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Trends and priority areas of state policy development in higher education for the period of 2000-2020

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to compare the results of the implementation of regulatory legal acts related to state policy in higher education, adopted for the period of 2000-2020, with the developed priority areas in education. According to the reports on the results of the activities of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation for the same period, the priority areas in higher education and the results of legislative framework functioning for the period under study were analyzed. As a result, four stages of state policy in higher education were identified (such grouping is determined by the periods of validity of the considered regulatory legal acts), including documents that regulate the education system as a whole and are narrowly focused on higher education. It should be noted that the implementation of the fourth stage has not yet been completed due to the fact that the period of validity of regulatory legal acts ends in 2020; therefore, several scenarios of the course of events were made up. Based on this study, an approach was formed to assess the conformity of priority areas and the results of state policy in the field of higher education, which helped to identify “bottlenecks” in the control over the implementation of the defined priorities.

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of the changes in world trends, including mass education, the implementation of the “third mission” by universities [1], the growth in the number of specialties, the market orientation of educational institutions, over the past decades the large-scale changes have taken place in higher education, which are characterized by a change in the paradigm of education, the restructuring of the education management system, the creation of new tools, methods, and sets of measures for the effective functioning and development of universities in Russia and at the international level. These actions were the result of the fact that the education system, formed over a long period of time, being conservative [2], is changing under the influence of modern social relations, requiring from the education sector the constant and dynamic development, meeting new quality requirements made by all interested parties.

Today, the education system in the Russian Federation is being reformed. The reform process has affected and given the new meaning to the goals, tasks, and functions implemented by universities in their activities. Many of them were reorganized, others received new statuses, reflecting their special significance both at the regional and national levels. Thus, the changes and modernization of higher education are accompanied by the formation, testing and adaptation of completely new institutions and mechanisms that are based on the principles of the new public management. For example, the shift to managerial skills and competencies, the transition to the activities based on effective contracts, the consideration of the result of activities as an object of managerial activity [3]. To a greater or lesser extent, these principles are reviewed throughout the entire period of reforming the higher education system and are institutionalized in regulatory legal acts that regulate all processes occurring in the higher education system.

Any change in the reform process is fixed at the legislative level; therefore, the issue of the state policy evolution in higher education and evaluation of its implementation remains relevant. Consequently, in the context of ongoing state organizational and institutional changes in the higher education system, the research objective is to review the approved regulatory legal acts and to identify the correspondence between the goals, objectives, and the results of the activities of state authorities in higher education. The consideration of the period from 2000 to 2020 is the most relevant, since during this period, the large-scale changes in higher education took place.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the literature review in the field of state policy, including in higher education, four research groups can be identified.

The first and largest is the group, which includes the studies aimed at analyzing the main characteristics of the country's state policy in education, including higher education at a certain point in time.

An example is the scientific results reflected in the article by Kotenev and Kuzmin, where the authors analyze the main documents that determine the priorities for education development in Russia as of 2015. Similar results were achieved in the studies conducted by Ivanova [4], Rostova [5], Chernykh [6], where the main vector of state policy in education in Russia is considered and the authors' assessment of its effectiveness is given. This group also includes the reports of UNESCO [7] and the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) [8], as well as the ones made by scientists such as Madani [9], Magnússon et al. [10] and others.

It is worth noting that in the study of state policy in education, the main role is given to the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation", the analysis of versions of which is reflected in research papers by Agarkova [11], Chekmarev and Matershev [12], and Poskonina [13]. Grinevich et al. [14] pay special attention to the priorities of state policy in international education, which is aimed at creating and supporting the country's image and its cultural attractiveness. In addition, such economists as Korotkova [15], Andryushina and Lutsenko [16], Besspalov et al. [17], Alexandrov et al. [18], Tokarskaya and Zhukova [19], Nosov [20], Pankova [21], Lapenkova [22] and many other scientists studied the state of Russian state policy and legal regulation in education and in the field of educational services.

The second group includes scientific papers that examine the main trends in reforming the educational system, including the higher education system, over a certain period of time.

For example, Komkov in his article analyzed the reforms of the education system in Russia, carried out in the period of 1990-2013 [23]. Characteristics of the state strategy for primary and secondary vocational education development for the period of 2001-2011 are found in the works by Skovorodneva [24]. Trends in setting goals of state policy in education for the period of 2000-2013 are presented in the work by Magalnik [25], while Nasutseva analyzes the effectiveness of the state policy for the period of 2000-2010 [26]. The analysis of documents regulating the education sector of Pakistan from 1947 to 2017 was conducted by the scientists Khushik and Dimer [27]. Eviss et al. [28] examined the state policy of one of the education levels in Egypt for the period of 1990-2017.

