

Assessing Higher Education Quality in the Context of Conceptual Confusion and Methodological Eclecticism

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Abstract

The article highlights evaluation and quality assurance theory and practices in higher education. Applying the principles of transparency, publicity and comparability quality assurance seeks to ensure high quality standards and to facilitate the comparability of European qualifications. As different frameworks for defining higher education quality are widely used, much of conceptual confusion and methodological eclecticism is found on the subject causing difficulties in data comparability. An example of methodological approach to higher education quality assessment enabling international data comparability is analysed and discussed.

Keywords: higher education, secondary education, quality, comparability, international comparative studies.

Introduction

The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of European Higher Education Area. Hence the development of quality assurance systems plays a vital role in ensuring high quality standards and in facilitating the comparability of qualifications throughout Europe. Universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and the *European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education* are expected to collaborate on establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate the best practice (Svarbiausi Bolonijos proceso dokumentai. Bolonijos-Londono laikotarpis 1999–2007 m., 2008). Highlighting the importance of the principles of transparency, publicity and comparability the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance at institutional, national and European levels is emphasised in the Bologna Process documents and more thoroughly discussed in the guidelines formulated by the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*.

Various attempts to conceptualize and measure higher education quality result in abundant production of scientific literature that reflects importance and relevance of the topic. Nevertheless the results obtained are often criticized and it seems that existing quality assurance systems instead of being

efficient are rather consuming large amounts of resources and often generating unnecessary bureaucracy (Ursin et al., 2008). Moreover, researchers apply different operational concepts of higher education quality: subjective teaching quality is measured (Dunrong and Fan, 2009; Savickiene, 2006); financial quality management data based on demand and supply model is analysed (Csizmadia et al., 2008; Juknyte-Petreikiene and Pukelis, 2007; Lauzackas et al., 2006); factors affecting professional job mastery may also be interpreted as higher education quality indicators (Aamodt and Havnes, 2008; Beresnevičiute and Poviliunas, 2007; Rosinaite, 2008) as well as studies results and achievements (Griffith, 2008; Pukelis and Pileickiene, 2006). According to yet another approach higher education quality could be evaluated using various ranking procedures or institutional quality audits (Baird, 2007; Federkeil, 2008; Rozman and Marhl, 2008). Whereas different frameworks for defining quality are used, researchers tend to write at cross-purposes on this subject and hence some serious difficulties in engaging meaningful and constructive conversation (Dew, 2009).

Drawing on thorough scientific literature analysis this paper highlights the problem of higher education quality conceptual confusion and methodological eclecticism, which cause difficulties for international data comparability despite the fact that modern states invest important resources into their educational system assessment and improvement. Meanwhile rather different situation is observed in the area of secondary education where international studies provide researchers with opportunities to examine how pupils from both similar and dissimilar formal educational systems perform on a single test and provide rich information about the relationships among pupil outcomes and the factors that affect them. Analysis of rich international comparative databases is often used for the national education policy conception (Bybee, 2009; Campbell, 2008; Dudaite, 2007; Elijo, 2007, 2008; Rutkowski and Rutkowski, 2009).

The aim of this article is first to discuss the problematic of higher education quality reflected in

scientific publications in contrast to secondary education quality assessment theories and practices, then to produce an analysis of QUISS¹ methodology assessing certain aspects of higher education quality and enabling international data comparability.

Transparency, Publicity and Comparability in Education Quality Assessment

Drawing on abundant published scientific literature, evidences suggest that the use of a variety of higher education quality definitions in empirical researches causes difficulties for data comparison. Hence Ursin's et al. (2008) practical concerns about the capability of higher education quality assurance systems to develop and clarify operations, to increase methodical practices and transparency. Meanwhile various characteristics of secondary education quality are assessed using the same methodology in many countries. Collected data constitute important international databases facilitating international comparability, ensuring data transparency and publicity. In this case deeper analysis of methodological and practical solutions to international quality assessment of secondary education seems to be appropriate and the comparison of the results obtained should allow much better understanding of higher education quality assessment concerns.

Quality Assessment Issues in Secondary Education

Researches on secondary education quality could be regrouped into two trends: constructivist (using humanistic approach) and positivist. Constructivist trend is based on the assumption that each person constructs the view of the world on personal perceptions of it, thus it is never objective per se, but objectivity is inherently a social phenomenon. Positivist trend deals with positive facts and observable phenomena, uses quantitative data as it draws on measurable evidence, is interested not only in description but also in prediction and explanation, aims at absolute or varying degree of generalization.

In constructivist trend researchers use such quality aspects as: values development as a principle of curriculum organization, relationship between teacher and pupil (Toomey and Lovat, 2009); emotional and instructional dimensions of quality expressed by classroom quality, teaching practices, social interaction between teachers and children and etc. Constructivists argue that instructional and social interactions between teachers and children are a far more accurate indicator of learning opportunities, and ultimately of child performance, than standardized tests

¹ *Qualitätsverbesserung in Schulen und Schulsystemen*, elaborated in 1983 by the scholars' team directed by Professor Werner Georg at Konztanz University (Germany) (Merkys et al., 2009).

are (Stuhlman and Pianta, 2009). Nevertheless far more widespread is positivist trend preferring standardized tests and learning outcomes assessment enabling international data comparability.

