Library Staff Research Activities of "Top 5-100" Russian Universities

Actividades de investigación del personal de biblioteca de las universidades rusas "Top5-100"

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ABSTRACT

The main role in university competitiveness realizes a university library as one of the structural unit within Russian universities' project "Top 5–100" to promote the mission of the university and its academic community, provide the best practices and innovations in education and research process, in managing and studying information and preserving the intellectual and cultural heritage. The authors discuss various ways to improve the research activity of university staff, explore the role of university libraries as centers of information resources, identifying trends in the development of modern university libraries that intend to increase the publication activity of university staff.

Keywords: Competitiveness, higher education, publication activity, university library.

RESUMEN

El papel principal en la competitividad universitaria es la biblioteca universitaria como una de las unidades estructurales dentro del proyecto de las universidades rusas "Top 5–100" para promover la misión de la universidad y su comunidad académica, proporcionar las mejores prácticas e innovaciones en el proceso de educación e investigación, en la gestión y estudio de la información y la conservación del patrimonio intelectual y cultural. Los autores discuten diversas formas de mejorar la actividad investigadora del personal universitario, exploran el papel de las bibliotecas universitarias como centros de recursos de información, identificando tendencias en el desarrollo de las bibliotecas universitarias modernas que pretenden incrementar la actividad editorial del personal universitario.

Palabras clave: Competitividad, educación superior, actividad de publicación, biblioteca universitaria.

INTRODUCTION

Modern society requires university teachers as subjects of the educational process, to possess professional and personal characteristics and competencies that allow them to act successfully in the context of varying educational models and be initiators of innovative constructive actions within the framework of a constantly changing education (Laherty: 2000). The new professional status of teachers implies their involvement in research and experimental activities aimed to solve the current problems of educational practice and to strengthen the innovative component of education. V. I. Zagvyazinsky notes: "It is precisely the research element that brings together the scientific inquiry and the educational process. Research fertilizes practical pedagogical activity, and the latter, in its turn, contributes to scientific creativity. In practice, research elements that are related to the scientific inquiry are very strong and significant." (Zagvyazinsky: 1982; Maitaouthong et al.: 2012).

However, there are many shortcomings in the development of research activities at universities, as it was mentioned in the report by the Center for Strategic Research and Higher School of Economics. "The Majority of Russian universities focus only on teaching and are what the world calls 'teaching universities'. Most of their staff does not conduct research or projects. As a result, the vast majority of universities today play a minor role in the innovative development of regions" (Lippincott: 2015, pp.283-295; Hess et al.: 2016, pp.128-134; Kuzminov & Froumin: 2018).

By considering universities as centers of innovation in regions and industries, it was possible to identify the key problems of regional universities: "either the lack of research or the weakness thereof, their detachment from modern-level science and technology, weak ties with business. Many training courses (including those for Master's degrees and seniors) are taught by teachers who do not conduct any research and do not participate in practical activities" (Billings et al.: 2012, pp.2-10; Kuzminov & Froumin: 2018).

At present, a significant contribution to the solution of this issue is made by a modern University Library, which creates the necessary conditions for supporting education and science being the main center providing information resources (Brown et al.: 2018, pp.337-348; O'Brien: 2020).

New trends in the development of university libraries promote teachers' research activities aimed, on the one hand, at learning, retrieving new knowledge for the solution of educational problems, and, on the other hand, at reproducing and enhancing the educational process in compliance with the purpose of modern education (Bell & Salem: 2017, pp.77-82). These trends lead to the formation and development of critical mental functions, to a significant increase in research skills and abilities to investigation, training, and development (Mitchell & Chu: 2014; Benin: 2015, pp.106-118, Davis et al.: 2016, pp.22-35).

METHODOLOGY

Brief overviews of theoretical frameworks are key components of university competitiveness from the view of V.K. Mueller (Mueller: 2016); library staff competences by G.B. Parshukova (Parshukova: 2012, pp.12-17), information literacy by A. Erich (Erich: 2018, pp.17-24); framing and developing of library work by E.N. Strukov (Strukov: 2018).