The third group includes the studies where the main method is a comparative analysis of the guidelines and priorities of state policy in education, including higher education, between different countries or cities, conducted by Bayramov [29], Yashchuk [30], Nosov [20], Edwards et al. [31], Iyengar and Surianarain [32] and others.

The study presented in this article relies on the consideration of state policy in a certain period of time, since in this way it is possible to analyze the changes that have occurred in dynamics over a given period of time. Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" No. 273-FZ dated December 29, 2012 combines the general provisions and rules governing the activities at certain educational levels, including in higher education. This document is also the basis for the creation of other regulatory legal acts in education, and its implementation sets the main trends in education development in general, including higher education.

RESULTS

To consider the trends in state policy in the field of higher education over a 20-year period, it was divided into 4 stages: from 2000 to 2005, from 2006 to 2010, from 2011 to 2015, and from 2016 to 2020, in accordance with the terms of validity of the adopted Federal Targeted Education Development Programs (FTEDPs) (Figure 1). It should be noted that at each of the stages, in addition to the documents related to all educational levels, the regulatory legal acts focused on the higher education system were also adopted.

The choice of priority areas is based on the reports of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, while the analysis is carried out only in those areas, the mention of which can be traced both in FTEDPs and in the reports of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation.

To analyze the results of a certain stage, the reports of the activities of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation for the final year of the stage were studied, since these reports summarized all the activities aimed at higher education development, regarding the achievement of the tasks at a certain stage.

Stage I (2000-2005) was related to the adoption of Federal Law of April 10, 2000 No. 51-FZ "On the Approval of the Federal Education Development Program", which included the following extended tasks: improving the regulatory framework in accordance with existing regulatory documents regulating the activities of the educational system, creating a unified educational space throughout the Russian Federation, the expansion of international cooperation, the development of scientific activity and the unity of education and science. This program contained the goals, content and procedures for the development of the entire education system from 2000 to 2005. This stage is also characterized by the adoption of documents aimed directly at higher education development, the adoption of a model regulation on a higher education institution of the Russian Federation (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of September 17, 2001 No. 676) and such concept as a university complex (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of April 5, 2001 No. 264). In general, this stage can be characterized as a stage that sets the direction and general goals of future reforms in higher education of the Russian Federation. The conformity of the tasks set and the results obtained can be seen in the analysis of the "Report on the Results of the Activities of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2005 and Targets for 2006".

Stage II (2006-2010) was related to the adjustment of existing regulatory legal acts. Thus, according to the amendments made on March 11, 2011 to Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 23, 2005 No. 803 "On the Federal Education Development Program for the Period of 2006-2010", the following targets were formed and enshrined at the statutory level: the formation of a lifelong education system, the improvement of education quality and technology, the development of the practical orientation of educational programs correlating with the needs of citizens, society, and the labor market.

Figure 1 Stages of state policy in higher education

In the same period of time, Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of September 17, 2001 No. 676 (as amended on February 14, 2008) "On University Complexes" (Recommendations for Creation) ceased to be effective. It should be noted that during this period, the priority areas for higher education development were adjusted for education, science and innovation, youth policy, international cooperation, as well as the monitoring and supervision direction. The conformity of the tasks set and the results obtained can be seen in the analysis of the "Report on the Results of the Activities of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2010 and Targets for 2011".

Stage III (2011-2015) involved further adjustments to the existing education development program, as well as the appearance of the first May decrees of the President of the Russian Federation regarding education, the emergence of such concept as the educational cluster and the creation of additional regulatory legal acts related to higher education. Due to the fact that another goal of FTEDPs for the period of 2011-2015 (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of February 7, 2011 No. 61 (as amended on December 25, 2015)) was to ensure the availability of quality education that meets the requirements of innovative socially oriented development of the Russian Federation, the following regulatory legal acts were adopted:

- Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of April 9, 2010 "On State Support for the Development of Innovative Infrastructure in Federal Educational Institutions of Higher Professional Education", the basis of which is the formation of an innovative environment, the development of interaction between educational institutions and industrial enterprises, support for the creation of business entities;

- Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 5, 2012 No. 599 "On Measures to Implement the State Policy in Education and Science", which improves the state policy in education and science and the training of qualified specialists, taking into account the requirements of the innovative economy and develops research and development activities by increasing the volumes of financing of state scientific foundations and foundations of leading universities.