Since 1958 all over the world *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement* (IEA) organizes international surveys for pupils' educational achievements and teachers' teaching abilities evaluation. Some international comparative surveys are administrated periodically within interval of some years and constitute international large-scale assessment used to analyze the tendencies over time for measured indicators:

1) *Trends in Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2008 (Rutkowski and Rutkowski, 2009; Pugh and Telhaj, 2008);

2) *Civic Education Study* (CIVED) or *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (ICCS) 1997, 2000, 2009 (Campbell, 2008; Torney-Purta et al., 2007);

3) *Second Information Technology in Education Study* (SITES) 1999, 2001, 2006 (Law et al., 2005);

4) *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) 2001, 2006 (Myrberg and Rosen, 2008).

Later on countries members of *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) also developed such international educational achievement surveys as: *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA), administrated repeatedly since 2000 every third year (Bybee, 2009; Takayama, 2008) or *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS), organized in 2008. All these surveys are administrated by an international group made up of delegates from participating countries' ministries in charge of education, data processing and research is done by an international office.

Lithuania participates in some international comparative educational achievement surveys as well:

- 1) PISA in 2006² (Dudaite, 2007);
- 2) PIRLS in 2001 and 2006³ (Elijio, 2007);
- 3) TIMSS in 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007 (Elijio, 2008);
- 4) SITES/COMPED in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2006;
- 5) ICCS/CIVED in 1999 and 2009⁴;
- 6) TALIS in 2008⁵.

² 60 countries participated.

³ In 2001 there participated 35 countries, in 2006 there participated 40 countries.

⁴ In 1999 31 countries participated, in 2009 38 countries participated.

⁵ 24 countries participated.

All the above mentioned surveys are coordinated and sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania and organized by the National Centre of Examination.

The significance of positivist trend international research on secondary education cannot be overestimated. Large-scale international assessments produce important and reliable data serving as guidelines for the policy decisions, for the implementation of national educational strategy, for improving studies curricula and institutional quality of studies. Despite the popularity of positivist trend in secondary education quality researches, some authors criticize it and argue that quality evaluation should be more complete. According to Livingston and McCall (2005), international studies with comparisons of the results that different educational systems achieve and the indicators and benchmarks relating to the quality of school education that the European Commission has published are problematic in a way: this type of external evaluation is often perceived by teachers as judgemental and controlling. In contrast, internal school-based evaluation aims to be seen as a developmental process contributing to improved teacher and student learning, where ownership of the evaluation processes remains with the school stakeholders. The authors argue that quality assessment has to cover all aspects of the educational process and not attainment outcomes only. Hence school self-evaluation (or school-based evaluation) can be developed alongside and is compatible with the demands for external accountability. On the other hand, international comparative educational achievement surveys being basically positivist have such a rich system of indicators that often contain some parameters that are rather constructivist:

- PISA evaluates pupils' achievements in reading, mathematics and natural sciences, but also analyses pupils' motivation, their learning methods and self-esteem (Dudaite, 2007).

- PIRLS respondents are not only pupils, but also their teachers, school administration, and parents. Items included: about pupils' home settings, parents' reading habits and attitudes, interactions between home and school, size of the class, learning equipment and learning methods, evaluation methods, pupils' group-work, school and class resources, school locality, school climate, pupils' socioeconomic data and etc. (Eljio, 2007).

- TIMSS is based on indicators derived from studies curricula: 1) curricula foreseen in national educative and social contexts is analysed; 2) curricula implemented on school, teacher and class levels is analysed; 3) curricula implemented on pupils' achievement level is analysed. Furthermore, school climate and pupils' evaluation of their own achievements

are included as a part of survey methodology (Eljio, 2008).

Summing-up methodological and practical solutions to international quality assessment of secondary education, it appears that combining the efforts of constructivist and positivist researchers in a complementary way, functional and comparative indicators system is feasible on the local level (internal school-based evaluation) as well as on international level (educational achievement surveys).

Higher Education Quality: Theory and Empirics

According to Dew (2009) there is much said these days about quality in higher education by government officials, employers, accrediting agencies, university administrators, institutional researchers, faculty, and faculty development specialists. All have something to share concerning this topic without managing to establish a constructive discussion. To engage in meaningful conversation, first a common definition of quality is needed. The author describes five popular ways to frame the issue of quality in higher education, as follows: 1) quality as endurance: when an institution stands the test of time for more than a century, it may equate that endurance with quality; 2) quality as luxury and prestige: when higher education institutions invest in beautiful garden-like campuses, stately buildings, luxurious suites in athletic stadiums, and every convenience that students from affluent backgrounds are accustomed to at home; 3) quality as conformance to requirements: the accrediting body specifies a set of requirements that a college, university, or specific academic program is required to meet, and then reviews performance to see if there is conformance to the requirements, educational institutions can establish requirements for learning outcomes, support services, financial well-being, library resources, and even for demonstrating effective planning, assessment, and improvement; 4) quality as continuous improvement: defined requirements can never keep pace with organizational learning and technology, so quality should mean achieving the fastest rate of innovation and improvement in all aspects of an institution; 5) quality as value added: students should know more after they complete an academic program than before they started, it should mean some measurable improvement in student learning, social skills, social contacts, writing skills, reading skills, critical thinking, or other attributes that are consistent with the mission of an institution, such as the ability to dance, speak another language, or plan how to construct a building. It is common to speak at cross-purposes on this subject when different quality definitions and different criteria for its evaluation are used.

