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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ISRAELY HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Implementation of an effective system of quality assurance is an integral element of higher education management. A deep understanding of the essence of the system approach to ensuring the quality of higher education requires the study of the best world practices. The article is aimed to analyze implementation strategies of quality assurance policy within Israeli system of higher education. The case of Israel illustrates implementation of a system for assessing and assuring quality standards in higher education that is recognized as one of the highest national priorities. Quality assurance at Israeli higher education institutions is regulated by The Quality Assessment and Assurance Division. Nevertheless, Israeli Council for Higher Education promotes culture of establishing internal mechanisms to assure academic quality.

The case study of quality assurance strategies in Israeli higher education institutions was focused on the analysis of key activities managed by teaching and learning centers. These centers are dedicated to professional development of faculty members to promote learning outcome of study programs through innovative teaching methodologies. Missions and functions of the centers are based on common international standards. The spectrum of activities includes: professional development of teaching staff (workshops for newly recruited both senior and junior staff, and individual teaching consultations to senior staff); technological and pedagogical support for curricula and course design (from lecture-based to fully online-courses support); implementation and integration of new technologies: particularly by scouting, absorbing and effectively implementing digital technologies; and conducting students' teaching satisfaction surveys. Results obtained can promote further understanding of some of the key issues relevant to the implementation of an effective internal quality assurance system within Ukrainian institutions of higher education.

Key words: Israeli higher education system; quality assurance; quality management; quality standards; teaching and learning.

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Introduction Recent years have seen a significant increase in attention to the quality of higher education around the world. This trend is caused mainly by the need for meeting the challenges of the 21st century in a traditionally conservative academic environment. Researchers emphasize the dual character of higher education quality: quality-certainty and quality-conformity. According to this approach, the activities of HE institutions also split into two interrelated components aimed at ensuring and improving the quality of higher education (Lugovoy, Slyusarenko & Talanova, 2017, p. 118). Quality assurance as the key in developing mutual trust, and the precondition for cooperation between HE institutions is recognized as one of the commitments of the Bologna Process (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p. 14). Hence, efficient quality assurance and enhancement system is an integral part of effective management in higher education. According to the ESG-2015, HE institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of higher education and its assurance (ESG, 2015). However, due to the complexity of the concept of higher education quality, it cannot be achieved only through purely internal efforts of universities (Finikov & Tereschuk, 2018, p. 23). Ensuring and improving

the quality is impossible without well-balanced and consistent state policy focused on the preservation and fostering the culture of quality in national higher education system.

Furthermore, culture of quality is based on the principles of university autonomy and academic freedom. In this context, the use of ratings, frameworks and accreditation procedures for study programs and educational activities of HE institutions is targeted on «the improvement of their perfection» (Lugovoy, Slyusarenko & Talanova, 2017, p. 119). In the meantime, Ukrainian higher education system is still predominantly oriented towards standards, and the culture of quality assurance in domestic HE institutions is still in its infancy. For instance, T. Finikov notes that the formal system of internal quality assurance at Ukrainian universities remains on paper only. Moreover, its implementation may be seen as a result of external pressure, and not as an important part of educational management at HE institution (Finikov & Tereschuk, 2018, p. 185).

Taking into account the above, a deep understanding of essence of the system approach to ensuring the higher education quality requires the study of the best world practices. In particular, worthy of separate attention is the experience of quality assurance and enhancement in the higher education system in Israel. Over the past

decades, the Israeli higher education has shown rapid progress. It is noteworthy that, according to the Shanghai Rating (ARWU, 2018), six out of eight Israeli research universities are listed among the best globally (two of them, Technion and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, are in the top hundred). Taking over Israeli experience quality assurance may help identify ways to successfully overcome the educational challenges facing Ukrainian universities today. This approach has determined the relevance of the study.

