

DETERMINING ACADEMIC WORKLOAD AND REMUNERATION SCHEMES IN GEORGIAN UNIVERSITIES

Maka Kordzadze

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

E-mail: Maka.kordzadze@lsg.gov.ge

Abstract

One of the main regulatory mechanisms for university education quality enhancement is the achievement of maximum efficiency in using the academic personnel's teaching and research potential. Therefore, the regulation of the academic workload and remuneration has become a key management issue for Georgian Higher Education Institutions. Elaborating of fair and logical workload schemes and determining of adequate salaries is quite a difficult problem, because academic work is very complex and consists of several components. To overcome the problem Higher Education managers should take into account the opinions of professors concerning the loading and compensation issues.

The research aimed to analyze opinions of academic and administrative staff of the leading Georgian universities about the major factors characterizing professors' workload that are important for determining reasonable remuneration. Significant differences in the assessment of these factors of academic and administrative staff were revealed. It seems obvious that current workload and remuneration schemes of academic personnel at universities of Georgia require improvement and development in order to avoid demotivation of professors and to ensure purposeful spending of university finances. The research offers to move to the system of calculating academic workload in the credits-hours as a method for elaborating fair and logical remuneration schemes.

Findings and conclusions of the research will be helpful for elaborating academic workload and compensation schemes that promote quality enhancement and motivation of the academic staff performance.

Key words: academic workload, credits-hours, motivation, remuneration, quality.

Introduction

To define workload and remuneration of academic staff is becoming a more and more intensive issue for research for education managers. This is natural since one of the most important factors to determine the quality of teaching at the high educational institution is its corps of professors. Besides, a major part of finances of higher educational institution are spent on the remuneration of academic personnel. Therefore, studying the schemes of workload of academic personnel, developing mechanisms to increase their efficiency and providing respective recommendations to higher educational institution will significantly promote not only enhancement of quality of higher education but also more efficient use of finances of higher educational institutions.

Problems of Research

The challenge which managers and administrators of the higher educational institutions face is to develop such a scheme of distributing the workload of academic personnel which will provide both implementations of the mission and aims of higher educational institutions, maximum use of the resource of academic personnel, its professional development and raise motivation thus promoting purposeful spending of finances. Concerns about staff wellbeing, motivation and performance have led faculties and universities around the world to consider how they might better manage the work and loads of individual staff (Vardi, 2009).

Research Focus

The recommendations of *the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) on the status of academic personnel of higher educational institutions adopted in 1997 are among the noteworthy international documents regulating workload of academic personnel and remuneration. The workload of higher-education teaching personnel should be fair and equitable, permit such personnel to carry out effectively their duties and responsibilities to their students as well as their obligations in regard to scholarship, research and/or academic administration, provide due consideration in terms of salary for those who are required to teach beyond their regular workload, and be negotiated with the organizations representing higher-education teaching personnel, except where other equivalent procedures consistent with international standards are provided (UNESDOC, 1997).

A number of authors also indicate to reflect the multi-component nature of academic personnel's work in the scheme of its workload. The teaching, research, creative endeavours, community involvement, professional service, and academic decision making – the work of university or college – is carried out each day by committed faculty members (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007). Academic personnel are obliged to plan BA programs, teach BA students, assess and evaluate them, supervise master and doctoral students, publish articles, get involved in various committee and board activities, manage research projects, carry out public activities. The list can be unending. At the same time, professors, as well as other professionals need enough time for their own professional development. Despite such a multi-component nature of academic personnel, up to present, most commonly are used models based time, particularly on conventional contact hours approach (Burgess, 1996; Soliman, 1999) which focuses on the number of contact hours that academic will teach (as cited in Vardi, 2009). However, in parallel with this, there exists the tendency of making the workload of academic personnel more detailed, which is also problematic since measuring the all separate details through quantitative and qualitative criteria is extremely complicated. However, it is essential to put forward certain details to make sure that it will promote the development of fairer schemes and increase of satisfaction of academic personnel. Staff members are, to boot, confronted with academic workloads that are increasingly scrutinised by higher education managers. This relates to the fact that, like in the world of business, checking on hours spent and money earned is filtering into higher education. Or, differently put, input frameworks for evaluating academic work increasingly complement earnings- and output-based frameworks (Bitzer, 2006). Although this study has shown that academic staff are generally comfortable with accounting for input workload indicators like time, they are also willing to take earnings for the institution or their faculties and departments on board. More accurate workload distribution instrumentation – at least in this study – thus clearly contributed to the perceived fairness and equity among staff, but it appears as if the output and outcomes of academic work should be increasingly stressed in order to produce tangible evidence of what academic staff contribute rather than how they spend their time or how much income they generate (Bitzer, 2006).