Van Kemenade et al. (2008) discern five approaches to quality in education: 1) transcendental approach, 2) product-oriented approach, 3) customer-oriented approach, 4) manufacturing-oriented approach and 5) value-for-money approach. Whatever approach is chosen, quality concept should be described by four constituents: object, standard, subject and values. Quality needs first a clarification about the object. The quality of 'what' are we talking about? The object can be learning results, a process or transformation as well as the whole system (ISO9001:2000 focuses on the quality management system of an organisation). Then quality assessment needs standards. What features should be taken into consideration and what standards should be used to judge its quality? Standards may derive from the content of a curriculum, students' competences, specifications of the diploma obtained, or the degree of excellence at an acceptable price and the control of variability at an acceptable cost. Defining standards leads to the next question: who sets the standards and who evaluates the quality? Subjects are widely analysed by customer-oriented quality approach and in education field they are stakeholders. A distinction can be made between external (the world of work, government, secondary education and partners) and internal stakeholders (staff, students). Each stakeholder has a certain value system. Therefore quality is a value-laden term: it is subjectively associated with what is considered to be good and worthwhile. In the context of higher education, the authors suggest four principal value systems on quality management: 1) process control or following the rules, procedures and standards; 2) continuous improvement or innovation; 3) commitment or social competence and flexibility (transforming the students into the citizens of the world); 4) breakthrough or intellectual competence (students are to be leaders in the future society) (Van Kemenade et al., 2008). As it appears, the four value systems are contradictory as when the accent is on process control and standards, it will be difficult to go along with innovations, on the other hand, if the aim is social competence, there will be difficult to expect the leaders as they need a more individual oriented approach. As the objects, chosen standards and subjects of higher education quality are closely interrelated and influenced by the set of social values, the variety of possible combinations of quality concepts, assessment methods, obtained results and conclusions is difficult to concord.

International practices concerning conceptual variety of higher education quality are also reflected in Lithuanian scientific publications. Kraujutaitė (2002) defines higher education by using such features as: individual and institutional autonomy, contractual relationships, culture of equality, and open-

ness of higher education. Ruskus et al. (2006) refer to the first educational system principle of Education Act of the Republic of Lithuania, postulating social justice of educational system that is supposed to guarantee equality without segregation based on gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, religion or beliefs. Everyone should be able to access education and have the possibility of improving qualification obtained as well as seek for a new one. The above mentioned definitions contain higher education quality standards based on the humanistic principles of social justice. Other authors define higher education quality from the different point of view considering the principles of economic demand and supply theory. Juodaitytė (2004) argues that quality is consumers-satisfying result that conforms to a certain services model. Westerheijden (2005) uses International Organization for Standardization (ISO) quality definition based on the characteristics enabling explicit and implicit needs satisfaction. Different aspects of studies quality are also analysed by different authors aiming to assess higher education quality (Pukelis and Pileicikiene, 2005; Valiukeviciute et al., 2004). Gudaitytė and Juceviciene (2000) expect higher education to integrate such contradictory aspects as: traditional values and market orientation, liberal education institution and services provider, promoter of social competencies and individualism.

In parallel to the higher education conceptual variety in the research field goes empirical eclecticism. For example, some researchers assessing higher education quality analyse the parameters of students' satisfaction with their studies (Dunrong and Fan, 2009; Savickiene, 2006; Schuck et al., 2008). This trend is criticised for the data unreliability and methodological lack of relevance (Bowling, 2008; Spooren et al., 2007; Wesp and Miele, 2008). Critics suggest to increase the number and variety of scales used to measure the subjective satisfaction (Ginns et al., 2007), or at least they urge to separate explicitly satisfaction with teaching from the evaluation of quality of teaching (Care, 2009). Teaching quality is often analyzed within customer-oriented quality approach based on the assumption that the most objective evaluations of higher education quality belong to its customers – students (Abdullah, 2006; Cooper, 2007; Lopez, 2005; Valiuskeviciute et al., 2004). Other authors suggest quality management approach analysing value-for-money parameters (Csizmadia et al., 2008; Juknyte-Petreikiene and Pukelis, 2007; Lauzackas et al., 2006). Finally, some vocational parameters are also used in the context of product-oriented higher education quality approach researches (Aamodt and Havnnes, 2008; Beresneviciute and Poviliunas, 2007; Rosinaite, 2008).

Quite often different above-mentioned quality assessment methods are combined in complex methodologies that are even more criticized as much for the theoretical conception ambiguity as for the lack of methodological reliability and relevance. For example, almost every country uses one or another kind of external assessment of the performance of higher education institutions: most often accreditation system or institutional audits are used. This type of quality management approach in higher education is severely criticized for removing the power from academics and placing it in the hands of managers and education bureaucrats (Baird, 2007). Another example of external assessment of the performance of higher education institutions are rankings. Broad variety of criteria is used in different ranking systems but most of them explicitly or implicitly are related to institutional selectivity issues. In the minds of most people, the best colleges or universities are those that are the most selective. Selective colleges and universities have high graduation rates, and attending them confers social status and is positively linked to increased post-college earnings. Although graduation rates and earnings may say more about the preparation, motivation, and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students attending selective institutions than what these colleges and universities contribute to student development, the combination of benefits is apparently sufficient to believe in rankings as a reliable quality assessment method (Kuh and Pascarella, 2004, p. 53). Federkeil (2008, p. 229) notices that “an analysis of existing rankings shows that the vast majority of rankings do not have an explicit and theoretically grounded concept of quality. They develop a specific set of indicators according to their aims and target groups – and often, simply with regard to the availability of data. Yet their set of indicators constructs an implicit model of quality or excellence of higher education institutions”. As a separate well-established international university ranking system should be discussed the Shanghai Ranking and its reliance on evidence of research productivity. It is a bibliographic method where all publications, professional, research, and scientific works of academics are catalogued (Rozman and Marhl, 2008; Verhesschen, 2006). In this particular case the data is rather about the scientific productivity and has nothing to do with teaching quality or other processes of higher education to be considered as quality criteria.