Our research is aimed to analyze implementation strategies for quality assurance and enhancement at national, state and institutional levels of Israeli higher education system. The objectives of the study were to outline the main features of the Israeli higher education system; analyze normative regulations concerning control, evaluation and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in higher education; as well as highlight current practices for quality improvement implemented by teaching and learning centers at the universities in Israel.

The methodology used in the research is a qualitative case-study approach, aimed to familiarize with regulatory acts on ensuring and improving the quality of higher education at the state level, and explore implementation strategies of quality assurance policy at higher education institutions in Israel. In particular, we analyzed the structure and key activities of the Teaching and Learning Center at the Hebrew University (Jerusalem) and the Center for the Promotion of Learning and Teaching at the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology (Haifa). These universities were chosen as the oldest and largest institutions of higher education in Israel, established before the creation of the State of Israel. Study visits took place in December 2017 during the International Seminar «New Pedagogy in the 21st Century for Higher Education Teachers» organized by the Israeli Agency for International Cooperation MASHAV.

The Landscape of Higher Education in Israel.

Today, Israeli higher education system include 62 HE institutions: 8 research universities, an open university, 32 colleges (20 public and 12 private), and 21 academic pedagogical colleges. The training is carried out under a tricycle system, although the national qualification framework has not yet been implemented yet. At the beginning of 1990, the state policy of expanding access to higher education has led to a sharp increase in the number of HE institutions, especially colleges, and consequently – impressive rise in student population (at the bachelor level, the number of students has increased more than threefold). At the same time, such a massification has had a number of negative consequences, especially for colleges. The establishment of new private and public colleges had provoked a lack of funding, staff washing and, consequently, a decrease in the quality of academic instruction that aroused criticism (Cohen & Davidovich, 2015, p. 259). However, since 2010, funding for higher education has been steadily increasing, and programs for supporting the professional development of teachers have been launched. In recent years, there has been a stabilization of the contingent of students, which by 2018

is 306.6 thousand. More than 230.8 thousand students are studying at the undergraduate level; 63.4 thousand are enrolled in second-cycle programmes; 11.4 thousand students are enrolled in third-cycle programmes (CHE, 2017). The general features of the higher education system in Israel can be described as follows.

- Public expenditure on higher education increases annually and covers funding for HE institutions, as well as research and development of educational infrastructure.
- The state promotes collaboration between HE institutions and industry offering financial support for cooperation programs; all the research universities are the founders of their own companies.
- Institutional support for non-formal education with the special attention to entrepreneurship and innovation is provided; universities and colleges grant resources for startups, and various volunteer initiatives.
- A relatively small percentage of students from Israeli universities participate in academic mobility programs. Foreign students' population is also small, with about 1.4% of total students' cohort.
- The state policy that determines the priority of training specialists in engineering and computer science has led to the situation when every fourth student in Israel is majoring in these fields.
- Significant attention is paid to innovative pedagogical technologies and the use of digital technology in teaching and learning. The Council for Higher Education promotes the idea of the 'New Campus', an innovative educational space as an instrument for improving the quality of education and expanding access to it (CHE, 2017).
- The inclusiveness of higher education is recognized as one of the national priorities. HE institutions develop advanced infrastructure, together with a system of professional support for people with special needs.

The Role of Government in Stimulating and Monitoring Institutional Quality Assurance. The Council for Higher Education (CHE) headed by the Minister of Education serves as main regulator of the Israeli higher education system. CHE is the only government body responsible for external quality assurance in higher education. Its main functions include safeguarding academic freedom while advancing academic research and educational activities; approving the establishment of new HE institutions and licensing of branches of foreign HE institutions; providing accreditation of new degrees and programs; and conducting quality assurance of existing programs. Regulation of financial provision of HE institutions is carried out by the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC).

CHE is pursuing a coherent policy to enhance the quality of teaching and learning reflected in the five-year activities plans. Israel hasn't got full membership in Bologna Process, but was granted the observer status. Still, it adheres to the principles of the Bologna Process, monitors the main achievements in developing the European Higher Education Area (EACEA, 2017, p. 14). CHE is a member of the INQAAHE, and is affiliated to the ENQR. At the same time, researchers (Scholz & Maroun, 2015, p. 299) note that recent reforms in a field

of quality assurance in Israel are focusing primarily on convergence with US higher education rather than the European Higher Education Area.