In addition, within FTEDPs for the period of 2011-2015, tasks were identified for the development of the education quality assessment system and the demand for educational services. Following this, Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated October 29, 2012 No. 2006-r "On the Approval of the Action Plan for the Development and Improvement of Competitiveness of Russian Leading Universities among the World's Research and Educational Centers" and Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated March 16, 2013 No. 211 "On Measures of State Support for Leading Universities of the Russian Federation in order to Increase Their Competitiveness among the World's Leading Research and Educational Centers" were adopted, which provide organizational-economic and regulatory development of leading universities of the Russian Federation to increase their competitiveness among the world's leading research and educational centers. Separately, it is necessary to consider the project of the National Training Foundation (NTF) "The Study of Prerequisites and the Formation of Basic Tools for the Development of Educational Clusters Based on the Network

Interaction of Leading Engineering Universities with Enterprises and Vocational Education Institutions of Other Levels in the Interests of Developing Priority Sectors of the Economy in the Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation”, since it is one of the largest steps taken by the state in ensuring compliance with the needs of the labor market and the region, through the development of mechanisms for the creation and development of multi-level interregional cluster-type systems. Regarding the development priorities, one could say that they have been enlarged to three priorities (education, science, and youth policy), but the remaining tasks, for example, in the direction of international cooperation, were distributed in all directions (the task of “developing bilateral and multilateral international relations in education” in the direction of “science”).

This stage is characterized by the emergence of new regulatory legal acts that support the implementation of previous goals and objectives and set the new ones, in particular, with regard to creating the innovative environment of the Russian Federation and the competitiveness of Russian universities. The conformity of the tasks set and the results obtained can be seen in the analysis of the “Report on the Results of the Activities of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2015 and Targets for 2016”.

Stage IV (2016-2020) entails assistance in the implementation of previous goals and objectives. Thus, in Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of May 23, 2015 No. 497 “On the Federal Targeted Education Development Program for the Period of 2016-2020”, one of the new tasks is the creation and dissemination of structural and technological innovations in secondary vocational and higher education, as well as the creation of infrastructure ensuring the conditions for training staff for the modern economy. In addition, Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 3, 2015 No. 349-r “On the Approval of a Set of Measures Aimed at Improving the Secondary Vocational Education System for the Period of 2015-2020” establishes measures to ensure that graduates’ qualifications meet the requirements of the modern economy, approves monitoring of the quality of training. During this period, Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 5, 2012 No. 599 “On Measures to Implement the State Policy in Education and Science” and Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 16, 2013 No. 211 “On Measures of State Support for Leading Universities of the Russian Federation in order to Increase their Competitiveness among the World’s Leading Research and Educational Centers” were adopted. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 26, 2017 No. 1642 “On the Approval of the State Program of the Russian Federation “Education Development” implements state policy directions in education through measures to ensure global competitiveness of Russian education, increase the proportion of graduates, increase the number of students involved in the activities of public associations.

This stage is characterized by the formation of many projects related to higher education and science: “Data Sheet of the Priority Project “Modern Digital Educational Environment in the Russian Federation” (approved by the Presidium of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and Priority Projects, Minutes No. 9 of October 25, 2016), “Data Sheet of the

Priority Project “Universities as Centers of the Space for Creating Innovation” (approved by the Presidium of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and Priority Projects, Minutes No. 9 of October 25, 2016), “Data Sheet of the Priority Project “Development of the Export Potential of the Russian Education System” (approved by the Presidium of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and Priority Projects, Minutes No. 6 of May 30, 2017), “Data Sheet of the National Project “Science” (approved by the Presidium of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, Minutes No. 16 of December 24, 2018), “Data Sheet of the National Project “Education” (approved by the Presidium of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, Minutes No. 16 of December 24, 2018). Priority areas of activities are expanding again and becoming narrowly focused; thus, in this period there are 5 priority areas.

Due to the fact that this period is not over yet, one can talk about the conformity of the tasks set and the results obtained when analyzing the “Report on the Results of the Activities of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2015 and Targets for 2016”, as well as the “Report on the Implementation of the Public Declaration of Goals and Objectives of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation for the First Half of 2019”.

