
3rd Central & Eastern European LUMEN International Conference
New Approaches in Social and Humanistic Sciences | NASHS 2017 |
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova | June 8-10, 2017

New Approaches in Social and Humanistic Sciences

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Gheorghe BRANISTE, Viorica CALUGHER, Ecaterina LUNGU

<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.nashs2017.8>

How to cite: Brainste, Gh, Calugher, V., & Lungu, E. (2018). The Quality of Education and Training in the Context of Knowledge Based Society. In V. Manolachi, C.M. Rus, S. Rusnac (eds.), *New Approaches in Social and Humanistic Sciences* (pp. 103-110). Iasi, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings. <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.nashs2017.8>



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The Quality of Education and Training in the Context of Knowledge Based Society

Gheorghe BRANISTE¹, Viorica CALUGHER², Ecaterina LUNGU³

Abstract

The strategic objective of the contemporary era is to increase the intellectual potential of society. Starting from this, the XXI century draws a priority to create a modern industry education, which will become an important area of investment, more advantageous than the development of a science, knowledge and education. The quality of education and training has become an area of particular interest, given, first of all to national gap with the developed countries and the need to make an integrated finality in the European context. European Commission's concerns regarding the importance of education and vocational training is reflected within the Europe 2020 Strategy by developing and adopting 'guidelines' concerning the quality of services provided by educational institutions. In a world rapidly changing, the European Union wishes to become a smart and favourable economy for the inclusion by creating a "knowledge triangle" of education, research and innovation, to function properly and to help young people to improve their skills, essential in terms of competitiveness, equity and social inclusion. Being responsible for preparing young generations of graduates in various fields of knowledge, the university is also responsible for the future of society and of the future state of the nation. Quality of education and training is an essential process of maximum importance for becoming, progress of learners and society at the same time. Among the motivational factors that determine universities to worry about the quality of education and training are: orientation towards performance and increase market competitiveness of universities and graduates of educational services in the market of labour resources; the expansion of investment in education research and process development; European market recognition of qualifications (degrees, diplomas) by institutions

¹ PhD, associate professor, The State University of Physical Education and Sport, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, braniste_gheorghe@mail.ru, +37369882548.

² PhD, associate professor, The State University of Physical Education and Sport, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, vio.calugher@mail.ru, +37369074489.

³ PhD student, The State University of Physical Education and Sport, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, kathya@mail.ru, +37379758081.

<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.nashs2017.8>

Corresponding Author: Gheorghe BRANISTE

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference



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in the country; development of an institutional culture of quality, fully involved in obtaining staff performance; increased responsibility for quality of academic benefits.

Keywords: *education, training, knowledge, performance, competitiveness, quality, educational services.*

1. Introduction

This study addresses the importance of quality assurance in higher education from the perspective of the European, national and institutional framework that demands, creates and offers the conditions for the development of this process in the university educational environment. The concern for quality assurance in the university environment is timely and relevant, as long as the quality at the international level is the solution that gives the higher education institution credibility to the clients, makes it competitive on the national and international market and assures its existence.

Each historical age has its own characteristics and priorities. The strategic objective of the contemporary age is to increase the intellectual potential of society. Starting with this, the 21st century sets as a priority the creation of a modern education industry, especially the higher one, which will become an important area of investments, because "there are no more valuable and advantageous investments than those in the development of a science society, knowledge and education" [4]. Being responsible for preparing young generations of graduates in the various fields of knowledge, the university is also responsible for the future of society, the future state of the nation. The quality of education and professional training is therefore an essential process of utmost importance for the development, progress of learners and society at the same time. Among the motivational factors that determine universities to be concerned with the issue of the quality of education and vocational training are: performance orientation and increasing the competitiveness of universities in the educational services market and also the graduates in the labour market; the expansion of investments for education-research-development processes; the recognition on the European market of qualifications (degrees and diplomas) offered by institutions in the country; the development of an institutional culture of quality, the full involvement of staff in achieving the performances; increasing responsibility for the quality of university benefits [3].

2. Theoretical Background

Quality research reflects the importance that authors give to quality management in quality assurance. In this context, arguments are put forward on the efficiency of various models of Quality Management Systems: systems based on international standards in the ISO 9000 family [1], Total Quality Management (TQM) based systems [2] and so on, or integrated models [4].

