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## Влияние образовательной доктрины неолиберализма на высшее образование России

**Проблема и цель.** Рассматриваются разные точки зрения на проблему кризисных процессов в российском высшем образовании. В качестве значимой причины системного кризиса высшего образования в современной России авторы считают серьёзное влияние образовательной доктрины неолиберализма. *Целью статьи* является анализ основных идеологических постулатов неолиберализма, обращённых непосредственно к образованию и превращающих его в составную часть глобальной экономики.

**Материалы и методы.** Изучены научные публикации российских и зарубежных авторов, включающие педагогическую и общественно-политическую периодику, материалы конференций, монографии, интернет-ресурсы. Используются источниковедческий метод, сравнительное описание, компаративистский и лингвистический анализ.

**Результаты исследования.** Отмечено масштабное и активное проникновение неолиберальной идеологии в сферу образования. Особое внимание уделено анализу привлекательности идеологием «человеческий капитал», «непрерывное образование» в неолиберальной интерпретации, которые на поверку оказываются механизмами девальвации духовного смысла образования и его коммодификации. Представлена критическая аргументация укрепления неолиберальной позиции в деятельности российских университетов: включённость в конкуренцию, проявление признаков «академической коммерции», коммодификация продуктов научной деятельности и обучения, бюрократизация. Подчеркнуто, что в контексте организации университетского образования по модели бизнес-процесса студенту предлагается позиция потребителя образовательных услуг, которая лицемерно декорируется как подготовка «когнитария» – креативного лидера эпохи «экономики знаний», а на деле – узких специалистов с набором компетенций, требующих постоянного обновления.

**Заключение и выводы.** Проведенное исследование показало, что проблема кризиса высшего образования активно обсуждается научно-педагогическим сообществом и на Западе, и в России, осознаётся влияние экономических и политических процессов на традиционные основы университетского образования. Но поиск решения проблем будет идти в разных направлениях: Запад ориентируется больше на политические рычаги преобразований, а российское образование должно определяться в своих методологических ориентирах. Выход из кризиса и преодоление влияния образовательной доктрины неолиберализма возможен только на путях становления новой идеологии России.

**Ключевые слова:** образование, университет, кризис, неолиберализм, человеческий капитал, конкуренция, идеология

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## The impact of the liberalist educational doctrine on the higher education in Russia

**Problem and Purpose.** The paper deals with different views on the problem of recessionary processes in the Russian higher education. The authors consider the significant impact of the educational doctrine of neoliberalism to be a significant reason for the systemic crisis of the higher education in modern Russia. *The purpose of the article* is to analyse the main ideological postulates of neoliberalism that address education directly and turn it into an integral part of the global economy.

**Materials and methods.** The research materials are represented by scientific publications of Russian and foreign authors, including pedagogical and socio-political periodicals, conference materials, monographs, Internet resources. The following methods were used: source study, comparative description, comparative and linguistic analysis.

**Research findings.** The authors note the large-scale active penetration of neoliberal ideology into the sphere of education. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of attractiveness of "human capital" and "lifelong learning" ideologemes in neoliberal interpretation, which in fact turn out to be the mechanisms for devaluation of spiritual meaning of education and its commodification. The article presents critical arguments in respect of the strengthening neoliberal position present in the activities of Russian universities: involvement in competition, signs of "academic commerce", commodification of scientific and educational products, bureaucratisation. It is emphasised that, in the context of the structure of university education according to the business process model, students are offered the position of educational services consumer, which is hypocritically decorated as training of "cognitarians" – creative leaders of the "knowledge economy" era, but in fact – narrow specialists with a set of competences that require constant updating.

**Conclusion and resume.** The study has shown that the problem of higher education crisis is actively discussed by the scientific and pedagogical community in the West and in Russia; the influence of economic and political processes on the traditional foundations of university education is tangibly realised. However, the search for solution to the relevant problems will take place in different directions: the West focuses more on the political leverage of transformation, while the Russian education is aimed at development within its methodological guidelines. The withdrawal from the crisis and overcoming the influence of the educational doctrine of neoliberalism is possible only through the establishment of a new ideology in Russia.

