on which the overall activity in a higher education institution is built and developed." (V. Daskalov, 2016)

The brief retrospective of the main conceptual apparatus, object of the present study, suggests its importance for the quality of higher education. And although the regulations governing higher education and the development of the academic staff are not specific in their definition, in the amendments and additions to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria from 2018, the requirement to form an Academic Ethics Committee was introduced (V. Angelova, 2022), as a manifestation of the forms of control. And since the regulatory framework itself, with its defects, ambiguity in the interpretation of certain norms, as well as the admission of unconstitutional ones (in previous editions of the above-mentioned laws and regulations, rejected as such by the Constitutional Court and re-imposed by legislation) allowed the admission of retroactivity of the legislative framework. In recent years, there has been a change in the understanding of "academicism", "academic ethics" in academic circles. The basis for this statement is the observations and examples of behavior of some members of the academic community, "fighters against pseudoscience" with a desire to "clear the inconvenient and hunt witches" for the sake of their ego, claiming to be world-class scientists, but refusing to conduct lecture courses. And this is undoubtedly a good enough reason to answer the question of which behavior is compatible with the norms of academic ethics in the name of academicism, the answers to which are defined by the generally applicable methods and tools of scientific knowledge.

3. RESULTS

The changes in the normative framework of academic development in our country since 2010 have created quite a few prerequisites for the rapid growth of the academic staff in higher schools and the scientific criteria without clear rules and criteria for scientificity. All of a sudden, there were a lot of qualified persons and persons with an educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the universities, and it is difficult to prove the existence of scientometricity for the works of some of them. In parallel with this, the so-called "quick start" in academic development from one academic position to another was observed, which led to a violation of the ratio between non-habilitated and habilitated academic staff in favor of the habilitated. At the same time, there was no regulation of any forms of control and minimum state requirements for scientificity and scientometrics in the legal framework, which led to a state of mass plagiarism, misuse of the works of trainees and doctoral students by qualified persons, some of them managers positions, repetition of dissertation topics, "flying" from university to university and acquisition of scientific degrees and academic positions. It got to the point where pseudoscience began to spread and become accepted as the norm. As a consequence of this, the norms of academic ethics, figuratively speaking, changed almost in favor of the carriers of false science and plagiarism. It is logical that under such circumstances, accompanied by the low incomes of the majority of the academic staff and the increase in the number of higher schools, the priority

private ones in parallel with the strengthening demographic crisis and the openness of the educational market abroad, growing unemployment in the country, there was also a deterioration in the quality of education in higher schools. A paradox has been reached in which higher education institutions, in order to have students and receive state subsidies under the still operating system of subsidizing state higher education institutions, apply lower admission and admission criteria based on grades from the state matriculation exams (a in some universities, admission was also observed based on documents, just to fill the inflated state quota due to student subsidies). As a result of all this, the public attitude towards "professors" as a byword and an unflattering concept became established. Moreover, a number of speeches and discussions in the public space of politicians and "public figures" tolerated the graduates of higher education abroad with a disdainful attitude towards the graduates of higher education in Bulgarian higher schools with an emphasis on the low quality of higher education in the country. This is how a negative public opinion is formed about the Bulgarian higher schools and the numerous "experts" from higher education. And at the same time, no one spoke about the costs of education, in particular higher education, laid down in the budgets for the last 30 years, no one discussed with a significant part of the academic staff of the higher schools the price they pay for the sleepless nights, for personal investments in scientific production, for working conditions and deprivations for their relatives.

Against the background of the brief retrospective of the results, after not one or two high-profile cases of gross violation of academic norms and academicism in general, in 2018, with subsequent amendments and additions, more drastic changes were undertaken in the legislative framework of higher education and academic development. Minimum state requirements (MDI) were introduced in areas of higher education and professional fields, and on this basis the registration in the National Center for Information and Documentation (NACID) for compliance with these requirements. The requirement that higher schools and scientific organizations apply anti-plagiarism systems to prevent and combat the increasing plagiarism practices in opposition to academicism and science was also introduced, as well as the creation of university commissions on academic ethics. And here the question is, to what extent did the actions and legislative changes contribute to overcoming the problem areas in academicism, observing the norms of academic ethics and increasing the quality of higher education? The answers are as contradictory as they are open to discussion.