The authors of the present study have singled out the key components that reflect the role of perspective development of modern university libraries, ensure the competitiveness of universities and provide the basis for the international system of university rankings that focus on publication activity issues. Let us list these key components:

Information: information, evidence, data, communication, references, awareness.

Analysis: analysis, research, investigation, test.

Promotion: promotion, assistance, encouragement, stimulation, advertisement, advertising.

Each of these English terms has several meanings in the Russian language (Mueller: 2016), and almost all of them can be used in the context of describing the current role of libraries, its involvement, and its demand within the university environment.

Let us consider the meanings of these terms in the context of the modern role of libraries. Information + Promotion (acquisition and delivery of information).

The main problem that should be tackled in this process is the amount of money spent and the statistical analysis of usage. This process is directly related to the level of information competence of the library staff, on the one hand, and that of users and university staff, on the other. G. B. Parshukova (Parshukova: 2012, pp.12-17) understands information competence as the content and degree of satisfaction of information needs of an individual, his knowledge of methods and patterns of search, processing, transmission, exchange, and storage of information in space and time, as well as his ability to use them in various areas of his activities. According to the definition given by researchers from Ohio University (Hunt: 2008, pp.227-277), "information competence is the ability to fulfill one's own information needs effectively: retrieve, evaluate, and use relevant information to empower decision-making." Information competence supposes not only the ability and skills to use computer technology, but also the ability to think critically, which allows an individual to understand the content, analyze, and evaluate the information retrieved. It is through critical analysis of obtained information that individuals possessing information competence are able to manage their own training successfully throughout their lives. The Association of Colleges and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, defines "information competence" as the set of skills and literacies required by an individual to determine an information need, the ability to retrieve, evaluate, and effectively use the information retrieved.

Both sides involved in the process actually increase the level of information competence while working with resources. The library has the opportunity to impact directly on the quality and efficiency of resource utilization by means of training events, such as seminars and study groups with the participation of experts, and the organization of the educational process within the university system of advanced training, which regularly take place at the university.

As an example, we can adduce the following courses conducted at Kazan Federal University.

Training seminars on working with electronic resources:

1. "Information technologies for education".
2. "Russian electronic library systems". The following topics are considered: innovations, ways of development, reader and library service opportunities.
3. Electronic library system "Lan". This library system presents the following topics: new services for inclusive education, special tools for teachers and libraries.
4. "The academic Publishing Press", a master class organized by Cambridge University Press.

Advanced training courses for university teachers include the following programs:

Analytical and informational competence and the improvement of modern-university teacher's publication activity.

Interdisciplinary: information systems and technologies; personnel management; management. The program aims at both the management staff (directors of Institutes, their deputies, heads of departments responsible for publication activity) and university lecturers. It focuses on the acquisition of professional competencies that ensure prompt information support for educational and scientific activities, through the efficient use of electronic resources and scientometric tools. The program is based on the elaboration of leading Russian and foreign practice for the development of research competencies necessary for the preparation of international-level scientific publications. The course thoroughly covers issues related to information retrieval technologies, processing and aggregation of both current and retrospective electronic scientific sources at the time of research or during the teaching process. The practical part of the program

includes various stages, such as the acquisition of skills and literacies to work with modern information retrieval and bibliometric systems, and social media in scientific and educational spheres; it focuses on the efficient use of these elements in professional activities.

The components of this course became part of the Curriculum of the Corporate University of Kazan Federal University (KFU), which is taught at the Center for Advanced Training and Retraining of Scientific and Pedagogical staff of KFU. After a final evaluation, participants receive a short-term professional development certificate of standard form.

The introductory lecture course of "Teacher's information competence", the course which considers application of Information Technologies to the University educational process, consists of the following topics:

-KFU electronic educational platform;

-Structuring information within the environment of online distance learning;

-Modern presentation technologies;

-Modern-library information resources;

-Intellectual property protection in an environment of electronic educational resources;

-Virtual reality systems in the educational process and research.