**Keywords:** education, university, crisis, neoliberalism, human capital, competition, ideology

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## Introduction

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The recessionary processes, including in state-run higher education systems, are becoming increasingly evident in the conditions of the modern globalised world, intensive cultural penetration, economic integration in the world educational space. Since the last decade of the 20th century, the worldwide higher education agenda has been increasingly shaped by the initiatives of influential international organisations (OECD, EU, Council of Europe, WTO, World Bank, etc.). The ideas of these organisations, representing mostly financial and commercial structures, are based on neoliberal ideology and are translated worldwide through presentations, reports, research results, recommendations to governments, financial aid programmes for specific states, etc. The result is represented by active penetration of economic, financial and commercial interests in the sphere of higher education, which leads to restructuring of national higher education systems, with subsequent crises in their organisation and management.

The discussions about the crisis of the modern university education do not stop in Russia either.

In recent decades, we have so purposefully advanced towards the knowledge economy and innovations in the educational system that we failed to notice the catastrophic decline in the level of education in the country, including higher education.

Some higher education specialists consider these crisis phenomena as natural and attribute them to the fact that higher education in the conditions of the global knowledge economy becomes a part of economic system and thus reacts to recession and crisis processes taking place in it. In these terms, they refer to an English scholar Ph. Coombs who deemed recessionary processes in education to be the attempts of the existing educational systems to adapt to the changing life conditions in the society. Moreover, in his opinion, crisis processes in education should be overcome by joint international search for due solutions [1].

However, the vast majority of authors concerned about the problems of higher education in modern Russia try to look for the causes of its decline in local areas. For instance, insufficient mastery of modern educational models is given attention to [2]. Attention is often drawn as well to “massification of higher education” [3]. School graduates entering higher educational establishments on the basis of Unified State Examination results, being not obliged to go through special entrance examinations, fill the university lecture halls, studying under mass-scale Bachelor degree programmes which have turned in fact into general education programmes compensating for serious deficiencies of school training. In turn, the Bachelor programme graduates who received the first university scientific (!) degree – “Bachelor” – do not continue their education for the most part, but start professional activity, often in the areas where higher education is not required. Higher education is being devalued in the society; science and industry do not acquire proper-quality specialists.

The problem that engenders crisis processes in modern Russian education is its commercialisation and commodification deemed as such not without reason [4]. Higher education teachers who still remember free state-powered education system can observe newly-introduced paid forms of education, paid online courses, paid participation in

scientific conferences, paid publications, etc., along with the budget-funded forms. The commercial relations based on supply of educational services quite quickly provide for transition to the processes of commodification, when management interferes in the process of education: shapes curricula towards training of competitive graduates, forms a set of competences that are in demand for servicing specific industries. As a result, the educational goals discourse, traditional for Russia, turns out to be unable to resist commodification requirements translated by the market economy [5].

A number of authors deem the ill-considered reforms of higher education to be the cause of all problems specific of our higher educational establishments, as well as Russia's joining the Bologna Process, the undertaken obligations to actively implement the universities internationalisation strategy [6; 7]. The scientific and pedagogical community began unwittingly to discuss the problems of higher education by relying on the language of globalised declarations, political recommendations, Western educational standards and normative legal documents.

The authors share the position of the researchers who argue that the crisis of education in Russia is accompanied by the crisis of pedagogical science. "The pedagogical science, as an instrument of reflection on the current situation, is increasingly demonstrating its inability to explain the pedagogical reality in its multifacetedness and completeness" [8, p.18]. But, in our opinion, the crisis has its roots not only in the postmodern destruction of the very subject of pedagogy, and not in the fact that it lacks the adequate scientific language to explain the modern processes in pedagogical practice. We deem the lack of clear, convincing methodological principles in the organisation of education in modern Russia as a determinant factor. For this reason, the system of higher education is openly built on the basic postulates of the educational doctrine of neoliberal globalism.

The authors challenged to analytically substantiate and highlight the tendencies that characterise the manifestations of neoliberal ideology and its transition to the level of axiological, substantive, organisational and technological foundations of higher education in modern Russia.

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## Methodology and methods

The methodological basis of this paper is the concept of education as a holistic and purposeful process involving formation and development of all human intrinsic forces and abilities.

The following research methods were used: source study; comparative description; comparative analysis – to identify neoliberal "trends" in the Russian theory and practice of higher education; linguistic analysis – for correct interpretation of terms; analysis of personal observations and the authors' own teaching experience in their capacity of practicing university professors.