The question where the Golden Middle needs to be found in order to make workload of academic personnel fair, focused on quality enhancement and detailed adequately, what qualities of activities of professors need to be envisaged while devising the systems of workload and remuneration so that the schemes do not lead to demotivation of academic personnel and, respectively, lowering the

quality of their activities, remains substantial and actual and it is only through taking into consideration the opinions of the representatives of high educational institutions that they will be settled. A fair and impartial merit-rating system could be a means of enhancing quality assurance and quality control. Where introduced and applied for purposes of salary determination it should involve prior consultation with organizations representing higher-education teaching personnel (UNESDOC, 1997).

As of today, there do not exist any common principles and approaches to developing the schemes of workload at high educational institutions of Georgia. In reality, it is only calculation of contact hours which is applied while determining the workload and remuneration of academic personnel and academic positions are taken into consideration. Distribution of time amongst the components of the faculty work – Teaching, Research and Service vary very much from one institution to another. Furthermore, there are no shared vision and common principles, procedures and methodology among Georgian HEIs for elaboration of academic staff workload (Kordzadze, 2013).

Devising a logical, effective and balanced scheme of workload is quite a challenging task since activities of academic personnel are multi-component and at the same time, envisage production of intellectual product. Assessment of its volume and quality requires respective methods and criteria of measurement.

To accomplish that task manager needs timely, reliable and complete information about allocation of workload for faculty (Zilli, Trunk-Širca, 2009). Indeed, such information should be obtained on the basis of studying the opinions of the academic personnel. Therefore, higher educational institutions should carry out an assessment of their activities. One of the most significant issues of this self-assessment should be interviewing academic personnel on the problems existing in respect with the interrelation of fairness and efficiency and workload remuneration of existing workload schemes. The aim of higher educational institutions should be to note those differences that exist between the opinions of academic personnel and the administration itself as well as surveying the reasons for these differences and achieving maximum consensus.

Methodology of Research

General Characteristics of Research

The research was of an exploratory nature. It aimed at studying the opinions of administrative and academic personnel on which components of professors' activities and their qualities should be taken into consideration by the administration in order to balance the volume of workload schemes and respective remuneration. For this purpose, academic personnel of higher educational institutions as well as administrative staff have been interviewed. Main points of focus of their opinions have been studied whose failure to take into consideration may cause demotivation of academic personnel and reduction of the quality of their activities. The quantitative research method was used. Namely, questionnaires after which they were statistically analysed.

Sample

Respondents were selected purposefully. Namely, from 2 groups – heads of quality management departments of universities and academic personnel of various higher educational establishments. Overall, the heads of 11 universities and 33 quality assurance services of separate departments of universities have been surveyed as well as 114 representatives of academic personnel from 14 universities. Both public and private universities have been involved in the survey. Public universities: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi State Medical University, State Technical University, Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgian State University, Sukhumi branch of Tbilisi State University, the Regional Universities in Gori, Batumi and Telavi. Private universities: the Caucasus University, Georgian University, Tbilisi Free University, Open University, University „Metekhi“, Teaching University „Tbilisi“, “University of Kutaisi”.

Instrument and Procedure

The structured questionnaire was selected as the assessment instrument. Questions were closed, questionnaires were sent to respondents by e-mail. The list of factors determining the amount/volume of remuneration was offered to the respondents in questionnaires who had to assess the importance of these factors. The factors were graded from one to five according to Likert's 5-value scale in which 1 was extremely significant and 5 implied completely insignificant and 99 – can't answer. The following factors have been listed:

- Responsibility towards work
- Load of study hours
- Outcomes of research activities
- Teaching experience
- Administrative workload
- Qualification
- Academic position
- Contribution to university activities

The academic personnel questionnaire included an additional question: to what extent are you satisfied with the workload scheme at your university which also had to be answered according to the 5-point assessment system from 1 "very satisfied" to 5 – "very dissatisfied".

After having collected filled-in questionnaires, they have been statistically processed and analyzed.

Data analysis

Survey data were entered manually and all analysis was done using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 13.0. Descriptive statistics including frequency distributions and means were conducted on all variables.

Results of Research

At the initial stage opinions of representatives of administration have been studied on which factors have been regarded as priority ones to define the volume of remuneration of academic personnel (see Table 1).

Table 1. The average meaning of assessing the factors determining remuneration of academic personnel by administrative personnel.

The factor determining remuneration	Average meaning of assessment "M"
Qualification	1.55
Outcome of research work	1.64
Academic Position	1.82
Responsibility towards work	2.20
Training load	2.30
Contribution to university activities	2.33
Teaching experience	2.45
Administrative workload	4.70

The given table clearly illustrates the priorities, what heads of university administrations consider more significant for defining the volume of remuneration of academic personnel. Priority is given to qualification, outcome of research activities and academic position, responsibility towards work holds the fourth position and training load is only at the fourth place.

