

DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR INTERNAL QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION (Case of Albania and Macedonia)

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SUMMARY

The importance of quality in higher education is not disputed amongst researches despite the diversity how quality is defined, what is questioned is the way to attain and develop quality. Looking at the theory we find some researches discuss the innovation, certification, some try defining econometric models and others use TQM model. We will focus on the quality based on European standards for internal quality assurance in the HEIs proposed in the conference of European ministers responsible for higher education in Bergen, with specific reference to Albania and Macedonia. This paper aims to analyze whether in Albania e Macedonia are implemented standards for internal quality assurance of Education. Firstly we examine the developments in HE both in Albania and Macedonia with reference to Bologna process. Then we will review literature and use statistical research method to draw conclusions.

Keywords: quality assurance, standards, higher education, quality indicators

1. BOLOGNA TRENDS

The liberalization of markets and the competition in the labor market made us aware of the quality in education among others, and that made it very interesting topic of research. One step in aligning the objectives of the education is the undertaken step towards the bologna process. Joining the bologna universities harmonize the higher education and make it comparable among different countries. Converging to the Bologna Process because of differences in culture, language, legislation may need diversity in choices to the final goal.

2. BOLOGNA IN ALBANIA AND MACEDONIA

In Macedonia there are 4 state accredited Universities and 19 private universities. The government support for higher education is reasonable since there are social benefits from higher education. Macedonia universities are part of Bologna proceeds, and we suggest that the Ministry of education should supervise the quality of education both in private and state universities. In Macedonia in public tertiary institutions is the highest number (78.7%) of the enrolled students in the academic year 2009/2010 while 21.0% were enrolled in private tertiary institutions. The total students enrolled were 57894 among which 52.5% are female.¹ The study

¹ The numbers are referenced from State Statistical Office of Republic Macedonia

Programs have been converted to Bachelor/ Master programmes both in private and state universities and they employ ECTS credit transfer. The state universities represent the largest sector and they are granted legal autonomy in Republic Macedonia. According to the data of the State Statistical Office, the number of teachers and supporting staff in the tertiary education institutions in the academic year 2010/2011 was 3 861. In 2009 the number of graduated students is 10232² where the major part is from public institutions (8131). The first private university in Macedonia was founded in 2001. The legislation for higher education in Macedonia enforces universities for quality assurance as modeled by European standard for evaluation in accordance to Bologna Process.

The Albanian higher education system has undergone several reforms during the last decade. The Bologna Process has influenced the development of the higher education system and particularly in quality assurance.

The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) emphasize the responsibility of higher education institutions for quality assurance. In compliance with them, the Albanian higher education legislation provide that the Internal Quality Assurance is already an obligation to the Higher Education Institutions but it should be in harmony with the external systems and should respect the academic freedom and the diversity of systems. It clearly determines the institutions, sharing of responsibilities and areas of competences, processes, procedures and standards that lie in the foundations of this process.

Despite the legal obligation to implement Quality Assurance (QA) systems, there are no specifications as regards their structure. It is up to each higher education institution to determine which instruments or procedures to apply, at which organizational levels the Quality system to implement, and which competencies the organizational units of the internal quality assurance to have. This allows institutions (particularly private HEIs) to develop systems and processes in consistency with their own targets and requirements, and to use external support for this purpose when needed.

QA system of higher education (HE) in Albania was established in 2000, based on the Higher Education Act of 1999. The legal basis for the operation of QA institutions in Albania is the Higher Education Law which came into force on 1 July, 2007 (but some articles have been amended). The QA institutions in HE in Albania are the Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (PAAHE) and the Accreditation Council (AC). The scope of the QA institutions is *Study programmes and institutions* operating in Albania including universities, academies and colleges, both public and private. But, QA processes in Albanian HE comprise Internal and External QA. The external QA processes include external evaluations, performed by PAAHE or any other agency that is a member of ENQA and accreditation which is the process of formal recognition of HEIs or HE programmes in Albania.

PAAHE is responsible for external evaluation of programs and public and private institutions of higher education before licensing them as well during operationing. It should also perform a systematic comparative analysis and assessment between HEI's and their programs. Based on the law each previously licensed institution before issuing degrees and before completion of a full study course, should undergo a process of evaluation and accreditation both at institutional and programme levels. The programme will not be formally recognized in Albanian territory in any

² State Statistical Office- R. Macedonia

case when the institution does not apply for evaluation and accreditation process or receives a negative accreditation decision.

Accreditation Council is a collegial body, which based on the assessment PAAHE recommends or not the accreditation of HEIs. The final decision on accreditation actually belongs to the Minister of Education.

In addition to external quality assurance system, operates Internal Quality System. HEI as an entity responsible for internal quality assurance periodically evaluates the effectiveness of teaching research, administrative, financial, activities of the institution. There are 13 public HEIs 38 private in Albania³, seven of public HEIs are located in Tirana, and six are regional, while most private are located in Tirana. The first private university was licensed in 2003. In the first three years, their number was very limited, but after 2006, this market grew considerably. In the 2010-2011 the number of private HEIs is three times more than those public.

3. MODELING QUALITY

Quality assurance bodies both internal and external may be helpful in reaching quality in education which is indisputably important. Qualitative HE may induce prospective employment and thus is considered as an investment of great interest. Stakeholders in HE are university employees, parents, students and last but not least the government. It is difficult to draw a line of criteria that should be set in order to say that we provide quality in education. Therefore the existence of internal bodies for quality in education is very crucial although their task is difficult. In order to proceed we need indicators that will describe quality. The competition in education is evident. In order to have competitive advantage universities look for improving the quality of education. “The internal quality assurance aims at creating a system and mechanism to control, audit and assess operations of institutions to comply with each institution's policies, purposes and levels of quality established by the institution and/or governing authorities.”⁴

Proposing a unique quality model may be a hazardous undertaking taking under the consideration that even quality is hard to define. Arjomandi et al (2009) suggest an EQFM excellence model as a quality assurance mechanism. They propose an input-output framework for quality for the core activities in universities: service, research, education. Kaplanis and Nanoussi admit the importance of modeling quality and they suggest that when looking at quality universities should assess both quality in education and research. A large group of researches look at the quality of education and they propose different kind of models and suggestions.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Macedonia and Albania are both countries that have employed the Bologna process in higher education. Both of them have public and private universities where the major number of students is in the public providers of higher education. The Ministry of Education has incorporated in the legislation the quality assurance bodies and it also calls for external rankings of the universities. The body of literature provides different models and different indicators to assess quality. Defining quality itself is contestable among researches and trying to compare and develop a model for quality assurance in two similar countries (Albania and Macedonia) we come with the

³ <http://www.aaal.edu.al/pagesEN/pages/Public.htm>

⁴ Manual for the Internal Quality Assurance for Higher Education Institutions: Commission on Higher Education, Ministry of Education: Bangkok, Thailand 2008, p 4

conclusion that modeling quality in education is country specific. We also suggest that an EQFM excellence model may fit the quality assurance in the case of Albanian and Macedonia.

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