As it appears, except for bibliographic method of ranking for academic productivity evaluation, it is difficult to find a commonly used method that ensures international data comparability in the field of higher education quality. According to Dew (2009, p. 4–7), it is possible, however, to establish a uniform set of

quality measures that will work throughout the entire higher education community at the degree level (accreditation) regarding: 1) student learning outcomes; 2) methods of assessment and improvement; 3) faculty credentials; 4) resources to support this specific aspect of higher education; 5) many professions, such as engineering, nursing, and education, are increasingly relying on common examinations that students in a higher education institution of any type should have the ability to pass to demonstrate his or her qualifications to practice in a profession, regardless of the institution’s broader mission. Degree programs are a common denominator in higher education, where it is possible to generate and assess comparative data, even though the mission of institutions that offer these degrees may vary significantly. At any level broader than degree programs, however, the attempt to establish a common set of quality indicators across institutions immediately runs into a problem when institutions have very different missions. Other authors notice that quality assurance, usually done at the institutional level, is generally meant to verify that institutions are fulfilling their declared missions. If they are doing so, the process may then, in some jurisdictions, culminate in institutional accreditation or re-accreditation. A number of governments now express disappointment with its impact for various reasons. Some had hoped it would shake up the higher educational system and squeeze weaker institutions more vigorously. Some have concerns about self-referential nature of much of quality-assurance work, which they believe needs some external point of reference. In an attempt to elicit more direct comparisons between institutions and programs based on student achievement, some countries have directed quality assurance agencies to work on standards similar to the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The OECD is tiptoeing into the higher education standards debate with understandable caution. Through a program called Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) it is now assessing whether reliable cross-national comparisons of student learning outcomes are scientifically possible and feasible (Daniel et al., 2009, p. 33). However, despite the fact that many authors analyse studies attainment as higher education quality indicators (Griffith, 2008; Pukelis and Pilecikiene, 2006), Dew (2009) thinks that they alone are not sufficient and other measures, even if they are problematic for comparative purposes, may still offer great value for understanding longitudinal performance within a single institution and should by no means be discounted.

Reviewing higher education quality assessment situation in the countries of the European Higher Education Area, Rauhvarger’s⁶ (2010, p. 18) ob-

⁶ Andrejs Rauhvarger since 2005 is member of the Bologna fol-

servations are of great interest: “All countries have introduced external quality assurance systems but just one third of the countries have organised assessment of their quality assurance agency against the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. In most countries, higher education institutions have established internal quality assurance procedures although some during internal approval of programmes are better developed, linking programmes with learning outcomes and designing assessment procedures to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes will take longer to implement. Student participation in quality assurance is widening, but students often do not participate in decision making, are not always involved in preparing self-assessment reports, and are very seldom involved in follow-up measures. Involvement of international peers in external review teams and participation in international quality assurance networks has grown, but there is still quite a large number of countries the quality assurance agencies of which are neither full members of ENQA⁷ nor included in the European Quality Assurance Register, that is, there is no proof of operating according to the European Standards and Guidelines⁸”. Therefore, the development of quality assurance systems in the European Higher Education Area still needs considerable efforts aiming to implement the principles of transparency, publicity and comparability, developing mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance at institutional, national and European levels.

Summarizing theoretical and empirical issues surrounding measurement of quality in higher education, much of conceptual confusion and methodological eclecticism is found: what is proposed to measure is grounded in different definitions of quality therefore there are widely divergent views about measurement, and how to conduct measurement activities. As there has been a wealth of government policy initiatives and important money spending on higher education reformation in different countries of the European Higher Education Area, those processes have been the focus of public, political and scientific concern in recent years. It is obvious that higher education quality is an important topic drawing attention of many scientists: numerous attempts to conceptualize and assess higher education quality could be presented and analyzed in depth within this context. As one of examples of empirical assessment of quality of higher education a methodology for a cross-cultural survey QUISS will be presented and analysed further.

low-up group; has chaired the working group studying the progress in the 46 “Bologna” countries and preparing the Bologna Stocktaking reports published in 2007 and 2009.

⁷ *European Network of Quality Assurance.*

⁸ *European Standards and Guidelines.*

Research methodology

Analysis of scientific publications was carried out aiming to identify the issues of higher education quality assessment in the context of conceptual confusion and methodological eclecticism. According to analyzed theoretical assumptions and empirical observations (Aamodt and Havnes, 2008; Baird, 2007; Beresneviciute and Poviliunas, 2007; Bowling, 2008; Care, 2009; Cooper, 2007; Csizmadia et al., 2008; Daniel et al., 2009; Dew, 2009; Dunrong and Fan, 2009; Federkeil, 2008; Ginns et al., 2007; Griffith, 2008; Gudaityte and Juceviciene, 2000; Juknyte-Petrickiene and Pukelis, 2007; Juodaityte, 2004; Lauzackas et al., 2006; Pukelis and Pileickiene, 2006; Rosinaite, 2008; Rozman and Marhl, 2008; Ruskus et al., 2006; Savickiene, 2006; Spooren et al., 2007; Valiukeviciute et al., 2004; Van Kemenade et al., 2008; Verhesschen, 2006; Wesp and Miele, 2008) there was original analysis matrix constructed and used for motivation and higher education quality assessment instrument QUISS II⁹ analysis.