The study aims the analysis of the literature in the subject area approached and to identify the basic aspects of the education quality assurance process and vocational training as a key factor that gives the university the credibility and makes it competitive in a knowledge-based society.

3. Argument of the paper

The quality of higher education represents a direction of research, analysis and debate in the broader field of research on higher education in the Republic of Moldova, which has been increasingly addressed since the end of the 1990s. The identification of its beginning is important for marking the relationship, which the quality assurance process has to do with the reform of the higher education system at national and European level, materialized in the 1999 Bologna Declaration.

4. Arguments to support the thesis

Globalization, the liberalization of labour movement, and recent developments towards a knowledge society raise issues of quality assurance, comparisons and transparency in higher education. An expressive peculiarity of globalization is based on knowledge, which is reflected in: increasing the role of human capital; centering the efficiency gains on highly educated and specialized human resources; allocating the benefits of development to those capable and well-trained; the growing connection between knowledge and competitiveness. In this respect, it has been promoted some compatible policies and procedures to ensure the quality of teaching and academic learning in order to increase the overall competitiveness of European higher education and to facilitate the mutual recognition of diplomas and academic degrees.

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

A partial diagnosis study focused on the procedural and structural components of the process of ensuring the quality of the educational process and vocational training of the future specialists in the field of physical culture in the Republic of Moldova in the context of a knowledge-based society was carried out in the research. Thus, we will identify the main aspects of ensuring the quality of the educational process and of the vocational training in the higher education of physical culture, reflected in the dimensions [5]:

1) ***international*** – a dimension that resides in the requirements of the European community regarding the integration in the European higher education area:

- alignment with the standards and practices of European universities in the field of quality assurance;
- increasing the confidence in the specialized university's capabilities in order to provide quality services and products;
- adapting / adjusting curricula and university curricula to requirements in the European area in order to ensure the mobility of students and teachers;

2) ***national*** - a dimension that expresses the imperatives of today's society:

- generating the confidence in the capacity and performance of the university in meeting the implicit and explicit expectations of society;
- assuming by the university the responsibilities for the proposed services;
- increasing the contribution of the educational system to the economic and social development of the country by providing the graduates with professional performances;
- convergence between education and human resources services markets.

3) ***institutional*** - this dimension contains the requirements for increasing the competitiveness of universities, their national and international recognition:

- orientation towards the performance and competitiveness of the university in the market of educational services and graduates in the labour resources market;
- fast integration of university graduates in the labour resources market;

- the recognition on the European market of qualifications (degrees and diplomas) offered by the university;
- developing an institutional culture of quality, full involvement of staff in achieving performance, increasing responsibility for quality.

Ensuring the quality of the vocational training process has the direct consequence, the increasing of employers' confidence in the skills acquired by future specialists, as well as a greater vertical and horizontal mobility of the labour force [6]. At the same time, the quality of the vocational training process is important also from the perspective of its essential role in a European context, in particular for individual development, ensuring the competitiveness, employment growth and for social cohesion. In this context, the development and recognition of the knowledge, skills and competencies of future specialists should facilitate transnational mobility and contribute to meeting the requirements regarding the demand and supply in the European labour market.

Starting from these, the process of quality assurance in the university's vocational training is based on the following concepts:

- vocational training is a permanent, lifelong process;
- the results of the vocational training process are recognized and capitalized at the national and European level;
- the existence of a general framework, that ensures the transparency of qualifications and the possibility of their comparing and transferring.

In the context of knowledge-based society, the quality of education and vocational training of the future specialists requires to the contemporary university to adhere to a number of principles [2]:

- **result orientation** - the results are the ones that define the quality and excellence of the educational process within the university;
- **focusing on customers and beneficiaries of educational services** - excellence is achieved if product / service creates lasting value for the customer. The University depends on its clients and needs to understand their current and future needs, meets their demands and tends to exceed their expectations;
- **developing partnerships** - with institutions, organizations, with direct and indirect beneficiaries of education. The quality assurance system is not just the privilege of the university, the whole community being involved in this process. As a result, the mutually beneficial partnership with all stakeholders will underpin the development of quality education at national and local level;
- **the social responsibility of the organization** - the university is publicly responsible for the quality of the provided educational services, and

the state, through its law-abiding institutions, is the guarantor of the education quality provided by the national education system;