To assess the identified stages, the authors proposed an approach to assessing the conformity of priority areas and the results of state policy in higher education, based on the methods of qualitative assessments and quantitative interpretation. To carry out a quantitative interpretation of qualitative indicators, a scale was introduced for assessing the level of compliance of priorities and goals identified in regulatory legal acts with the main state policy results presented in progress reports of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation. The main characteristics of each area of state policy in points are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Scale for assessing the level of conformity of priorities and results of state policy in higher education by points

Level of conformity	Point	Characteristics
Low level	1	Do not conform at all
Average level	2	Conform with large differences
Above-average level	3	Conform with slight differences
High level	4	Fully conform

To assign a certain level of conformity, the following assessment algorithm was formed.

This algorithm is based on determining the area of higher education development, then on a comparison between the chosen priority area and the result of the activities of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation.

Figure 2 Algorithm for assessing the level of conformity of priority areas and results of state policy in higher education

DISCUSSION

According to the results of the analysis of the legal framework in education and reports of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, the following points were assigned in each area of state policy, presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Assessment of the level of conformity of priorities and results of state policy in higher education

Area	Point
Stage I (2000-2005)	
Ensuring the unity of the educational space of the Russian Federation	2
Regulatory support	2
Development of national cultures, regional cultural traditions and characteristics	2
Development and maintenance of democratic, state-public management of the education system	3
Economic mechanisms of the functioning and development of the education system	2
Development of international cooperation and international activities of the Russian Federation in education	2
The average of Stage I	2.2
Stage II (2006-2010)	
Education	3
Science and innovation	3
Youth policy	2
Control and supervision activities	2
International cooperation	2
The average of Stage II	2.4
Stage III (2011-2015)	
Education	3

Science	3
Youth policy	3
The average of Stage III	3
Stage IV (2016-2020)	
Education	3
Science and innovation	3
Youth policy	3
International cooperation	2
Control and supervision activities	3
The average of Stage IV	2.8

Therefore, to sum up, it can be concluded that in accordance with the rating scale presented above, Stages I and II are currently assessed at 2.2 and 2.4 points, respectively, which indicates a correspondence between the areas and results with a high degree of deviations, Stage III is above average, unlike the two previous ones, and is characterized by only slight deviations between the priority areas presented in the report results. It should be noted that Stage IV is assessed preliminarily since it ends only in 2020. Based on the foregoing, a schedule of changes in the correspondence between priorities and results of activities can be made up over four stages for the period of 2000-2020.

Figure 3 Changes in the correspondence between priorities and results of activities during four stages for the period of 2000-2020

In the graph, the transition from Stage III to Stage IV is indicated by a dashed line due to the fact that there is no final data on the results of this stage; therefore, one can talk about possible scenarios for assessing Stage IV:

- Scenario 1 involves increasing the level of conformity of priority areas and results up to the high level;
- Scenario 2 assumes that the level of conformity will remain at the same level as in the previous period;

- Scenario 3 involves a decrease in the level of conformity;
- Scenario 4 (preliminary assessment) assumes that the level of conformity will remain at the same level as in the preliminary assessment.

CONCLUSION

The analysis and assessment of regulatory legal acts in state policy in the field of higher education in priority areas showed that in the 20-year period, the implementation of state policy in higher education can be divided into 4 periods (Stage I – 2000-2005, Stage II – 2006-2010, Stage III – 2011-2015, Stage IV – 2016-2020). These periods are characterized by the alternation of the stages initiating the new goals and supporting them, as well as the emergence of new regulatory legal acts in each of the stages. However, the assessment confirmed the existence of discrepancies between the results of the implementation of these acts and priority areas; from stage to stage, there is an expansion, then a narrowing of the priority areas, and, consequently, their targets, which confirms the lack of continuity.

There is also a lack of openness in the results of the implementation of a regulatory legal act. This can be proved by the following facts: if there are planned indicators for a specific project, certain time limits, there is no link in the report on the implementation or non-fulfillment of the program. It is also not indicated in which report this indicator can be found. These actions do not allow stakeholders to study and trace the line of state policy in higher education, moreover, it casts doubt on the significance of the tasks set earlier.

Nevertheless, the formation of an effective state policy in higher education requires absolute coherence and transparency in the implementation of regulatory legal acts. For this purpose, it is necessary to constantly monitor the level of conformity of the priorities and results of activities of state authorities in higher education in order to reduce risks and negative trends arising from inconsistencies between the central authority and its subordinate bodies. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen control over observing the consistency between the priorities and the results described in the reports. Certainly, an issue on necessary measures to increase the level of compliance between priority areas and results needs to be addressed separately.

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