The research materials comprised as follows: scientific publications of Russian and foreign authors (including pedagogical and socio-political periodicals), conference materials, monographs, results of research carried out within the EU and other international organisations (UNESCO, OECD, Council of Europe, etc.); Internet resources, including official websites of international organisations, websites of research centres, educational institutions; open archival, bibliothecarial, educational resources, etc.

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## Results

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The bourgeois consciousness, until the middle of the 20th century, existed within the framework of classical capitalism substantiated in the earlier period by Max Weber's Protestant philosophy: activity, will, conscientious professional labour, honesty, modesty, rational and prudent accumulation of capital. These principles of pragmatic life management ensured the achievement of famous "American dream": they opened a prospect for a common man to become a rich and successful capitalist. In the second half of the 20th century, the leading capitalist systems, undergoing a systemic crisis, embarked on globalisation. In order to retain power and their own material priorities, the Western countries' elites needed to dismantle the traditional institutions of developed capitalist era – social state, civil society and mass education – with the support of neoliberal ideology.

One of the most attractive postulates of neoliberalism is the declaration of "knowledge economy". The pedagogical approach somewhat idealises this notion, making the emphasis on the word "knowledge". Meanwhile, the neo-liberal interpretation suggests the opposite – economisation of education, devaluation of spiritual meaning of knowledge and its transformation into a component of "human capital" which clearly reveals the market-focused interpretation of education.

The concept of "human capital" was substantiated and introduced into scientific usage by T. Schultz and G. Becker [9; 10]. The proponents of neoliberalism believe that any person should manage his/her life similar to business processes and strive to be efficient. "Ownership" (ownership of material resources) and "independence" (willingness to rely on oneself, on one's free choice) are proclaimed as the leading principles of life. Human capital is a unique form of capital, since a person is able to improve himself, to multiply his/her resources. In this context, education is considered as a form of investment in an individual, a kind of "self-capitalisation": mastering new competencies that are required in the labour market, taking care of one's health, maintaining one's efficiency, demonstrating determination, perseverance, striving for self-development. An individual's well-being and achievement of life success depend on human capital. According to S. Sellar and L. Zipin, "it must be recognised that the discourse of human capital efficiently offers a fictitious hope, "music to one's ear", to people having unstable emotional state and being in difficult material circumstances. This hope is encapsulated in a discourse of "responsibility" which implies that any individual, while bearing individual responsibility for his well-being based on limitless opportunities of self-capitalisation, also becomes responsible for a failure to achieve this well-being. False promises mask real traps". [11, p.8].

The set of human capital components inevitably becomes a commodity: one should pay for it, one should take care of its replenishment by paying for educational services. Human capital is included in the process of competition, since a person "invests in himself" to achieve success. Success is another key characteristic of the market interpretation of education which to some extent claims to be a universal moral norm. But the pursuit of success becomes essentially an exploitation mechanism packed in a bright wrapper: in order to survive in market competition, one has to continually apply for more and more educational services.

Launching the market competition mechanism in education eventually leads to segregation of students by racial, national, religious and, above all, social attributes. This

is a requirement of the present labour market. “The inequality in distribution of income, debt and wealth becomes increasingly evident. All this is accompanied by a gap in the labour market between “good”, well-paid and relatively protected managerial positions (and sometimes professional activities) – and the increasing number of “bad”, low-paid, temporary jobs” [12]. Thus, one of the leading democratic ideas of Western civilisation – “equal opportunities” – is desecrated.

Neoliberalism openly promotes the idea of admissibility of inequality. Inequality in education creates certain conditions for sustainable development of the world’s population, since every socio-cultural stratum will perform its specific functions: the more educated ones – to lead, the less educated ones – to subordinate. The educational system is designed to adapt the learners to neoliberal values, without making them understand that this is a path to lifelong oppression.

The ideologists of neoliberalism have distorted the very substance of education – the individual’s cognitive need, his striving for self-improvement for a higher goal. The concept of lifelong learning is a testament to this. If we lift the veil of reasoning about the society, the knowledge economy and the importance of “human capital” resources, it turns out that the reconstructed liberal education system intentionally degrades the level of academic training of schoolchildren and students, depriving them of the possibility to master the fundamentals of science, while the proposed sets of competencies containing a minimum of unstructured information quickly become obsolete. Hence the need to “continuously” maintain one’s human capital by updating the sets of skills and abilities that will allow one to hold out on the professional and life success ladder. A whole system of “lifelong learning” is being built, representing in fact a huge market of educational services with no shortage of consumers eager to get new certificates and diplomas.