QUISS methodology was elaborated by the scholars’ team directed by Professor Werner Georg at Konztanz University (Germany) in 1983, since then it was used repeatedly in surveys and systematically improved by authors. This survey methodology is quantitative, dominated by psychometric Likert-type scales of different levels (from 3 to 9), most often with central categories. In 2000-2002 one of its recent versions QUISS I was used on international level in France, Germany and Spain: the questionnaire was made up of 62 questions, 425 items regrouped in 7 major themes: 1) choice of studies and studies expectations; 2) studying attitudes and habits; 3) students’ life; 4) social contacts and communication; 5) studies experience and problems; 6) use of IT; 7) choice of profession and its representations. The questionnaire was translated into English, French and Spanish, and culturally adapted. Respondents from 16 universities took part in the survey: 2 German universities (984 respondents), 6 Spanish universities (1823 respondents) and 8 French universities (1230 respondents). In 2008-2009 the latest version of the instrument QUISS II was used in surveys administrated in France, Germany and Lithuania. Lithuanian State Studies Foundation financed the scientists’ group project “*Academic Studies Quality and Social Context Survey*” directed by Professor Gediminas Merkys, in which QUISS II was translated and culturally adapted (Merkys et al., 2009). In addition, some original modules, reflecting more precisely Lithuanian socio-economic context, were created. The questionnaire consisted of 10 diagnostic blocks, including 59 different constructs and containing 780 items. Diagnos-

⁹ Qualitätsverbesserung in Schulen und Schulsystemen II.

tic blocks were: 1) socio-demographic data; 2) studies quality; 3) consulting needs and possibilities; 4) studies motivation and professional carrier possibilities; 5) understanding the European higher education area; 6) use of IT; 7) national identity and emigrational attitudes; 8) social integration and social networks; 9) political literacy, democratic attitudes and civic participation; 10) fees for higher education, financial resources and the quality of life. In this paper original QUISS II scales for motivation and higher education quality assessment will be analysed: 34 scales and 7 separate questions composed of 304 items. Two major topics covered: motivation (46 items) and higher education quality (258 items). Motivation scales analyse such aspects as: 1) choice of higher education institution (8 items); 2) choice of studies (7 items); 3) meaningfulness of studies (10 items); 4) motivation for doctoral studies (11 items); 5) intentions to study abroad (6 items). Higher education quality scales analyse such aspects as: 1) availability of information (3 scales – 29 items); 2) major problem areas (3 scales – 42 items); 3) studies and teaching (7 scales – 76 items); 4) communication and consulting (7 scales – 30 items); 5) studies results (6 scales – 50 items); 6) European Higher Education Area (3 scales – 28 items).

Research results

Drawing on analysis of scientific publications discussing different issues of higher education quality assessment five principal quality approaches according to Van Kemenade et al. (2008) are defined and juxtaposed with five ways of framing quality, proposed by Dew (2009). Next to the theoretical approaches to higher education quality there are presented published findings of different authors illustrating the proposed grid of analysis and constituting the background for QUISS II analysis (see Table 1).

QUISS II questionnaire is based on customer-oriented quality approach aiming to record the students' point of view. As students are asked to evaluate different aspects of their studies outcomes and studies requirements, as well as teaching quality and different studies organization processes the questionnaire covers also the issues of product-oriented and manufacturing-oriented quality approaches. Motivation scales evaluating intrinsic and extrinsic higher education choices and studies motivation evaluate some as-

pects of transcendental and value-for-money quality approaches. Some scales and items fit to analyse different aspects of more than one approach, for example, consulting scales are suitable for customer-oriented as well as for manufacturing-oriented quality approaches.

Transcendental quality approach is the most subjective. Institution standing the test of time or having some luxury settings may provide mediocre education services nevertheless public opinion may have its own subjective evaluation related to transcendental aspects. These aspects are not evaluated in QUISS II. Still, in Lithuanian context Vilnius University may be considered to stand the test of time, hence, particular attention when analyzing data should be given to the respondents' from this institution data examining the hypothesis about transcendental endurance quality factor impact on higher education quality evaluations.

Conformance to requirements and continuous improvement within product-oriented, customer-oriented and manufacturing-oriented quality approaches is evaluated from two different perspectives: 1) whether the institution conforms to requirements and what needs to be improved in it; 2) whether its students conform to requirements and what they need to improve.

Value-for-money quality approach is only in part within the scope of students' interests. Conformance to requirements and continuous improvement in relation to financial resources are rather the problems of institutions and are not analyzed within QUISS II methodology. Nevertheless, the questionnaire analyses value added aspects by assessing extrinsic motivation for higher education: whether higher education diplomas will provide with better vocational options and/or be useful for improving students' social status.

Concluding thorough QUISS II analysis it is important to notice that the methodology covers a wide variety of approaches to higher education quality. It also proposes functional and comparative indicators system in constructivist perspective. Finally, its data comparability is being tested on international level. Continuing working on this methodology, it could become a reliable tool for certain aspects of higher education quality assessment and be helpful in achieving international data comparability.