4. DISCUSSIONS

In the context of the above, the discussions are about the effects of legislative amendments and additions, directly involved in academicism and academic ethics as factors for a quality educational process and regarding possible solutions to overcome problem areas. And they, the decisions, should be aimed at:

✓ Changing the model through education and self-education in the sense of continuity, respect for Bulgarian cultural and historical traditions, worshipping the memory of our heroes, who gave their lives for Bulgaria and our holy places, protection of the Bulgarian language and pride that we have given of dozens of peoples, our "self, books, Vedas, verbs...", studying the works of the "patriarchs" of Bulgarian literature, of eminent personalities who glorified our country. And all this in symbiosis with the creativity and potential of our contemporaries and young artists, scientists, inventors. Undoubtedly, this is possible precisely through continuity, teamwork and defending the positions protecting the interests and identity of our country. This means that with the lessons of the past, taking into account the reality and the challenges facing education, we can have faith in the preservation of the Bulgarian spirit and the viability of Bulgarian education;

✓ Suspension of the frequent amendments and additions to the normative educational acts and by-laws based on subjective circumstances and with administrative decisions. Any change should be justified after a preliminary analysis with a broad discussion by the academic community. This means that decisions should be made by the persons directly involved in the educational process. It is also expedient to change the classifier for the remuneration of the work of the academic staff depending on the scientific degrees and scientific positions, so that the difficult work of the academic staff is evaluated according to certain criteria within the specified limits. Thus, opportunities will be created to attract young academic staff with opportunities for an academic career and with the necessary stay and growth in an academic position;

✓ Discontinuation of the practice of retroactivity of the normative base and persons who have defended dissertations and acquired scientific degrees and scientific titles under the VAK system to be automatically recognized without the need to request additional registrations;

✓ Encouraging young people towards an academic career, but not at the cost of age discrimination. The solution in this direction is to evaluate the professionalism, competences, combining the wisdom, knowledge and contribution of each member of the academic staff for the development of the higher school with the ambitions and creative abilities of the young teachers.;

- ✓ Putting in place adequate forms of control to prevent pseudoscience and plagiarism at the entrance, and not subsequently by resorting to "witch hunts", with the aim of "clearing accounts". This would prevent the "domino effect" and opposition of academic staff both within a given university and between universities. Moreover, scientific degrees and academic positions, acquired under certain conditions, after a change in the legislative framework, are subject to reassessments, as a form of retroactivity;
- ✓ Availability of the strategic vision and a working strategy based on the principles of academicism through a wide discussion by the people directly involved in the quality of training and higher education;
- ✓ Termination of legalization of the so-called priority professional fields, protected specialties, etc., which led certain professional fields (3.7. Administration and management and 3.8. Economy) to be reduced to a state of unreliability, and universities and academies, training in these areas as a priority, to look for ways to survive;
- ✓ The relation primary - secondary - higher education is the basis for a quality educational product. This means that when in the primary and secondary courses the education is of high quality, in the higher schools the upgrade in this regard cannot but be of high quality;
- ✓ Change in the model for subsidizing higher schools according to the quantitative dimension, i.e. according to the number of students. The solution is that the funding of the universities and their management should be according to the results achieved and the realization of their graduates. In general, the effectiveness, return and profitability of higher schools should be brought to the fore.
- ✓ The internationalization of higher education and inclusion in international educational and scientific networks should be on a broader basis, and not the administrative imposition of only the two scientific databases - WEB OF SCIENCE and SCOPUS, which is in the interest of open science. Moreover, there are professional areas and fields that, due to their specificity and the need to comply with the law on the protection of classified information, do not imply publication in the specified scientific databases;
- ✓ Education and its dependence on the demographic picture in our country are directly dependent, and with the established trend of a decreasing number of matriculates and a projected increase in the number of state-subsidized higher education institutions, inconsistent with the potential candidates, the need to a serious analysis in the long-term, medium-term and short-term aspect of the graduate-candidate ratio and on this basis to determine the state-subsidized professional fields, specialties and universities. The openness of the educational market and the associated outflow of candidate students to foreign universities should also be taken into consideration. The solution is to find an approach to motivate these same candidate-students after years, when they graduate in the country and to pour their skills and competences into the public life of the country and for the good of Bulgaria;
- ✓ The connection between the labor market in our country, guaranteed jobs and the national educational product is undeniable. It is the labor market that determines the demand and supply of an educational product and, in compliance with the rules for the competitive and competitive beginning, the good selection is made. On this basis, the concepts of protected or priority professional areas and specialties should be dropped. As long as there is a labor market, there is also selection. The solution is that the "funnel" of admission to higher education institutions is wide-open, but at the exit, as a result of the quality educational process, it is narrowed, the labor market itself sifts what it needs and what it doesn't. And all of this accompanied by long-term analysis and what-if scenarios, which is the basis of management by results.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In summary of our research, focused on academicism and academic ethics in the interest of the "knowledge-science-business" trinity, without imposing a definite opinion, we believe that it is time to restore confidence in Bulgarian universities, which have their worthy and indisputable place in the European area of higher education. Let's not forget that in order to have a quality higher education, we must have a working legislation and strategy, with thought and responsibility for future generations through the development of a knowledge economy, which is directly dependent on a quality academic composition, which in unity, with dignity and with public debate to contribute to it. In other words, with self-respect and respect for the academic community with its knowledge and contributions to observe, preserve and build on the traditions of academicism and academic ethics as a factor for quality education and training.

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