Although neoliberalism claims to be an economic theory, in fact it is an ideological project designed in the interests of big capital. As noted by D. Harvey, neoliberalism is an ideology since it claims that its vision of the society is the only correct, universal and necessary one, for “any manifestation of human activity can be involved in market relations” [12, p.3]. The main postulate of the ideology of neoliberalism: everything works through the market of free competition. Not only the economic life, but also social and personal relations are based on it. Everything exists for the market and under the laws of the market!

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## Discussion

The university in the context of neoliberal ideology is positioned as a money-making enterprise engaged in “academic commerce” and included in competition at all levels. Western scholars, who were the first to encounter the process of neoliberalisation of higher education, note: “Competition covers everything: competition for a place in world rankings, competition to attract foreign students, competition to get grants, competition for university graduates’ jobs, etc. Universities hire those who can bring more money to them; evaluation of teaching staff is based on the number of publications; students are awarded for commercial ideas, etc.” [13, p. 109]. Similar trends are also noticed in the Russian university community.

In the knowledge society, it is the universities that are viewed as one of the main agents of knowledge production. “However, the emphasis is placed on the production of knowledge that can be commercially exploited, rather than on the development of ways through which

knowledge will contribute to man's internal development within the extensive goals of education" [14, p. 3]. We agree with the author who states that an illustrative example of the above is the fact that foreign language (primarily English) is already functioning in the labour market as a commodity having "exchange value". One can observe active commodification of the English language along with the development of globalised interaction between countries and economies, spread of information technologies. "Social relations under capitalism form a pattern where the products of human labour become a property not of the one who possesses skills and abilities, but of the one who can exploit them. Commodified language, as a factor of labour process, provides for extension of the already recognised elements of the profit-driven production system. The language skills and abilities of a hired individual prove to be a commodity for those who will profit from their use – the employers" [14, p. 20].

The university, as an enterprise, actively creates its own profile, develops activity standards, academic disciplines curricula – that are oriented at the expectations of students as consumers of educational services. The processes of supplantation of free education in higher school are considered as positive by the supporters of neoliberalism: the students who pay for education have to think over financial consequences of their choice of training courses, learn to save and consider their education as a personal investment comparable to purchasing a house or a computer [15]. We share T. M. Korsgaard's disturbing observation that the society is not much concerned about the fact that education is degraded to deriving profit, which process takes place not only at the institutional and social class level, but also at the individual level [16].

During the educational process at the university, students are subject to active cultivation of business-like attitude towards work and life, development of skills of self-presentation, self-organisation and self-management of their activities. The training of a "cognitarian" – a specialist of the present epoch (the so-called cognitive capitalism), a creative leader ready to take independent decisions, able to think positively and create innovative products – is coming to the forefront. One must be a mobile, enterprising non-conformist having communication skills. The practice-oriented competencies (soft skills) are becoming basic values and are noticeably replacing the theoretical foundations of science in the educational process.

The universities' activity is evaluated by the same criteria as those used to assess the efficiency of business corporations: the lower the cost of goods and services sold, the more efficient the institution is. The worldwide practice of reducing the prime cost leads to deflation of teachers' salaries, reduction of teaching staff, increased teaching load, reduced term of employment contracts, etc. One cannot but agree with R. Keil who, analysing the situation in Canadian provinces, notes that school and university teachers, since the introduction of neoliberal regulatory measures in education, have been subjected to increased workload, stagnant salaries, increased number of learners in class, changes in curricula, changes in educational institution management and reduced funding of these establishments [12, p. 588]. Thus, despite the statements about their academic freedom from the state, the universities are not an independent academic community. D. Hill's conclusions are concordant with the above: "The reduction in higher education funding has made the universities extremely susceptible to the influence of big money, which has led to a certain impact on academic freedom and research areas" [17 p. 117].