Nevertheless, the case of Israel illustrates implementation of a system for assessing and assuring quality standards in higher education that is recognized as one of the highest national priorities. (Klein-Avishai et al., 2014, p. 23). In 2004, CHE established the Quality Assessment and Assurance Unit, transformed into the Quality Assessment and Assurance Division (QAAD) in 2010. The main goal of the division is «to create a culture of self-assessment within Israeli HE institutions by establishing internal mechanisms to regularly assess academic quality and improve any faults found» (QAAD, 2012). Quality assessment is recognized not only as a tool for ongoing improvement process in academia, but also as a «cornerstone in the globalization process in higher education» (Klein-Avishai et al., 2014, p. 71).

QAAD administrates monitoring of performance of HE institutions, and coordinates the evaluation process provided by external committees. External evaluation process consists of three stages: preparation of self-evaluation report; evaluation by the international committee; and discussion by the CHE and resolutions in light of evaluation report, followed by monitoring the response to recommendations expressed (QAAD, 2012, p. 2). External evaluation is compulsory and systematic for all study programs. It is noteworthy that external evaluation committees mostly consist of leading experts from foreign universities (Israeli citizens can be no more than 20% of experts in the committee). The Committee assesses goals and objectives of study programs, their content and scope, teaching and learning outcomes, methods of teaching and evaluation, procedure for enrollment of students, recruitment and professional support of teaching and administrative staff, as well as self-assessment procedure and management decisions in the HE institution.

Internal Quality Assurance. According to the Recommendations on the Organizational Structure of Universities (CHE, 2004), institutional autonomy is recognized as one of the main principles of Israeli higher education system. Although CHE keeps certain decision-making powers, the Recommendations establish a model of «good governance» in higher education (Hénard & Mitterle, 2010, p. 87). HE institutions are primary responsible for developing and implementing the policy for quality assurance. Quality management systems in HE institutions in Israel have a complicated hierarchical structure, based on a triple board system (governing board of trustees, collegial executive board, and academic board). The «committee culture» in Israeli higher education model (Hénard & Mitterle, 2010, p. 75) is also traced in functioning of the audit committee, academic appointment committee, research and coordinating committees, etc. In addition, the position of student ombudsman is mandatory at all universities.

Development of research infrastructure and research granting are the key priorities for universities in Israel. However, all the HE institutions are implementing a consistent policy for preserving and fostering the quality

of teaching and learning. During 2010-2016, the units directly responsible for internal quality assurance were formed. Teaching and learning centers were established in the context of the state program aimed at improving quality of higher education in Israel. At the same time, there are no special governmental requirements or recommendations regulating the organizational structure of such centers or the areas of their activities. Quality assurance strategies at different universities may vary significantly. Nevertheless, internal quality assurance centers base their mission and functions in common international standards, ESG in particular.

The case study of implementation strategies of quality assurance policy in Israeli HE institutions revealed that they are focused mostly on teaching and learning related aspects of quality assurance. Internal quality assurance at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Technion – Israel Institute of Technology are managed by teaching and learning centers: the Teaching and Learning Center and the Center for the Promotion of Learning and Teaching, respectively. The centers function as separate units within university, and are accountable only to rector and the Advisory Comity. These centers are dedicated to professional development of faculty members to promote learning outcome of study programs through innovative teaching methodologies. The main activity areas are as follows: improving teaching skills of academic staff; operating an award based system to acknowledge quality teaching; developing a computerized bilingual syllabi system based on the learning outcomes approach; establishing the Diploma Supplement; conducting student's teaching satisfaction surveys; and integrating digital technologies in teaching and learning in higher education. Let's take a closer look at the before mentioned activities.