Analysis + Promotion, introduced by the authors of the study, allows considering the activities of the bibliometric analysis service. This has become one of the main areas of growth for KFU Scientific Library, which has significantly increased the role of the library in the eyes of scientific and pedagogical staff and the University management. The project to create the said service emerged in 2012, but its real implementation became possible only after Kazan Federal University entered the program for improving competitiveness (Russian universities' Project Top 5–100), which is associated with the commencement of work towards the preparation of KFU Roadmap.

At the moment, the analytical service performs a significant amount of work, including current monitoring of publication activity separately by scientific topics, research groups, and structural divisions; preparation of analytical materials at the request of the rector's office, and monitoring the implementation of Key Performance Indicators (KPI). All of this is accomplished by means of tools, such as InSites, SciVal, as well as Scopus and Web of Science analytical modules (Figure 1).
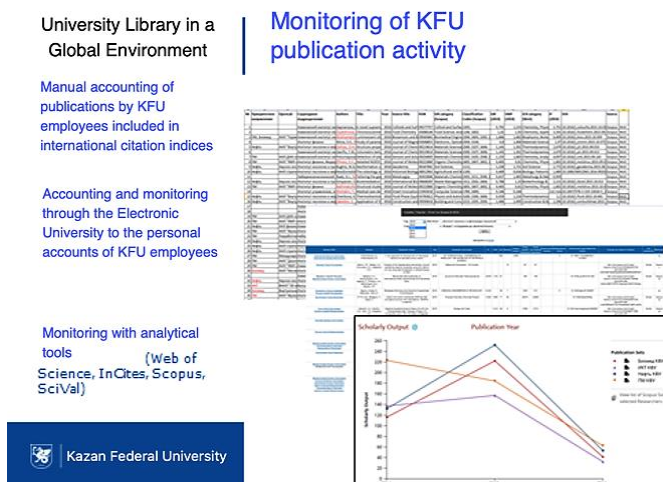

Figure 1. Screenshot of Monitoring of KFU publication activity analysis program

The main task of the service for the support of publication activity is the work with authors, especially young researches, to prepare their articles for publication in international scientific periodicals. Young researchers, postgraduates, and undergraduates are taught academic writing skills and the structuring of the material. Also, the service offers assistance with the redaction and the translation of the text into English language (Figure 2).
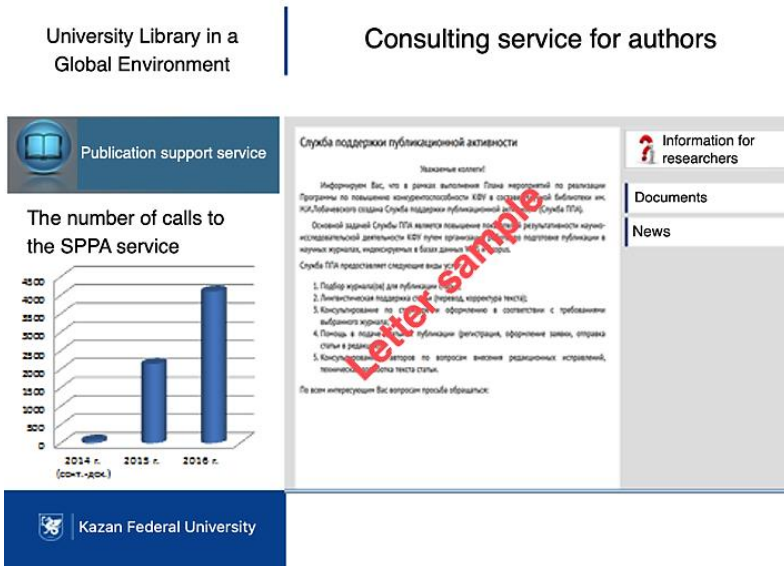

Figure 2. Consulting service for authors

Additionally, the material undergoes an initial quality control process, which includes checking for compliance with peer-reviewing requirements, and checking for plagiarism for texts in the Russian language (anti-Plagiarism) and the English language (iThenticate). Moreover, when it is required, the service staff ensures the selection of journals and technical interaction with their editorial offices.