Table 1

QUISS II Analysis According to Theoretical and Empirical Issues of Higher Education Quality

Quality approach		Published findings	QUISS II methodological aspects
Transcendental	Endurance	Quality criterion is the test of time. Used in rankings and related to institutions selectivity issues.	Not evaluated.
	Luxury and prestige	Used in rankings and related to institutions selectivity issues.	Not evaluated.
	Value added	Mostly found in theoretical articles.	Intrinsic motivation for higher education studies (personal growth): 22 items.
Product-oriented	Conformance to requirements	Established requirements for learning outcomes. Used in institutional audits, accreditations.	Institution services conformance to requirements: 17 items; students' conformance to requirements: 15 items.
	Continuous improvement	Studies programmes innovation.	Institution improvement: 11 items; students' improvement: 17 items.
	Value added	Researches on some measurable improvement in student learning, writing skills, reading skills, critical thinking, social skills, social contacts, or other attributes which are consistent with the mission of an institution.	Evaluation of improvement in knowledge, skills, critical thinking, social skills, etc.: 14 items.
Customer-oriented	Luxury and prestige	Used in rankings and related to institutions selectivity issues for attraction of wealthy students.	Importance of prestige and traditions for choosing higher education institution and studies programme: 4 items.
	Conformance to requirements	A set of requirements that institution or specific academic program is required to meet. Institutions can establish requirements for support services. Assessed via institutional audits and accreditation procedures.	Institutions' conformance to requirements (studies organization and resources, consulting): 27 items; students' interests in provided services: 5 items.
	Continuous improvement	Improvement of students' satisfaction.	Institution improvement in studies organization: 37 items; students' improvement: 6 items.
	Value added	Researches concerning students' satisfaction with their studies outcomes, improvement in knowledge, social status, vocational options.	Students' satisfaction with consulting services: 6 items.
Manufacturing-oriented	Conformance to requirements	Established requirements for teaching, consulting and other studies processes. Researches on various aspects assessing studies quality. Used institutional audits and accreditation procedures.	Availability of all the necessary information and consulting possibilities: 55 items; studying attitudes and aptitudes: 18 items.
	Continuous improvement	Improvement of teaching and learning processes. Researches on various aspects assessing studies quality.	Teaching quality, studies organization and studies resources: 33 items; students' willingness to self-improvement: 14 items.
	Value added	Some measurable teachers' impact on students. Researches on various aspects assessing studies quality.	What is useful for students' personal and professional growth: 26 items.
Value-for-money	Conformance to requirements	External and internal requirements for services and costs. A set of requirements that institution or specific academic program is required to meet in balance with its costs. Institutions can establish requirements for financial well-being, library resources, and even for demonstrating effective planning, assessment, and improvement.	Not evaluated.
	Continuous improvement	Better results within affordable costs.	Not evaluated.
	Value added	Researches on diplomas: whether they cause better vocational options and social status improvement.	Extrinsic motivation for higher education (vocational, social status, financial aspects, etc.): 32 items.

Conclusions

Different higher education quality definitions are used:

1. There are five popular interpretations of quality in higher education: 1) quality as endurance; 2) quality as luxury and prestige; 3) quality as conformance to requirements; 4) quality as continuous improvement; 5) quality as value added.

2. There are different approaches to quality in education: 1) transcendental approach; 2) product-oriented approach; 3) customer-oriented approach; 4) manufacturing-oriented approach; 5) value-for-money approach.

3. Quality concept is described by four constituents: 1) object; 2) standard; 3) subject; 4) values.

In the research field empirical eclecticism is found:

1. Subjective evaluations are analysed: students' satisfaction with their studies or teaching, with different other parameters of higher education; different subjective value-for-money aspects are analysed; some vocational parameters are also used in the context of product-oriented higher education quality approach researches.

2. Quality management is used: different value-for-money aspects are analysed; degree programs are evaluated; institutional audits and different rankings are effectuated.

3. Accreditation procedures are used.

4. Studies attainment outcomes are evaluated as higher education quality indicators.

The development of quality assurance systems in the European Higher Education Area still needs considerable efforts aiming to implement the principles of transparency, publicity and comparability, developing mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance at institutional, national and European levels:

1. All countries have introduced external quality assurance systems but just one third of the European Higher Education Area countries have organised assessment of their quality assurance agency against the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

2. In most countries higher education institutions have established internal quality assurance procedures, nevertheless linking programmes with learning outcomes and designing assessment procedures to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes is not achieved yet.

3. Student participation in quality assurance is widening, but students often do not participate in decision making, are not always involved in preparing self-assessment reports, and are very seldom involved in follow-up measures.

4. Involvement of international peers in external review teams and participation in international quality assurance networks has grown, but there is still quite a large number of countries where there is no proof of operating according to the European Standards and Guidelines.

Higher education quality conceptual confusion and methodological eclecticism cause difficulties for international data comparability. Meanwhile combining the efforts of constructivist and positivist researchers, secondary education quality is successfully assessed by using functional and comparative quality indicators system.

