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HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE: CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES

The article deals with the quality of higher education in the context of global trends in higher education development, taking into account global and international influences that encourage discussion of the problem of higher education quality assurance. The concept of quality has been considered and the lack of consensus regarding its conceptualization and evaluation has been stated. The higher education quality has been considered from a pedagogical point of view – as a systematic methodological category reflecting the degree of conformity of the result to the goal set, as well as the correspondence of the product to the consumers' requirements and as a set of its characteristics determining the degree of suitability of the product for its intended use. It has been noted that the concept of quality and its indicators are debatable due to the presence of a range of stakeholders – persons interested in higher education. The difference in the value of higher education quality for each of the interested parties has been determined by the presence of their

own interests and their own vision of quality. Globalization, the massification of higher education and the ICT revolution have been stressed in the article as factors that have radically changed the higher education environment, creating new challenges for governments, higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

Higher education quality assurance has been defined as a global problem, and the growing attention to this problem has been noted in connection with the rapid development of higher education and the increase in the cost of educational services for the state and the public. Recent trends in higher education have been reviewed and their advantages and disadvantages have been noted.

*Keywords: **higher education, higher education quality assurance, quality, tendencies.***

INTRODUCTION

The issue of assurance of higher education quality in Ukraine is becoming increasingly relevant due to its integration into the European educational space. Ensuring the quality of higher education in Europe has gained relevance in recent decades, in particular as a result of large-scale reforms of education systems. At the same time, it is the result of education that is becoming one of the most important components of higher education systems in the majority of national higher education systems of the European countries, participants of the Bologna process (Klimova, 2016, p. 205–207).

Today the liberalization of higher education is observed, meaning strengthening of autonomy and social responsibility of higher education institutions. Consequently, the problem of ensuring efficient, accessible and high-quality education is becoming essential today. The world community regards a high-quality higher education as an instrument for social, cultural and economic growth (Durdas & Kravchuk, 2022, p. 186).

The purpose of the article is to study the concept of higher education quality and the recent trends and higher education quality assurance in the context of global changes and challenges in higher education.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The concept of higher education quality. Globalization, ICT revolution and massification of higher education have drastically changed the higher education environment making new challenges to governments, providers of higher education and other key stakeholders in terms of ensuring its high quality. With the radical changes it became clear that the traditional means for internal and external assessments are no longer appropriate to ensure the adequate level of higher education performance to meet the needs of society development. Considering one of the primary roles of quality assurance in higher education is ensuring relevance and credibility of higher education provisions, today more and more countries are making quality assurance a priority to enhance the essential changes in governance of higher education systems, mutual recognition across national borders, and responsibility before the public (Karakhanyan, Stensaker, 2020).

Ensuring higher education quality of is not a purely European problem. Attention to this problem is growing all over the world, and this can be explained by the rapid development of higher education and, at the same time, the increase in the cost of educational services for the state and people. Europe intends to achieve its goal of becoming the most dynamic and intellectual economy in the world. New initiatives and demands arising both in Europe and beyond, with regard to the internationalization of higher education, require an appropriate response. The formation of a quality assurance system based on uniform standards and recommendations indicates the emergence of a true European dimension in the field of

quality assurance, which should strengthen the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

The definition of higher education quality is still a challenge. The review of literature shows no consensus on how higher education quality should be conceptualized and assessed. Thus, the understanding of quality and its indicators are debatable because of the range of educational stakeholder groups: students, employees, employers, professional educational bodies, government agencies, funding agencies. The meaning of higher education quality is different for each of these stakeholders, and this may be driven by their own interests. For example, «an industrialist will define and measure the quality of a higher education institution by considering the number of flexible and skilled graduates who are ready to accept challenges. To the government, the meaning of quality is described in terms of the number of trained professionals that the institution produces. A student will measure the quality of an institution by considering one's own development due to his/her experiences in the institution» (Mukherjee et al., 2022, p. 5–6).

It should be noted that in pedagogical science, «quality» is a systematic methodological category that reflects the degree of compliance of the result with the set goal. Thus, O. Lyashenko (2004) interprets quality as compliance of products with the requirements of consumers, as well as a set of its characteristics, which determine the degree of its suitability for use for its intended purpose (p. 9–14.). In this regard, it is important to speak about the quality standards which are widely used to determine the quality of services aimed at meeting the needs of clients and employers who are the main customers of the higher education «product» (Mospan, 2018, p. 363).