The role of the administrative apparatus in such conditions is increasing; the number of managers within the staff is increasing as well. The intensification of commercialisation

processes in education leads to increasing integration of education and business, creation of public-private partnerships; this contributes to the implantation of market mechanisms and values of corporate management culture in academic life, with an emphasis on competition, saving, efficiency, performance [18]. This is mentioned as well in F. Cannizzo's works that point at active inclusion of administrative responsibilities in the duties of the academic teaching staff – those involving reporting, benchmarking, collection of data and analysis of performance, permanent modification of plans, which leaves significantly less room for actual teaching and research [19 p. 200]. According to the author, the teachers entering the university are expected to cultivate entrepreneurial initiative, while the risks that may arise from their actions will be managed through evaluation and audit of their activities [ibid, p. 209]. The researchers of higher education in Ireland come to the same conclusions: "Higher education has become highly commercialised and privatised. Universities now see their role in providing services, research and labour for the corporate sector. University funding comes for the most part from private sources, including tuition fees from international and own students and philanthropists' aid. At the same time, public funding is declining. Higher education workers have become increasingly subjected to monitoring and control by managers. Reporting is presently controlled by managers or external auditors and civil servants in line with an outcome-oriented management policy. This management style has come from business and is based on the neoliberal model of organisation management" [20, p. 373]. Similar conclusions are voiced by M. Holborow: "Academic commerce has become the main sphere of activity at universities in Ireland, including operation of university campuses and creation of partnerships between universities and business. Like elsewhere, obtaining patents and producing intellectual property has become a prerequisite for evaluation of academic staff performance and the condition for their promotion. Higher education policy becomes orientated at attracting foreign students who will pay money for education" [14, p. 109]. According to A. Harðarson, the educational model based on the concept of economic educational outcomes as one of its key concepts, as approved by the Bologna process among other things, pursues the achievement of results that are external in relation to the educational process. This deprives people of the opportunity to have learning an experience that is rewarding in itself. It is this simplistic and unrealistic perception of the goals of education, the author believes, that serves to be the reason of failures in attempts to improve the education [21]. These conclusions are quite consistent with our assessment of the mechanism of commercialisation of higher education.

Western critics of neoliberal regulation of higher education are more concerned with the problems of "managerialism": reconstruction of university management system, financing and academic commerce. The attitude voicing that the recessionary processes in higher education represent a temporary phenomenon conditioned by the economic and financial crisis is actively translated. They predominantly see the way out of this situation through political transformation.

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## Conclusion

The analysis of the chosen problem convinces the authors of this paper that the wide opportunities for the introduction of neoliberal ideology were opened when, after the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation radically transformed its economic system through the method of "shock therapy", destroyed many social institutions, devalued

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spiritual values and achievements of the Soviet period for the sake of entering the market economy. It might seem that some natural-way renewal of education has commenced: the Unified State Examination upon leaving school has become a pass to a university; fee-paying education has been launched, the Bologna Process principles have been introduced; the transition to competence-based education is underway – but in fact we are integrating, and already have been integrated, into the process of neoliberal globalisation. The ideological postulates of neoliberalism have been introduced into the educational culture of Russia not only through the business language of economics, social and psychological technologies, but also metaphorically, by creating attractive images of a present-epoch free and successful individual. Young people are offered a “semantically substituted” representation of reality; this ensures the viability of neoliberal ideology. The neoliberal ethos not only destroys the traditional cultural and educational environment of universities, but also promotes a system of values through attractive benchmarks (freedom of choice, success, self-actualisation, student-centred education, professional mobility, etc.) which shift the responsibility for the socio-economic situation onto an individual.

The higher education of contemporary Russia has undoubtedly incorporated the major neoliberal ideas, but it has shaped them into a bizarre hybrid of American and European systems with some remnants of the dismantled Soviet educational system. Its existence in this form is inherently doomed to stagnation, which is already now perceived as a crisis of higher education.

The scientific and pedagogical community of the national higher education institutions reacts to the recessionary changes with anxiety and concern: from doomed acceptance of the destiny “to live in the time of change”, the desire to disguise what is happening with optimistic arguments about “global civilisation codes”, “universal values”, progressive trends of globalisation and promotion of the professional education concept as a system of “hard skills + soft skills” – to comprehension of the in-depth transformation of the substance of education as a process of personal development, recognition of destruction of the traditional axiological principles of the young generation’s maturation under the influence of the neoliberal ideology. The influence of neoliberal reforms can turn higher education establishments into class socialisation institutions preparing their graduates for market competition in the global capitalistic space.

This powerful ideological infiltration of liberalism in Russia’s higher education can only be countered by a new ideology of the country which is called upon to change the education policy.

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