Among various scientists' attempts to conceptualize and assess higher education quality QUISS methodology could be an example of a reliable tool for assessment of certain aspects of higher education quality aiming to achieve international data comparability:

1. It covers a wide variety of approaches to higher education quality.

2. It proposes functional and comparative indicators system in constructivist perspective.

3. Data comparability is already being tested on international level (France, Germany, Lithuania and Spain).

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Aukštojo mokslo kokybės įvertinimas sąvokos daugiaprasmiškumo ir metodologinio eklektiškumo kontekste

Santrauka

Aukštojo mokslo kokybės standartų užtikrinimas ir Europoje teikiamų aukštojo mokslo kvalifikacijų palyginamumas bei tarptautinis suderinamumas išdėstomi Bolonijos proceso dokumentuose ir *Europos aukštojo mokslo kokybės užtikrinimo asociacijos* suformuluotose gairėse: skaidrumo, viešumo ir palyginamumo principai turi derėti su aukštojo mokslo institucijoms suteikiama autonomija plėtojant savo vidines kokybės užtikrinimo sistemas. Mokslinių straipsnių gausa atspindi aktyvias pasaulio mokslininkų pastangas apibūdinti ir įvertinti aukštojo mokslo kokybę, tačiau gauti rezultatai susilaukia daug įvairios kritikos, pasigirsta nuomonių, kad dauguma minėtų pastangų tėra tik bereikalingą biurokratiją skatinantys ir daug lėšų reikalaujantys procesai. Šio straipsnio tikslas – išanalizavus mokslinę literatūrą ir atskleidus aukštojo mokslo kokybės sąvokos teorinio apibrėžimo daugiaprasmiškumo ir empirinių tyrimų eklektiškumo problematiką, atlikti QUISS II¹⁰ metodologijos, įvertinančios tam tikrus motyvacijos ir aukštojo mokslo kokybės aspektus ir sudarančios sąlygas duomenų palyginamumui, analizę.

Remiantis moksline literatūra, galima daryti išvadą, kad švietimo kokybės sąvokos apibrėžimas ir jos vartojimas empiriniuose tyrimuose kelia nemažai problemų. Aukštajame moksle susiduriama su rimtomis problemomis siekiant įgyvendinti skaidrumo, viešumo ir palyginamumo principus, o atliekant bendrojo lavinimo sistemos kokybės tyrimus, šiais principais sėkmingai vadovujamasi. Išskirtos dvi pagrindinės bendrojo lavinimo sistemos kokybės tyrimų kryptys: konstruktyvistinė ir pozityvistinė. Konstruktyvistinės tyrimų krypties šalininkai modeliuoja tokius kokybės indikatorius kaip vertybėmis grįsta pedagogika;

humaniški santykiai tarp mokytojo ir mokinio; skatinanti ugdymą klasės aplinka; socialinis klimatas; mokytojo įsitikinimai ir asmenybinės savybės; mokymosi galimybių kūrimas; grįžtamojo ryšio kokybė ir pan. Pasaulinėje praktikoje daug plačiau taikoma pozityvistinė tyrimų kryptis, grįsta mokinių pasiekimų testavimais, suteikiančiais galimybę juos palyginti tarptautiniu mastu. Nuo 1958 m. plėtojami tarptautiniai lyginamieji mokinių pasiekimų ir pedagogų profesinių gebėjimų tyrimai, inicijuoti *Tarptautinės švietimo pasiekimų vertinimo asociacijos*. Vėliau mokinių pasiekimų tarptautinius tyrimus ėmė organizuoti ir *Ekonominio bendradarbiavimo ir plėtros organizacijai* priklausančios šalys. Svarbiausi tarptautiniai lyginamieji tyrimai kartojami kas keleri metai, sudarant sąlygas įvertinti įvairių šalių mokinių pasiekimų tendencijas. Lietuva taip pat dalyvauja šiuose pagrindinio ir vidurinio ugdymo sistemų tarptautiniuose tyrimuose. Juos koordinuoja ir finansškai remia Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministerija. Nors tarptautiniai lyginamieji tyrimai priklauso pozityvistinei tyrimų kryptiai, juose neretai vertinami ir įvairūs konstruktyvistiniai parametrai, sudarytos išsamios indikatorių sistemos leidžia išmatuoti svarbius švietimo sistemos kokybės rodiklius. Dėl konstruktyvistinės ir pozityvistinės tyrimų kryptių šalininkų įdirbio bendrojo ugdymo sistemos kokybės įvertinimo srityje tiek lokaliai, tiek tarptautiniu mastu daug ir kryptingai dirbama kuriant ir tobulinant funkcionalią ir tarptautinius palyginimus leidžiančią atlikti kokybės indikatorių sistemą.

Tačiau aukštojo mokslo srityje remiamasi skirtingomis kokybės interpretacijomis. Kokybė grindžiama: 1) aukštojo mokslo institucijos ilgaamžiškumu; 2) jos prestižiškumu ir išskirtinumu; 3) tam tikrų reikalavimų tenkini-