At the same time N. Batechko (2017) admits that «…the category «quality of education» is multifaceted and in its essence reflects various aspects of the educational process: philosophical, social, pedagogical, political, demographic, economic, etc.» (p. 94–95).

However, polysemic and often vague or ambiguous nature of higher education quality is still creating difficulties to any initiative aimed at designing and evaluating educational systems, plans, programs and organizations. At the same time, the wide range of literature on the concept of higher education quality, far from having led to a precise and widely accepted definition, reveals the great difficulties that hinder the fulfillment of this task. «…This situation has led to a process of semantic oversaturation and, paradoxically, deflation of meanings, especially because it is a concept in constant change and not susceptible to univocal interpretation. But the paradox is only apparent; if multiple perspectives and meanings of quality are admitted, the concept becomes less useful as a tool for change, or even meaningless» (Calamet, 2022, p. 147).

According to J. Prodanova, L. Kocarev (2023) the successful future of the educational service is highly dependent on the competencies and observations of the participants in the system, where service quality, employee satisfaction and engagement play an essential role in organizational competitiveness (Prodanova, Kocarev, 2023, p. 1). In this context, it is also necessary to admit that teachers who show satisfaction with the institution and their work decisions are more likely to feel inspired, enthusiastic and proud of their job, as the components that describe a dedicated community. This is a valuable indicator of how the higher education system is perceived in a developing society (Prodanova, Kocarev, 2023, p. 10).

According to A. Calamet et al. (2022) the higher education quality concept is of relative nature. The researchers admit five ways to conceive higher education quality: «…
quality as excellence, quality as consistence or perfection («zero errors»), quality as adjustment to the objectives proposed («fitness for purpose»), quality as economic efficiency

regarding the correlation between costs and results («value for money») and *quality as transformation»* (p. 124).

Accordingly, it is possible to conclude that quality of higher education includes:

- learners who are healthy and ready to participate in learning, and they are supported in studying by their families and communities;

- healthy, safe, protective environments providing necessary facilities and resources;

- content reflected in relevant curricula and materials for acquisition of skills and knowledge;

- outcomes including knowledge, skills and attitudes linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society (Thacker, nd).

Thus, education in general, and higher education in particular, are considered to be essential to improving people's well-being and life quality and education influences the society we live in (Findler et al., 2019). Higher education influences the thinking processes of the decision makers in business and society, which helps in the processes of positive transformations of society. As T. McCowan (2016) states, «there is evidence in the literature underpinning the importance of universities in the achievement of sustainable development goals» (p. 505). At the same time, students' success is becoming a shared vision for quality in higher education (Yang & Li, 2020, p. 2).

Nevertheless, as S. Thacker admits, «… the definitions of quality must be open to change and evolution based on time, changing contexts and new understandings of the nature of education's challenges» (Thacker, nd).

In the framework of our research it is necessary to note that being a distributor of intellectual and educational knowledge, skills and attitudes, a higher education institution must have a system aimed at directing them towards excellence in their striving for relevance, contribution to the development of society and business. This stresses the importance of planning, operationalizing and measuring the quality of services provided by universities and other higher education institutions (Mukherjee et al., 2022).

Thus, higher education quality is important not only for students' learning outcomes but also for long-term goals and outcomes. The research shows that higher education influences social and economic condition of society. Consequently, we can admit that society and business have a personal interest in ensuring higher education quality. The student's professional and personal success after completion of their studies «echoes the quality of education provided by the institution» (Mukherjee et al., 2022, p. 24).

Global trends in quality assurance. In the last couple of decades the global higher education scenario has dramatically changed due to the rise of the number of higher education institutions (García-Morales et al., 2021). This expansion is largely due to a significant growth in the number of students choosing higher education. The increase of the number of institutions providing higher education has led to the growth of competition among universities. This indicates that the sustainability of higher education institutions is based on the quality of the services they provide. Higher education quality indicators are explained as authoritative and quantitative measures of key features of the actions of the institutions and their constituents. The problem is that the existing indicators fail to measure the role played by the institution in a student's life (Mukherjee et al., 2022). At the same time, today there is no country which would be satisfied with its higher education system – everyone is in search of innovations that would give tangible results. Under these conditions, the essence of phenomenon of quality culture has undergone significant transformations: from traditional understanding of it as a mandatory component of the institutional academic culture of a higher education institution to the society's awareness of fundamental role of higher education in

shaping the corporate culture of the national quality assurance system in higher education (Durdas & Kravchuk, 2022, p. 186).

