

Assessing the Quality of Higher Education: Concepts and Forms

*Evaluación de la calidad de la educación superior:
conceptos y formas*

Avaliação a qualidade do ensino superior: conceitos e formulários

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Abstract

Introduction: For the educational world to achieve its existence and taste of creation and existence, there is always that need to promote and expect quality education, and this can only be realized through the analysis of its basic concept and formalities put in place. It is in this lane that an article and research is considered necessary.

Purpose: To recognize the undeniable importance of creating a reliable and transparent system of accreditation of educational institutions, the introduction of an independent system of education quality assessment, by the way of scientific analysis and comparison. The subject matter of the article consists in the concepts and forms of the quality of higher education.

Methodology: Based on the analysis of scientific points of view, the authors have suggested their own definition of the concepts of "quality of higher education" and "form of assessing the quality". The classification of forms of assessing the quality of education has been provided and its procedural forms have been defined.

Conclusions: The authors have formulated propositions for improving the accreditation process in Ukraine. It has been noted that the issues related to the process of providing education in Ukraine are currently under close attention of both state authorities and international experts and public organizations.

Keywords: Accreditation, educational process, forms of assessment, higher education.

Resumen

Introducción: para que el mundo de la educación logre su existencia y gusto por la creación y existencia, siempre existe esa necesidad de promover y esperar una educación de calidad, y esto sólo se puede realizar a través del análisis de su concepto básico y de las formalidades puestas en marcha. Es en este carril que se considera necesario un artículo e investigación.

Propósito: reconocer la innegable importancia de la creación de un sistema fiable y transparente de acreditación de las instituciones educativas, la introducción de un sistema independiente de evaluación de la calidad de la educación, por la vía del análisis y la comparación científica. El tema del artículo consiste en los conceptos y formas de la calidad de la educación superior.

Metodología: basándose en el análisis de los puntos de vista científicos, los autores han propuesto su propia definición de los conceptos de "calidad de la educación superior" y "forma de evaluar la calidad". Se ha proporcionado la clasificación de las formas de evaluar la calidad de la educación y se han definido sus formas de procedimiento.

Conclusiones: los autores han formulado propuestas para mejorar el proceso de acreditación en Ucrania. Se ha observado que las cuestiones relacionadas con el proceso de impartición de la enseñanza en Ucrania son actualmente objeto de gran atención tanto por parte de las autoridades estatales como de los expertos internacionales y las organizaciones públicas.

Palabras clave: acreditación, proceso educativo, formas de evaluación, educación superior.

Resumo

Introdução: para que o mundo educacional alcance sua existência e sabor de criação e existência, há sempre a necessidade de promover e esperar uma educação de qualidade, e isto só pode ser realizado através da análise de seu conceito básico e das formalidades implementadas. É nesta linha que um artigo e uma pesquisa são considerados necessários.

Objetivo: reconhecer a inegável importância da criação de um sistema confiável e transparente de credenciamento das instituições educacionais, a introdução de um sistema independente de avaliação da qualidade da educação, por meio de análise científica e comparação. O assunto do artigo consiste nos conceitos e formas da qualidade do ensino superior.

Metodologia: com base na análise dos pontos de vista científicos, os autores sugeriram sua própria definição dos conceitos de "qualidade do ensino superior" e "forma de avaliação da qualidade". A classificação das formas de avaliação da qualidade do ensino foi fornecida e suas formas processuais foram definidas.

Conclusões: os autores formularam propostas para melhorar o processo de credenciamento na Ucrânia. Foi observado que as questões relacionadas ao processo de fornecimento de educação na Ucrânia estão atualmente sob a atenção das autoridades estatais e de especialistas internacionais e organizações públicas.

Palavras-chave: credenciamento, processo educacional, formas de avaliação, ensino superior.

I. INTRODUCTION

The level of professional ability of any specialist or professional to perform the work qualitatively is the key in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of the entire organization. The activities of each group of individuals, regardless of their size and tasks, are directly dependent on the training and education of their members. The quality of education that was once provided to a specialist is naturally considered as the most important factor of possible success in the process of further career of such a specialist.

Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, many Ukrainian citizens, including members of research and teaching associations, have preferred to promote a high-quality and transparent system of assessing the quality of education in Ukraine. Moreover, the requirements for a future successful accreditation system stated that, first of all, it must meet all the highest world standards, and secondly, it should assess both the effectiveness of a particular educational institution and the level of education of specific individuals. This assessment should be surely carried out taking into account certain factors such as: specifics of a particular specialty; requirements of stakeholders to future specialists; the ability of the higher educational institution to provide training taking into account modern information technologies; the need for passing internship (at least introductory), etc.

The modern policy of modernization of higher education actualizes the problem of effective development of the national accreditation system based on the use of the historical experience of its reform. The transformation of the structure and content of accreditation is due to Ukraine's accession to the European Higher Education Area and

to the adoption of the Law of Ukraine on Higher Education (2014)¹, which reflects the European integration processes in higher education. These events needed a rethinking of national traditions in the organization of the accreditation system in terms of the potential of higher education development within the information society, processes of globalization and the European paradigm of higher education².

II. POSING AND EXPLAINING THE STATE OF THE RESEARCH

Many scholars from various fields have dealt with issues related to the invention and implementation of positive changes and improvements into domestic education, in particular, the process of accreditation of higher education institutions of Ukraine. National scholars, as well as the majority of Ukrainian society, are very interested in methods and ways to solve urgent problems of modern education in Ukraine. Such obstacles prevent the educational system from functioning properly, and therefore specialists are working to overcome them. The offered ways and methods of solving problems related to the assessment of the quality of education, as well as a variety of useful ideas for reforming the accreditation system, can be found in the scientific works of a large number of scholars.

The range of research related to assurance of the quality of higher education is extremely wide: Philosophical aspects of higher education; tendencies in the development of higher education and its subordinate sub-tendencies; historical analysis of the development of higher education's quality assurance system; essence, criteria, quality indicators; competence approach in assessing educational quality; monitoring the quality of higher education³.

1 *On Higher Education: Law of Ukraine dated from September 6, 2014*. BULLETIN OF VERKHOVNA RADA (BVR). 2014. No. 37-38. Art. 2004.

2 S. A. Svizhevska. *Development of the Accreditation System in Higher Education in Ukraine (late XX-early XXI century)*. Doctoral thesis. National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine. (2015).

3 *Id.* Pp. 5-6.

III. PLACING AND CONCRETIZING A JUSTIFIED PLATFORM OF UNDERSTANDING IN UKRAINE

The accreditation institution in the Ukrainian system of higher education has its own history. It was developed as a permitting procedure, as a result of which a higher educational institution receives the "right to conduct educational activities" and to issue a diploma of the "state standard". The Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" of 2014 defined the basic principles of reform of this institution, according to which accreditation should become one of the means of ensuring the quality of higher education in accordance with European standards and recommendations⁴.

There are powerful dynamic processes in the modern world aimed at qualitative transformations in all spheres of human life. Such rapid changes have not bypassed the education field, in particular, the day-to-day operation of higher education institutions. The transformations that are partly useful and necessary for the educational process are happening so quickly due to significant assistance from well-known international organizations. International institutions and organizations such as the Council of Europe, the International Department of Standards, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Organization (UN), and the European Commission provide invaluable assistance to higher educational institutions⁵.

The international community has recently become actively interested in various ways to improve the effectiveness of the educational process. In particular, the desire to increase the ability of students to perceive and assimilate the obtained information is among the reasons for this interest. Another equally important factor was the will of a large number of scholars and others involved in the educational process, to a more harmonious combination of theoretical knowledge and practical work.

These allegations are based on the fact that the education system, along with the powerful and continuous development of the entire world society and the environment, has no right to lag behind; otherwise, humanity will face the end of its development. In order to achieve its goal, which is to enhance the situation with the provision of educational services to the population, both in the world in its whole and in some of its parts, the international community has begun to work on joint programs and regulatory acts.

4 O. Panych. How the Accreditation Reform in Higher Education Will Look Like? 2017. Available at: <https://osvita.ua/vnz/57111/>

5 Ministry of Economy and European Integration of Ukraine. *Millennium Development Goals*. 2003. Available at: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG%20Country%20Reports/Ukraine/Ukraine_MDG_Report_-_2003.pdf.

The program “Millennium Development Goals” should be noted among such documents. It was adopted at the UN Summit in 2000. Its importance lays, in particular, in the fact that it was one of the first acts of international nature aimed at supporting and developing education and this document formulated the main future priorities of mankind – and one of the most important priorities was equally free access to education for representatives of all layers of the population as a key guarantee of “the prosperity and well-being of all peoples and nations”.