The assessment of these factors by academic personnel resulted in a completely different picture. Table 2 represents opinions of academic personnel of higher educational institutions, what factors should determine labour remuneration of academic personnel.

Table 2. The average meaning of assessing the factors determining the remuneration of academic personnel by academic personnel.

Factors defining remuneration	Average meaning of assessment "M"
Teaching load	1.33
Qualification	1.38
Outcome of research activities	1.51
Responsibility towards work	1.57
Teaching experience	1.70
Academic position	1.92
Contribution to university activities	2.61
Administrative workload	2.67

In this case the obvious priority is given to teaching workload and responsibility towards work, followed by qualification, the result research activities holds the fourth place. The academic position occupied the sixth place.

For clear comparison, both assessments are demonstrated in Figure 1.

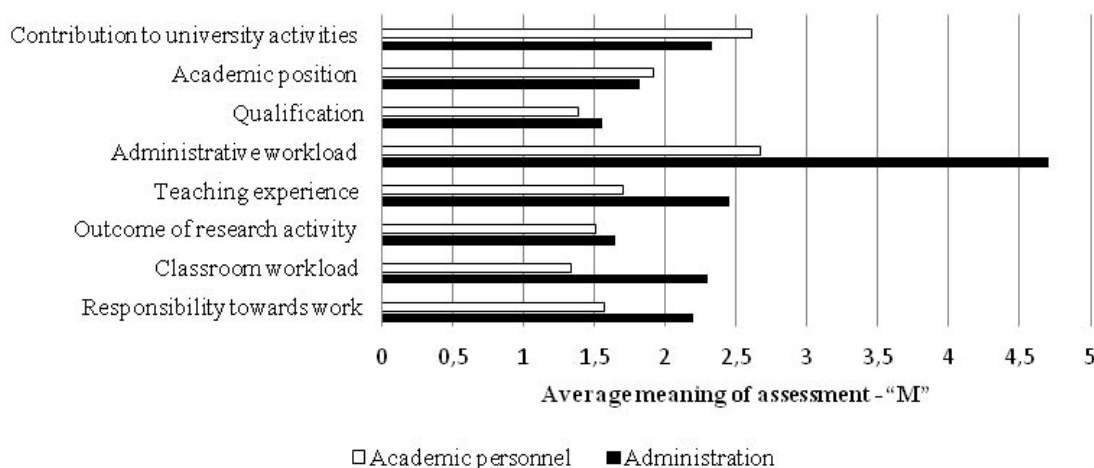


Figure1: Average meanings of factors defining remuneration and workload by administrative and academic personnel.

It is worth noting that administration practically considers it fully insignificant to let administrative activities of academic personnel be reflected upon their remuneration. However, this work requires quite a lot of time and effort and is evaluated by the academic personnel as the component having much more significance.

As for satisfaction with the workload scheme in one’s own university, the average meaning of responses equaled $M=3.4$, which is placed on the suggested assessment scale in the middle “not so much satisfied - 3” and “dissatisfied - 4”.

Several issues to be taken into consideration emerged out of the analysis of results of assessing the factors determining the quality of activities and components of workload by the academic personnel and administration.

The survey revealed that for determining the volume of remuneration academic personnel considers each component and quality of his/her activities more important than administration. Only two factors: academic position and contribution appeared to be those factors which administration considered more significant compared to academic personnel. It is worth noting that academic workload and teaching experience as well as responsibility towards work and administrative workload, were assessed substantially differently by the respondents of these 2 groups.

It is extremely worth noting that if based on the assessment of the administration academic position was ranked as the third among the listed factors, this factor occupied the 6th place in the assessment of academic personnel. Only those factors that are not directly linked with academic and scientific-research work have been defined as factors having less importance. Namely, contribution to university activities and administrative workload. This difference definitely needs to be taken into consideration since, practically, remuneration for the workload of academic personnel at universities of Georgia is directly related to the academic position.

It can be said that the weakest and most imbalanced side of academic schemes in Georgian Universities today is the fact that multi-component nature of workload is not taken into consideration in them and they are based only on contact hours and academic position factors (Kordzadze, 2013). The academic position, on the one hand, is obviously significant and something to take into consideration and it should have its own “weight” in this scheme. However, on the other hand, another issue to be envisaged is the fact that academic personnel not possessing the academic position or having lower posts, such as, assistant professors, are much more loaded with work. The existing workload schemes oblige them to do so. Bentley & Kyvik (2012) investigated this kind of disproportion as a more global phenomenon. Bentley & Kyvik (2012) tested this proportion using data on the allocation of working time between academic tasks at universities in thirteen countries and found that faculty members holding the highest professorial rank share more in common, with generally stronger interests in research and a greater time dedication to research over teaching. But in Georgian Universities besides this disproportion, as a rule, the personnel holding lower professorial rank is subject to less remuneration for every classroom teaching hour. Respectively, for this part of academic personnel which permanently, sometimes even 6-8 hours a day, is busy doing classroom teaching work, it is quite a tough task to find the time for scientific work and professional development without which, on the other hand, it will not be able to get high academic position. Thus, it flows from this that to a certain degree there is a “vicious circle” and it is definitely necessary to find the way out.