Finally, we should highlight another essential feature: the certification center, whose function is to confirm of the fact that the article has been included in Scopus or WoS citation databases. Applications for this service can be submitted through the Electronic University system web interface. To date, more than 250 members of the University staff have used this service (Figure 3).
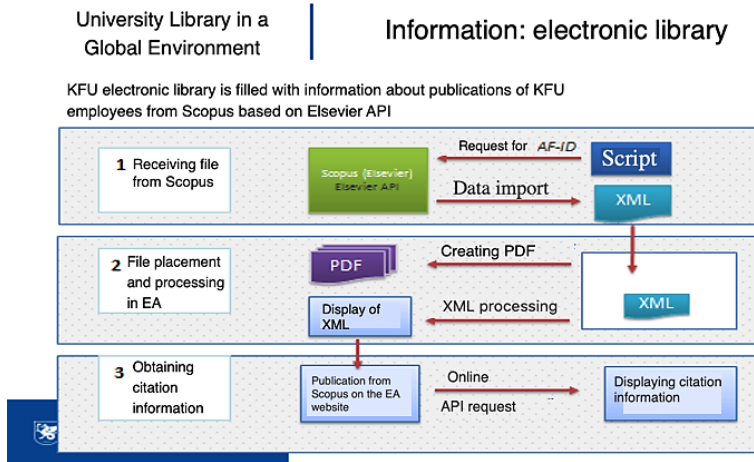
Figure 3. Information: electronic library

All of the above is implemented within the structure of the KFU Scientific Library.

RESULTS

Today's library status is transforming in conditions of informative society. The paradigm of these changes directed at combination of classical library with the search of new trends of development and forms of functioning. A team consisting of highly qualified library specialists has been organized to implement all the above measures, which are aimed at strengthening the research activities of the University staff (Plotnikova & Strukov: 2019, pp.1-10). The obtained key components during the research were found: information, analysis, promotion. The meanings of these terms in the context of the modern role of libraries and were created: information & promotion which include training seminars on working with electronic resources and advanced training courses and programs for university teachers; analysis & promotion which is aimed at monitoring of KFU publication activity analysis, consulting service for authors and functioning of electronic library.

DISCUSSION

For reaching the aim also the strategies for team members' work have been defined and can be described as follows:

GOALS:
⸺ to perfect our work;
⸺ to react promptly to changes in the external environment;
⸺ to be involved in the University's activities intended to improve its competitiveness.

PERSONNEL:

Attract, develop, and support highly qualified specialists.

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INFORMATION:

Improve IT resources and services, thus contributing to the development of the University's information infrastructure.

CONSULTING:

Assist university teachers, students, graduate students, and undergraduates in the promotion of their research results.

TRAINING:

Train employers to effectively use and generate information when solving research and educational tasks.

PROMOTION:

Promote library information resources and services in the University environment.

The strategy of Kazan Federal University library functioning is aimed at the university great ranks in higher educational market.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of modern society leads to an accelerated exchange of information. Today, the University Library can be considered an information and research department. It requires special infrastructures and a specialized interface for interaction with readers, namely one that relies on "modern information and communication technologies to provide users with additional services related to information literacy" (Erich, 2018). Thus, repositories (institutional repositories) are "a set of services that the university provides to its staff for the purpose of managing and distributing digital materials created by an institute and its employees" (CNIE: 2017). Institutional repositories include electronic theses, dissertations, research data, videos of events, open educational resources produced at institutes, and other materials. They provide systematic supervision for a wide range of content as well as a mechanism that demonstrates the achievements of the institute, creativity and research contributions of university staff.

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