Teaching and learning centers have put the special focus on the professional development of teaching staff. It should be noted that at Israeli universities research activity of faculty members stays the key criterion for staff recruitment and promotion; then again, government programs for professional support for academics mostly cover research grants. Quite often, doctorate or post-doctorate study programmes exclude teaching components, so early career faculty members may not have any teaching experience. However, universities are aware that quality assurance and enhancement is impossible without improving the quality of teaching. Therefore, they take the responsibility for assessing and additional training in teaching. The the primary task set during establishing the teaching and learning centers was improving teaching skills of academic staff. For junior teaching staff teaching training is often obligatory, but the target audience of various workshops is usually much wider. Sometimes a recommendation to undergo teaching training may be given after the student surveys analysis or pedagogical observations. There is also a widespread practice of providing individual consultations, in particular for developing the syllabi of a new course or utilizing new digital technologies.

The Diploma Supplement, as well as digitalized bilingual (in Hebrew and English) syllabi with a

description of study components and learning outcomes, was implemented primarily due to the increasing attention to internationalization in higher education. The main goal of these activities is to foster the international mobility of students and graduates. As noted above, relatively small number of Israeli students is engaged in international mobility programs. On the other hand, international students are only about 1.4% of total cohort (CHE, 2017). Today, internationalization of the higher education is supported by CHE. Still, this process slows down because of complicated system of recognition, relatively small amount of English-taught programs, and geo-political situation. In light of this, HE institutions with a support of the government develop relevant infrastructure and capacity to promote internationalization initiatives.

Another priority mentioned in the CHE multiyear plan for 2017–2022 (CHE, 2017) is digitalization of higher education as a tool for improving the quality of instruction and accessibility. Universities mostly focus on integration of new technologies, particularly by scouting, absorbing and effectively implementing appropriate digital technologies into courses, and providing technological support and proactive assistance for lecturers. The main mission of teaching and learning centers is the search and effective adaptation of innovative digital tools to student's needs and the content of courses, as well as modifying courses or their components to the model of online or mixed learning. Technology consultants are monitoring and testing new technologies, analyzing the potential effectiveness of the specific tools for each case. At the same time, development of IT competence of teaching staff has a special emphasis on the pedagogical aspect of the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning.

Systematic monitoring of student satisfaction in the relation to quality of teaching and learning experience is an important part of quality assurance system in academia. Feedback surveys are carried out on online survey platforms after completion of each course. At the same time, taking the difficulties occurred in collection and processing survey results into consideration the structure of the questionnaire may be improved. For example, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has significantly reduced the number of questions in the questionnaire (from a long list to two questions based on a 1 to 9 scale and two qualitative description questions). The purpose of data collection has been also narrowed to identifying high and low quality courses to be further analyzed upon request. Due to this, the number of students participating in the poll more than doubled (from 20% in 2014 to over 46% in the first semester of

2017). Therefore, the confidence in their results among teachers and students has increased.

Missions and functions of teaching and learning centers at Israeli universities are based on common international standards for quality assurance. Nevertheless, to assure its effectiveness they prefer increasing activity step wise and not immediate broad spectrum. At the same time, priority lines of work are singled out, and the spectrum of activities is in an enlargement process, encouraged and fully supported by university management.

Conclusions. Based on the results of this case-study it is clear that quality assurance is one of the priority areas for development of higher education system in Israel. Implementation of quality assurance tools is carried out both at national and institutional level. The Council for Higher Education operates external evaluation and quality assurance as a tool for the continuous improvement in higher education institutions. At the same time, the main goal of external evaluation provided by committees of international experts is to develop a culture of self-evaluation and quality enhancement in academia.

University autonomy is recognized as the main principle of the functioning of higher education system in Israel. Institutions that govern higher education constantly monitor and assess the quality of education and training, but universities have primary responsibility for internal quality assurance. The units directly responsible for implementation of the internal quality assurance system were established during 2010-2016 in the context of the multiyear government program. However, the forms of implementation of policy for quality assurance may vary significantly. The key activities provided at teaching and learning centers in the Israeli HE institutions are: improving teaching skills of academic staff; operating an award based system to acknowledge quality teaching; developing a computerized bilingual syllabi system based on the learning outcomes approach; establishing the Diploma Supplement; conducting student's teaching satisfaction surveys; and integrating digital technologies in higher education.