- **quality education ensures the participation of educational players and valorisation of the human resource** - the involvement of teachers and their professional development depends on how they use their competencies for the benefit of the university;

- **individual autonomy and institutional autonomy** - quality education will pursue the development of individual autonomy, the ability to make pertinent decisions. The university enjoys greater autonomy in developing an educational offer appropriate to individual and community needs, assuming its responsibility for the quality of the educational offer;

- **continuous improvement** of performance - taking into account the pace of social changes, lifelong learning, innovation and continuous development become basic principles of university functioning and development. Quality assurance will be seen as an individual and institutional learning process, with the aim of identifying areas of development and orientation of personal and institutional development towards beneficial directions;

- **combining the self-evaluation, internal and external evaluation procedures of the quality** - is an axiom of assuring the quality of education. The results of the evaluation must be undertaken not only by the evaluator (for policies underlying) but also by the evaluated one- the university (for initiating /continuing/ reorienting the organizational and personal development procedures). This requires common criteria of evaluation and shared values - therefore a common evaluation culture.

6. Dismantling the arguments against

The analysis of theoretical concepts in different quality management systems, standards and principles used to develop management systems as well as international practices has demonstrated the usefulness, opportunity and applicability of different systems in the educational sphere. At the same time, we cannot say with certainty that at least one of them is perfect for higher education institutions. Apart from the advantages they offer, they are also lacking in some deficiencies. For this reason, we consider it appropriate to develop and implement an integrated quality management system in higher education institutions, which would assimilate important components from existing systems and would allow an exhaustive approach to quality issues in education by: addressing the quality issue in strategic terms (Mission, values, principles, policies, strategies, objectives, etc.); Keeping

under control and continuously improving processes within the university; Identifying relevant quality indicators and introducing mechanisms for internal evaluation of the system and documenting the system in order to provide objective evidence that would create confidence in its customers. [4] In this context, the implementation of integrated management systems (quality, environment, safety and health at work, etc.) within the higher education institutions would be a proof of the university management orientation towards the national and international requirements, the continuous improvement of the internal processes and the Orientation towards increasing the performance of students and teachers.

7. Conclusions

The quality of education and its relevance to personal development and the knowledge economy are the fundamental criteria for consecration of higher education of physical culture in the Republic of Moldova. Measures to ensure the quality of education shall be carried out both at system level and the institutional level. These contribute to increasing the university's confidence in the skills acquired by graduates of vocational training programs, which allows for the modernization of education and vocational training systems and a better valorisation of learning outcomes, thus multiplying the possibilities of valuing the human capital.

One of the priorities of *the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in the field of Education and Training (ET 2020)* is the smart growth through the development of an economy based on growth and innovation, reflecting the share of knowledge and innovation in the future growth of contemporary society by improving the quality of education, developing research performance, promoting the transfer of innovation throughout the European area, full and complete use of information and communication technologies. In this context, it is necessary to transform innovative ideas into new products and services, quality jobs and competitive specialists on the European and world labour market.

The implementation of the quality management system in university education is an objective and urgent necessity in order to ensure compatibility with the trends of university education in the developed countries, creating the bases of cooperation with them in the field of education and professional training, as well as for the realization of the first priority step of the international integration. The study is on the line of national and international concerns about quality, which has become

important in the context of globalization, where competitiveness in the educated market is based on knowledge and skills.

The results of the theoretical researches and the study conducted by us led to the realization of some original contributions concerning: the analysis of the current state of research in the field of quality management in university education and a synthesis of current trends in the researches undertaken in this field; Highlighting the role of the quality of education and training in university education; The synthesis of concepts and principles underpinning quality assurance and training in higher education; Identifying the responsibility of the university in assuring the quality of education and training; The argumentation of implementing an Integrated Quality Management System within universities that is geared towards meeting the expectations of students, partners and society.

The results of this study can lead to the development of the following research directions in the future: implementation of the integrated quality management model in higher education of physical culture; continuously improving the quality of education and training in higher education.

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