¹⁰ *Qualitätsverbesserung in Schulen und Schulsystemen II.*

mu (akreditavimu); 4) nuolatinio tobulėjimu; 5) pridėtine aukštojo mokslo verte (studijų rezultatų, socialinių įgūdžių, kritinio mąstymo kokybiniais pokyčiais ir kt.) (Dew, 2009). Autoriai išskiria skirtingas kokybės apibūdinimo prieigas: 1) transcendentinę; 2) orientuotą į produktą (rezultatą); 3) orientuotą į vartotoją; 4) orientuotą į procesus ir 5) kainą atitinkančios naudos (Van Kemenade et al., 2008). Iš aukštojo mokslo kokybės apibrėžimų įvairovės išplaukia ir empirinis kokybės įvertinimo eklektiškumas. Nemažai tyrėjų, vertindami aukštojo mokslo kokybę, analizuoja dėstymo kokybės ir studijuojančiųjų pasitenkinimo dėstymu parametrus; dėstymo kokybės vertinimas priskirtinas paklausos / pasiūlos modeliui grįstai vartotojiškai prieigai, kurios atstovai mano, kad aukštojo mokslo kokybę geriausiai įvertina vartotojai, siūloma aukštajame moksle taikyti kokybės vadybos prieigą, įvedant finansinio pelningumo ar teikiamų paslaugų sąnaudų ir naudingumo parametrus, studijų kokybei vertinti naudojami ir kai kurie profesinės veiklos rodikliai. Minėtos skirtingos ir turinčios trūkumų kokybės vertinimo metodikos dažnai sujungiamos, o sudarytų sudėtingų metodikų teorinis pagrindimas ir empirinis patikimumas kelia dar daugiau abejonių. Antai, praktiškai visos pasaulio šalys naudoja išorinį aukštojo mokslo sistemos įvertinimą – akreditavimą, arba institucinius auditus. Ši aukštojo mokslo kokybės vadybos prieiga stipriai kritikuojama dėl to, kad galia iš akademikų perkeliama vadybininkams ir biurokratams. Kitas išorinis aukštojo mokslo sistemos kokybės įvertinimo būdas yra aukštųjų mokyklų reitingavimas, kuris paprastai yra glaudžiai susijęs su įvairiais aukštosios mokyklos atrankos aspektais. Egzistuoja ir bibliometrinės metodikos, kuriomis vertinamas mokslinis produktyvumas, naudojamas aukštųjų mokyklų reitingavimui. Šios metodikos atskleidžia mokslininkų aktyvumą, tačiau neatspindi dėstymo procesų kokybės.

Išskyrus mokslininkų produktyvumą vertinančias bibliometrines metodikas, sunku būtų kalbėti apie tarptautinio palyginamumo principo įgyvendinimą aukštojo mokslo kokybės srityje. Dėl šios priežasties kai kurios šalys skatina savo kokybės užtikrinimo agentūras aukštajame moksle kurti standartus, panašius į tuos, kurie naudojami bendrojo lavinimo pasiekimams vertinti. Siekdama iširti, ar yra įmanomas mokslininkų patikimas tarptautinis lyginamasis tyrimas, *Ekonominio bendradarbiavimo ir plėtros organizacija* inicijavo programą *Aukštojo mokslo pasiekimų rezultatų įvertinimas*. Nors mokslininkai gana dažnai

analizuoja studijų rezultatus, aukštojo mokslo kokybę išreikšti vien rezultatais nepakanka (Dew, 2009).

Atskleidus aukštojo mokslo kokybės sąvokos teorinio apibrėžimo daugiaprasmiškumą ir empirinių tyrimų eklektiškumo problematiką, sudaryta analitinė matrica, kurią naudojant atlikta QUISS II metodologijos, įvertinančios tam tikrus motyvacijos ir aukštojo mokslo kokybės aspektus, analizė. Tai kiekybinio apklausos tyrimo metodika, daugiausia sudaryta iš psichometrinių Laikerto tipo skalių, turinčių nuo trijų iki devynių padalų. Klausimyną sudarė prof. Werner Georg vadovaujama mokslininkų grupė iš Konstancos universiteto (Vokietija). Metodika sudaryta 1983 m., pakartotinai naudota atliekant Vokietijos studentų nuomonės apklausas ir tobulinta. 2000–2002 m. viena paskutinių jos versijų QUISS I naudota tarptautinėje studentų apklausoje, kurioje dalyvavo studentai iš dviejų Vokietijos, šešių Ispanijos ir aštuonių Prancūzijos universitetų. 2008–2009 m. paskutinė QUISS II versija naudota atliekant tarptautinę studentų apklausą, kurioje dalyvavo Prancūzija, Vokietija ir Lietuva. Lietuvoje mokslininkų grupės tyrimą „Akademinis studijų kokybė ir socialinis kontekstas“, vadovaujama prof. Gedimino Merkio, rėmė Lietuvos valstybinis mokslo ir studijų fondas (Merkys et al., 2009).

Analitinė QUISS II matrica sudaryta pagal Van Kemenade ir kt. (2008) pasiūlytas penkias kokybės apibūdinimo prieigas, jas sugretinant su Dew (2009) kokybės interpretacijomis ir iliustruojant pavyzdžiais, aptiktais mokslinėje literatūroje. Gauti rezultatai leidžia teigti, kad į vartotoją orientuota apklausos metodika gana išsamiai atspindi ir į produktą orientuotos kokybės, ir į procesus orientuotos kokybės aspektus. Naudojant QUISS II būtų galima daug mažiau sužinoti apie skirtingus kainą atitinkančios naudos ir transcendentinės kokybės prieigų aspektus, tačiau kai kurios aukštojo mokslo kokybės dedamosios negali būti studentų apklausos objektai, kaip antai, kainą atitinkančios naudos prieigoje reikalavimų tenkinimo arba nuolatinio tobulėjimo įvertinimas. Šiuos aspektus turėtų nagrinėti pati aukštojo mokslo įstaiga. Atlikus QUISS II analizę, matyti, kad ši metodologija galėtų tapti patikimu tam tikrų aukštojo mokslo kokybės aspektų įvertinimo įrankiu, suteikiančiu galimybę atlikti tarptautinius palyginimus.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: aukštasis mokslas, bendrasis lavinimas, kokybė, palyginamumas, tarptautiniai lyginamieji tyrimai.

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