The findings from the research indicate that implementation of an effective system for ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in higher education is built on trust and interests of all the stakeholders. Results obtained can promote further understanding of some of the key issues relevant to the implementation of an effective internal quality assurance system within Ukrainian institutions of higher education. The further study might draw on a profound analysis of international external evaluation process implemented in the higher education system in Israel.

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ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ В СИСТЕМІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ ДЕРЖАВИ ІЗРАЇЛЬ

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Розвиток систем забезпечення якості є головною передумовою ефективного управління у вищій освіті. Глибоке розуміння суті системного підходу до забезпечення якості вищої освіти потребує вивчення світових практик. Зокрема, на увагу заслуговує досвід управління якістю в системі вищої освіти Держави Ізраїль. Статтю присвячено практикам забезпечення та удосконалення якості в системі вищої освіти Ізраїлю на державному та інституційному рівнях. Окреслено головні особливості функціонування ізраїльської системи вищої освіти, проаналізовано нормативне забезпечення контролю, оцінювання та поліпшення якості вищої освіти, а також висвітлено сучасні практики удосконалення якості, що реалізуються центрами із забезпечення якості навчання і викладання у провідних університетах Ізраїлю. Дослідження передбачало освітні візити до Центру навчання і викладання у Єврейському університеті Єрусалиму та Центру підвищення якості навчання і викладання у Техніоні – Ізраїльському технологічному інституті.

Моніторинг діяльності ЗВО, а також координування роботи комісії зовнішнього оцінювання в ізраїльській системі вищої освіти здійснює Рада з вищої освіти. Головною метою зовнішнього оцінювання із залученням міжнародних експертів є створення культури самооцінювання у ЗВО. Університетська автономія визнана головним принципом функціонування системи вищої освіти Ізраїлю, тому форми внутрішнього забезпечення якості в різних університетах можуть відрізнятися. Центри навчання і викладання як університетські підрозділи, відповідальні за забезпечення якості освіти, орієнтуються на міжнародні стандарти, зокрема ESG. Основними напрямками діяльності центрів є: розвиток викладацького персоналу; координування системи заохочення; опис освітніх програм; впровадження додатку до диплома; проведення опитувань студентів; інтеграція комп'ютерних технологій в освітній процес. На прикладі результатів діяльності ізраїльських ЗВО бачимо, що впровадження дієвої системи заходів та процедур забезпечення якості освіти, вибудованої на основі довіри з боку усіх учасників освітнього процесу, слугує поліпшенню ефективності управління закладом вищої освіти.

Ключові слова: забезпечення якості; навчання і викладання; система вищої освіти Держави Ізраїль; стандарти якості; якість вищої освіти.

ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЕ КАЧЕСТВА В СИСТЕМЕ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ГОСУДАРСТВА ИЗРАИЛЬ

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Развитие систем по обеспечению качества является определяющим фактором эффективного менеджмента в сфере высшего образования. Глубокое понимание сути системного подхода к обеспечению качества требует изучения мирового опыта. В частности, внимания заслуживает опыт обеспечения и совершенствования качества в системе высшего образования Государства Израиль. Статья посвящена практикам обеспечения и совершенствования качества в системе высшего образования Израиля на государственном и институциональном уровнях. Определены особенности функционирования израильской системы высшего образования, проанализировано нормативное обеспечение контроля, оценки и улучшения качества, а также освещены современные практики совершенствования качества, реализуемых центрами по обеспечению качества обучения и преподавания в ведущих университетах Израиля.

Ключевые слова: качество высшего образования; обеспечение качества; обучение и преподавание; система высшего образования Государства Израиль; стандарты качества.

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