Peculiarities of Education Quality Assurance in Lithuania

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Abstract

Achievement of objectives of education and training is one of significant factors influencing quality of life. Higher education institutions use different work, teaching methods and tools; however they are inadequate in many cases. Today higher education institutions have problems concerning sustentation and rise of certain level of education by giving the job for graduates, using of new technologies that help to present, manage, evaluate and control knowledge. The main objectives of quality management system (QMS) at higher education institutions are as follow: to assure continuous improvement of education quality; to demonstrate performance results and relevant facts to the interested parties (customers of college or university, social partners, administrative institutions) showing the abilities of education institution to prepare high qualification specialists that fully correspond to changing requirements of labour market.

The QMS at education institutions should be designed as continuous process, considering that the quality of final product is the result achieved in primary processes. The process shall involve all interested parties. Parameters and indicators of education quality can help to analyze the efficiency and effectiveness of existing QMS. The results of quality audits should be also taken into account when designing and implementing QMS at organization.

Literature review showed that for the assurance of education quality three different approaches prevail: total quality management (TQM); requirements of quality awards and assessment models; and QMS corresponding to the requirements of ISO 9001 standard. The case study of QMS design and implementation at Vilnius Law and Business College is presented in the paper. The peculiarities, difficulties and obstacles of QMS implementation in the higher educations institutions are analysed in more detail in this article.

Key Words: Quality in Education, Quality Management, TQM, ISO 9001

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1. Introduction

During global economic integration quality became one of the most important factors for survival and success of organizations. European Union’s Programme for Quality considers quality as the tool for strategies for European organizations. In the period of European integration quality becomes important for Lithuanian business and service companies, as well as for higher education institutions. Quality determines efficiency of public sector organizations, economic stability of the country and quality of life of society members. Quality of life is each individual’s subjective gauge by which they evaluate their life, encompassing their physical and psychological well-being, social and spiritual factors, their level of independence, and ties to the community. Quality of life is also determined by: (1) material status (the quality of commodities, services, home, economic quality, work and recreation conditions, average income, purchasing power, etc.); (2) environmental surrounds and the development of the economy in relation to the exploitation of natural resources, sustainable development; (3) community health; (4) the moral and psychological climate one finds oneself in; (5) personal security (body, legal, social); (6) self-expression possibilities; (7) levels and quality of education (Ruzevicius, 2005b).

The aim of this study is to show the importance of quality, TQM and QMS in the economics and social field and to highlight peculiarities, problems and interferences of education quality improvement at universities and colleges. Methodology - this article is prepared using scientific and methodological literature together with analysis and summary education practice at universities and colleges of Lithuania.

2. Quality In Higher Education

Organisations, movements and initiatives are being created in Europe and throughout the world that seek to guarantee the quality of higher education (the declaration from the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference in 1998, the 1997 Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, the Salamanca Convention and Declaration, the Bologna Process, the ideas promoted by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, etc.). The international agreements and documents mentioned above, along with the ever-changing higher education environment (rising demands of organisations and the public concerning the quality of education, changing student and employer expectations regarding study content and methods, growing financial pressure in the public sector, growing competition among universities, and the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education) not only encourage but force organizations to search for new systematic measures for the improvement and management of the