Following this important document adopted at the UN Summit, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of that time also decided to express its strong support for the current international needs and tendencies, by adopting the Ukrainian national strategy for economic growth and statehood development called the “Millennium Development Goals”. This document, among other things, proclaimed Ukraine’s course to achieve the highest quality standards in education⁶.

Having analyzed the information reflected in open Western European and North American sources that were published over the past few decades, we can logically conclude that the developed world countries already have a stable practice of collecting indicators of education’s quality. The efficiency and effectiveness of students and researchers of a particular university are considered to be the main criteria for determining the leading countries of the education’s quality.

Special written standardized tests are used as reliable verification of these indicators. Due to such indicators, it is possible to create a “picture” of the quality of education around the world. Thus, it will bring significant benefits to specialists who are professionally engaged in the issues of education’s development. In fact, having the data collected during the writing of such tests, specialists will be able to get acquainted with the current state of the educational process in details, and after analyzing all the information, they will be able to provide effective advice to governments that are in the process of development to formulate their effective strategies in the field of education⁷.

Currently, scholars state the situation according to which almost all developed and democratic countries with true rule of law form their own strategies to increase the efficiency of the educational process and the activities of educational institutions in their country. In fact, the entire state educational policy of the developed countries

6 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). *Education at a Glance. OECD Indicators 2001*. OECD Publishing. (2001). Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2001_eag-2001-en

7 *On the Comparative Assessment of Education: Council of Europe Recommendation 1137 1990*. BULLETIN OF THE INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IN UKRAINE. 2002.

is currently based on such strategies, which were created by specialists on the basis of tests and student assessment. Of course, Ukraine is no exception. Since, there is a clear understanding among the representatives of all segments of Ukrainian society of the fact that effective and high-tech education is one of the necessary components for positive achievements in the country. The National Doctrine of Education Development of Ukraine even states that education should be considered a strategic resource of the country. And this statement is quite understandable, because success in education certainly strengthens the authority and competitiveness of Ukraine at the international stage, as well as it plays an important role in ensuring national interests. It is for these reasons that the level of education's quality is determined by the national priority and the basis of national security⁸.

As for European realities, the proper quality of education is perceived as an object of unification and consolidation of society. European legislation, in particular the EU agreement, states that any promotion of the quality of education is a direct responsibility of EU Member States. Last but not least, the act emphasizes that a common European education system must be based on the principles of cooperation, equality and respect as fundamental principles for the successful and harmonious existence of any society.

The provision of high quality educational process and timely assessment of the quality of educational services to the population by educational institutions should be distinguished among the tasks that are currently the priority for European countries, including Ukraine. Qualitative education in the country is able to properly meet the basic scientific, social, political and managerial needs of society⁹.

8 *On the National Doctrine of Education Development: Decree of the President of Ukraine dated from April 17, 2002 No. 347.* Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/347/2002#Text>

9 *Standards and Recommendations for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.* 2006. Available at: https://osvita.kpi.ua/files/downloads/Standart_EPVO.pdf.

IV. ACCEPTING A PLAUSIBLE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY EDUCATION WITHIN THE UKRAINIAN EDUCATIONAL SETUP

The concept of “quality of higher education” is provided in paragraph 23 of the Article 1 of the Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education”, as “the level of knowledge, skills, abilities acquired by a person, which reflects his competence in accordance with higher education standards”¹⁰. It follows from this statement that currently the focus is mainly on the need to meet the growing current requirements of the labor market to new professionals.

Regarding another definition of the term of “quality of education”, according to the official position of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine: It is “a set of characteristics of the educational process that determine the consistent and practically effective formation of competence and professional awareness”. This definition means a certain level of knowledge and skills, mental, physical and moral development of an individual, which was achieved by graduates of the educational institution in accordance with the basic plan of their educational process. There are the following officially recognized forms of education’s quality assessment in Ukraine, according to its current legislation: External Independent Assessment (EIA), State Final Certification (SFC) and PISA (International Student Assessment Program).

As for PISA, it is an international evaluation program launched in 1997, funded on the ongoing basis by the OECD. The purpose of this program is to formulate the current tendencies in curricula in different countries, based on the results of this testing. Besides, the goals of the program are to track the level of educational achievement of students and pupils around the world, as well as to improve the quality of teaching in educational institutions. Since 2000, the survey has been conducted every three years and is aimed at assessing education systems around the world based on the testing of 15-year-old students. Ukraine took part in this testing for the first time in 2018. Around 80 other countries, except Ukraine, also participate in that survey.