It is also necessary to admit that due to the challenges, caused by the Covid-2019 pandemic (2019 – till the present time), higher education institutions have been forced to fulfil a lot of their teaching online. On the surface it may look like a series of innovations in the education sector: higher education institutions around the world became more flexible and can offer both virtual and physical classrooms, making studies easier and less stressful for students (El-Azar, 2022). Therefore, today we can observe several trends in higher education.

1. *Studying from any place*. This provides some benefits to students learning at their own pace and enables them to apply knowledge learned in the classroom in real life.

2. *Active learning instead of lectures:* spaced learning, emotional learning and the application of knowledge. This does not only improve learning outcomes but also reduces the education gap with socio-economically disadvantaged students, providing them with the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained at university in the real world.

3. *Teaching the skills relevant in a changing world* – the skills which will preserve their relevance in new, changing and unknown circumstances and settings.

4. *Formative assessment instead of high-stake exams.* A formative assessment, involving both formal and informal evaluations through the learning process, encourages students to actually improve their performance rather than just have it evaluated. (El-Azar, 2022).

Thus, the assurance of higher education quality is the duty of everyone at the institute: from top management to bottom management. The assessment can be done through self-evaluation, peer reviews, on a market survey, students' feedback etc. Self-evaluation is also a strong instrument for quality development (Thacker, nd).

The continuous practices of quality assurance are taking place all over the globe. Studying and applying them may give up gradation of the education standard. The comparison of the institutions may set the benchmark for the quality. The developed networks, national and international agencies, international philosophies and theories may provide the different goals and standards (Thacker, nd).

CONCLUSIONS

Globalization, massification of higher education and ICT revolution are the factors which have radically changed the higher education environment creating new challenges to governments, higher education providers and other stakeholders. Assurance of higher education quality is not a purely European problem – all over the world, attention to this issue is growing, which is explained by the rapid development of higher education and the increase in the cost of educational services for the state and people.

As for the concept of «quality», on the one hand, it is a systematic methodological category reflecting the degree of compliance of the result with the set goal. On the other hand, «quality» is a compliance of products with the consumers' requirements, a set of characteristics of a product, which determine the degree of its suitability for use for its intended purpose. Higher education quality can be conceived in 5 ways: quality as excellence, quality as consistence or perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as economic efficiency and quality as transformation.

Several recent trends can be observed in higher education today: studying from any place; active learning instead of lectures; teaching skills that will remain relevant in a changing world; formative assessment instead of high-stake exams. The further research will be dedicated to the possible ways of ensuring higher education quality in changing conditions of the modern world and the challenges faced by today's learners and teachers.

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ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ: СУЧАСНІ ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ

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У статті розглядається якість вищої освіти в контексті світових тенденцій розвитку вищої освіти з урахуванням глобальних та міжнародних впливів, які спонукають до обговорення проблеми забезпечення якості вищої освіти. Розглянуто поняття якості та констатовано відсутність консенсусу щодо концептуалізації поняття якості вищої освіти та її оцінювання. Якість вищої освіти розглянуто з педагогічної точки зору – як системну методологічну категорію, що відображає ступінь відповідності результату поставленій меті, а також як відповідність продукції вимогам споживачів та як сукупність її характеристик, що визначають ступінь придатності продукту до використання за призначенням. Зауважено дискусійність поняття якості та її індикаторів через наявність кола стейкхолдерів – осіб, зацікавлених у вищій освіті. Різниця у значенні якості вищої освіти для кожної із зацікавлених сторін визначається наявністю в них їхніх власних інтересів та власного бачення якості. Успіх студента закладу вищої освіти сформульовано як спільне бачення та сприйняття поняття якості вищої освіти. Глобалізація, масовізація вищої освіти та революція ІКТ підкреслено у статті як фактори, які радикально змінили середовище вищої освіти, створюючи нові виклики для урядів, закладів вищої освіти та інших зацікавлених сторін.

Забезпечення якості вищої освіти визначено як глобальну проблему та зауважено зростання уваги до цієї проблеми у зв'язку зі швидким розвитком вищої освіти та збільшенням вартості освітніх послуг для держави та громадськості. Розглянуто останні тенденції у вищій освіті (навчання звідусіль; активне навчання замість лекцій; формування навичок, які залишаються актуальними в мінливому світі; використання формувального оцінювання замість традиційних іспитів) та зазначено їхні переваги та недоліки.

*Ключові слова: **вища освіта, забезпечення якості вищої освіти, тенденції, якість.***