In order to solve the identified problems, the ways need to be found by means of which it will be possible to envisage the characteristic factors of multi-component nature of their activities and the indicators given above in the schemes of workload of academic personnel and their remuneration. To find such ways, it is necessary to study and analyze the literature in the sphere of workload schemes of academic personnel. However, it is also worth noting as Houston, Meyer and Paewai (2006) found that the literature investigating different approaches to work allocation is limited and does not provide a comprehensive research-base for clear guidelines with known consequences. But while the distribution of working time has been examined by many individual universities and in many countries, cross-country comparative studies are in short supply (Bentley, Kyvik, 2012). So, it is also possible to use best practice examples in this respect. Namely, the experience of other leading universities, carry out analysis of schemes developed by them and fit them to the existing reality. For example, it is well-known, that several universities use special excel charts to calculate exactly academic workload by means of which exact calculation of separate, pre-determined components is. The examples of those charts are posted by Kelvin (2012); University of East London (2013).

However, at this stage, taking into consideration the experience at universities of Georgia, developing such detailed schemes of calculation seem to be quite problematic. Based on existing experience, it is possible to make sure it is more relevant to move to the system of calculating the workload by credits which will be more easily understandable and logical for universities of Georgia

since calculating the workload of students by credits has been used quite successfully since 2007 in all high educational institutions of Georgia.

Mechanisms of calculating the workload of academic personnel by credits have been implemented and are in progress in numerous universities of various countries. Cowdery and Agho, (2007) used a mailed survey to assess methodologies used by different universities to determine and assign academic workload within health education. According to their study, most of the universities use credit hours as the main measure of academic workload.

In reality, it is possible that all three major directions of workload of academic personnel: teaching, i.e. classroom instruction workload; administrative and public activities; scientific-research and professional development activities as well as their constituting components are reflected on the time spent on execution and convert this time to respective credits.

For example, not only the time intended for primary training workload is included in the classroom teaching, i.e. the amount of direct contact hours but also the one allocated for indirect/non-classroom teaching, such as, preparing the classes and practical seminars; designing/revising syllabi; providing consultations; supervising practical work; designing tests, examination materials, situational tasks; advising on bachelor, master and PhD theses. Public and scientific-research work may as well be converted into credits. There exist practical examples of using credits in such a way. Namely, in order to meet all the criteria of PhD studies, part of 180 necessary credits include writing the PhD thesis and defending it according to the *Law on Higher Education 2004* (Geo). Besides, preparing the colloquium by the PhD student as well as writing the review is subject to granting credits. A similar practice may apply to various intellectual activities provided by the professor which may as well be measured by the amount of hours spent and credits, respectively. On top of that, while counting the volume of credits the amount of those students needs to be taken into consideration with whom a particular professor works in the group or individually. The more students there are in the group the more time is spent on assessment, test preparation, marking work and consultation. Carrying out such calculation and developing respective recommendations is not only advisable but also completely attainable.

Conclusions

It is obvious that the workload and remuneration schemes of academic personnel existing these days at universities of Georgia require improvement and development, in order to avoid demotivation of academic staff and promote the increase in the quality of teaching. The implementation of mechanisms of calculating the academic workload in credits is one of the ways to solve the problem. Credit-hours reflect more transparently and exactly and calculate as countable units all those key factors characteristic of the professors' work that were discussed in the given survey as well as other possible factors and components peculiar to this activity.

By means of credit hours, description of the activities of the professor will be the instrument to link the volume of professors' remuneration to not only contact hours and academic position but also credit-hours which the professor needs to comply with. The workload by credits will be quite easily understandable and logical for universities of Georgia. Implementation of such changes will obviously be possible by higher educational institution itself after having achieved a consensus regarding this issue.

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*Advised by Ketevan Chkuaseli,
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia*

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Maka Kordzadze

PhD Student and Invited Lecturer, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University,
Faculty of Humanities, 1, Chavchavdze Ave., 0218, Tbilisi, Georgia.
Phone: +995 32 2 22 51 07.
E-mail: maka_kordzadze@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.tsu.edu.ge/>