The Ukrainian Center for Assessing Educational Quality (UCAEQ) has been conducting external independent evaluation (EIE) since 2006. This testing is currently recognized as being able to provide reliable information on the current state of quality of knowledge of those who take it. In addition, the results of this assessment provide

¹⁰ *On Higher Education: Law of Ukraine dated from September 6, 2014. BULLETIN OF VERKHOVNA RADA (BVR). 2014. No. 37.38. Art. 2004.*

a wide range of information about the quality of the process of providing educational services in a particular educational institution, based on the results of this test, for example, among graduates or students of a particular educational institution.

EIE, originally created as the test to verify the quality of knowledge of graduates of secondary schools, quickly proved its usefulness and effectiveness. That is why EIE, over the years, has been actively used to verify the quality of education in higher educational institutions. In particular, starting from 2016, this testing is mandatory for verifying knowledge during the entrance examinations for admission to MA courses in "Law"¹¹.

As a result of Ukraine's accession to the so-called "Bologna" system of assessing quality of education, also called the "Bologna Process", our state has a duty to clearly follow modern educational tendencies and to adhere to the highest standards of the educational process. Among the recent tendencies that can be observed in the educational systems of developed countries, we can note the gradual transition from checking the proper quality of admission to educational institutions and testing their activities to assessing the effectiveness of education in regard to quality and "success" of graduates' employment. In other words, the most important criterion for the quality of education now is the level of adaptation of a particular educational process to the modern competitive labor market¹².

It is worth noting that one of the urgent problems of educational institutions is the lack of selectivity. There are cases when it is specified in the curriculum, but the student has no choice. The phenomenon of fictitious selectivity demonstrates the unwillingness of the institution to consider the applicant as a full participant in the educational process and, of course, may be the reason for conditional (deferred) accreditation or non-accreditation. Besides, the observance of academic honesty has become an important issue, since not everyone understands what exactly this concept means and how to deal with this problem. Adherence to academic honesty begins not only within the institution, but also through international cooperation, changes in legislation and national court practice. It is possible to require honesty and adherence to standards from an individual professor, who has been constantly working in a "broken" system that lobbies for falsification, bribery, write-offs and deception, but the impact will not be effective for the entire teaching staff without significant changes in each educational mechanism.

11 *Official website of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine*. Available at: <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/tag/yakist-osviti>.

12 V. Riabchenko. *The Problem of the Quality of National Higher Education in the Context of Educational Reforms: Retrospective and Modernity from the Standpoint of Worldview*. HIGHER EDUCATION OF UKRAINE 1. 2015. Pp. 12-27.

There is no doubt that one of the key criteria for evaluating a curriculum in the process of its accreditation according to new principles is training and teaching. How do institutions provide quality indicators in this aspect today? What could be the wishes for universities in this context? The student-oriented approach has long been provided by many higher educational institutions of Ukraine, exclusively through the free choice of topics of scientific works and bases for internship. However, there have always been systemic problems with the free choice of disciplines. State higher educational institutions facilitated administration and saved money by offering students the “choice without choice”. Nowadays, the universities administrations, which previously blocked the choice of students, have begun to actively offer elective courses. The autonomy of institutions allows to do so in different ways (from completely free up to block one, or a combination of them), but there is no doubt that changes in this direction have begun to occur. However, there are still many issues in higher educational institutions – i.e., with the number of students to form a group on the subject, the load on the elective disciplines, staff – that need an individual solution¹³.

V. PERSPECTIVE AND THE FUTURE OF AN ADVANCED EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

Summarizing the theses and statements above, it should be noted that one of the most important components for the effective, transparent and efficient operation of both an individual institution and the higher education system as a whole is, of course, a single system of criteria and requirements for higher education quality. Besides, a single generally accepted evaluation system should operate. These components are the key guarantors of high quality and transparency of the educational system. If available, they will ensure high confidence in the educational process, as well as a harmonious combination with the labor market.

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¹³ *Criterion of “Training and Teaching” under the Accreditation of Curricula [name from the screen]. Website of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. Available at: <https://naqa.gov.ua/>*

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