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The economic aspects of access to qualitative higher education for socially unprotected groups of people in China

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The economic aspects of access to qualitative higher education for socially unprotected groups of people in China / Ekonomiczne aspekty dostępu do edukacji wyższej dla mieszkańców Chin nieobjętych opieką socjalną

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ABSTRACT

The article features the economic aspects of access to qualitative higher education for socially unprotected groups of people in China. There has been considered the advantages and disadvantages of access to higher education for disabled and low-income students.

KEY WORDS: equal access to higher education, disabled people, low-income students, distance learning, state allocations, social programs

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is the way of social mobility in modern information society. It takes part in further social differentiation of its participants. Higher education as the social institute is one of so-called “social elevators” as it enables changes for citizens among social classes. For this reason, one of the priority assignments of Ukrainian education system is to provide the equal access to qualitative higher education of all groups of people, including the socially unprotected ones. In order to fulfill this task, Ukraine should use the experience of other countries.

Nowadays China is very popular on the world arena. For the last years it has experienced rapid economic development. It remains the second largest world economy by nominal GDP after the USA. Since initiating reforms in 1949, living standard of urban population grew by 7 times, of rural citizens – by 5 times.

Chinese higher education system is also developing rapidly now. It provides the national economy with highly skilled specialists, who are able to be creative professionals, to use modern information technologies and new knowledge.

The state authorities of China pay much attention to the development of higher education system, aiming higher education institutions (HEI) at satisfying economic needs. Only the most talented applicants can enter universities. University entrance is the real holiday for young people.

Such problem as equal access to qualitative higher education of socially unprotected people is the relevant issue in China today. For this reason, studying and generalizing the Chinese experience in providing the equal access to qualitative higher education of socially unprotected groups of people is very topical for Ukraine.

THE ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

The problems of higher education development are considered by such Ukrainian and foreign scientists as I. Gryshchenko, I. Kalenyuk, V. Kremen, Zh. Minwei etc. But the problems of equal access to higher education for socially unprotected groups have not been studied profoundly yet.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The objective of our research is to study the economic aspects of access to higher education of socially unprotected groups

of people in China and the elements of Chinese experience in the process of forming and realizing the state policy of supporting the socially unprotected groups of people.

DISCUSSION

For the last years the Chinese government has taken measures in providing rights for such socially unprotected group as disabled people. At the international level, the Chinese government is one of the parties of Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which confirm the equal rights of all people, including disabled people. At the national level, there had been adopted the Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities which deals with regulations and rights of disabled people.

Chinese legislation also protects the right of disabled people to education. There is a number of laws which guarantee the equal access of all groups of people to education. The Article 38 of Education Law of the People's Republic of China states: "The state, society, schools and other educational institutions shall organize education in consideration of the physical and mental characteristics and requirements of disabled people and offer them assistance and convenience" (Education Law of the People's Republic of China). Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China also guarantees the equal access of disabled people to higher education. The Article 9 of the Law says that higher education institutions shall enroll disabled students who are up to the admission qualifications prescribed by the State; they may not refuse to enroll them on account of their disability (Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China). The disabled people are guaranteed to get higher education irrespective of their illness (with the exception of hard mental disorder). Currently 1655 of Chinese HEIs provide the education services to disabled students. Almost 365 thousand disabled students can study there. Besides, there are 1029 of education centers and 2898 courses which prepare them for entering universities.

Chinese authorities pledged to increase funding for disabled students education and cancel some school payments to make their access to education easier. Additionally, one of the peculiarities of Chinese higher education system of financing is donations from beneficial organizations.

But still there are some difficulties in practice. According to Human Rights Watch Report, above 40% of Chinese disabled people are illiterate and live under the poverty line (Human Rights Watch Report 2013). One of the challenges is the medical examination for applicants before entrance. The results of the medical examination are sent to HEIs. In such a way, disabled applicants should declare about their disability what they would not like to do. Some HEIs restrict or even prohibit entrance for people with some

physical and mental "defects". Thus, contrary to valid laws, while entering universities, there is discrimination for disabled students.

The next problem is the lack of special equipment. For instance, the blind students cannot enter the mainstream HEIs as the Government usually fails to provide Braille or electronic versions of entrance exams. But even if they manage to enter, they have to focus on studying professions that are traditional for disabled people, for instance, massage therapy for the blind students (Human Rights Watch Report 2013). Students who aspire to get other professions usually face a plenty of challenges.

There are special education institutions for disabled people in China, including HEIs. The Central government supports such institutions with additional funding. The institutions possess appropriate equipment and special teachers. But the problem is that these special establishments separate disabled students from ordinary people and in many cases that is not their wish. One of the positive moments of Chinese experience is promoting HEIs of distance learning. It is known that distance learning is one of the most efficient ways of obtaining education for disabled people.

Chinese national network of television and radio universities was founded in 1979. Since that time distance learning is developing rapidly. The main means are radio and television programs. The Internet is also being used widely nowadays. There has been suggested to develop distance learning by means of satellite television. Today the Chinese government also confesses the importance of such universities (Kalenyuk 2012).

As the state authorities actively support obtaining higher education via TV, radio, the Internet and other communication means, the number of distance learning students is increasing annually (Ministry of Education of the People Republic of China 2011). In 2011 the number of distance learning students amounted to 492 thousand people (table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of education services consumers at HEIs in China by tuition level (without higher vocational colleges)

Indicators	Thousand people
Regular program students	3113,1
Short-cycle program students	3248,1
Education for adults	2020,7
Doctoral programs	132,4
Graduate programs	463,3
Distance learning	492,0
Preparatory courses	67,1
Foreign students	147,5

Source: The Department of Educational Statistics of the People's Republic of China

In July 2010 China's National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) was promulgated. It distinctly formulates the goals to be reached till 2010. It proposes a lot of innovative ideas for higher education improvement. According to this Plan, Chinese Government provides for using innovations, information technologies and facilitating the distance learning (Ministry of Education of the People Republic of China 2010).

While entering HEIs, there is a system of benefits for such socially unprotected group of people as orphans and children from low-income families. There is a number of state programs for financial assistance to students with financial difficulties. These are grants, scholarships, subsidies and even exemption from tuition fee. Besides, HEIs students are allowed to combine their tuition with part-time job if it does not hinder them in their efforts to study.

One of the financial assistance programs for students is the social program "Hope". It was founded in 1989 by the Foundation of Development of Young People in China. Since 2007 the program has initiated the new stage of its activity. Nowadays it provides much more possibilities for socially

unprotected people who want to get profound higher education (Minwei 2012).

For the last years the system of state financial support has been constantly improving. In 2011 the state allocated near 73.2 billion RMB for student credits, grants, subsidies and scholarships. In future the allocations are planned to be increased. Government allocations are mainly used for financial support of low-income students. Some HEIs also allocate money for students with financial difficulties.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Providing the equal access to qualitative higher education for socially unprotected groups of people is one of the priorities today. For this reason, the experience of other countries can be useful for Ukraine. There are some positive points in Chinese experience of providing equal access to higher education for disabled and low income people. These are: the improvement of distance learning, the efficient system of benefits for students with financial difficulties, variety of social programs. Still, the problem has not been absolutely solved and has to be further studied.

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