

QUALITY ASSURANCE AS THE DRIVER OF INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT. In the context of change of higher education in Ukraine, the issue of transformation of institutional relations and subjects of educational space has been put forward. The new paradigm of higher education is based on European values and focused on the integration of Ukraine into the European Higher Educational Area. The transformation of higher education is influenced by many institutional factors. The processes of quality assurance as one of the drivers of institutional transformation of Ukrainian higher education system is researched. The preconditions of the institutional transformation of Ukrainian higher education is analyzed; new approaches and principles of quality assurance in the emerging new institutional environment of higher education and integration into the European educational space are defined in the article.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rejecting the socialist past, Ukraine has started building its educational system after the old Soviet image. The Ukrainian system of higher education has been developed under the burden of duplication of the Soviet educational system which does not meet the present challenges and cannot keep pace with the development of the new socio-political and economic relations. Twenty years is a very short period for forming the traditions and values of European higher education. Unfortunately, the established traditions and values of European higher education, university autonomy and academic freedom, public governance and effective public control over the activity of institutions of higher education as well as a social mission and social responsibility of universities have not been formed in Ukraine yet.

Democratic reforms have given positive impetus, but the attempts on using new approaches of the European education system on the post-soviet higher education background have led to the crisis and major distortions including a sharp increase in the number of universities without increasing the quality of training, emergence and growth of paid education in both the public and private sectors, and as a result – reduction of funding and quality of educational resources. The private initiatives have not been developed even to the government scale and cannot be competitive with the European private universities.

Institutional transformation of the Ukrainian system of higher education stipulates intensive attention to the quality assurance processes. Meeting the European standards on higher education will increase the prospects of cooperation between Ukraine and the international community in the field of educational, scientific and innovative activity and will enhance the potential of the national education on the international level.

Our attention to the application of the institutional approaches to the quality assurance system is related to the process of Ukrainian educational space transformation. Ukrainian educational space is under the influence of changes in the institutional environment. This transformation of approaches to management and quality assurance provides new rules for interaction between key agents of the institutional environment.

Over the last decades the economists have been interested in the theory of institutionalism. This is due to the inability to solve all the social and economic problems purely with the help of market institutions. Institutionalism ideas are relevant in terms of transformation of the society and changes in the principles and conditions of interaction between public organizations.

Possibilities to change the social structure are closely related to the reorganization of the educational system according to the new needs of social strata and groups.

The environment changes inevitably cause the need for transformation of educational institutions. The educational system meets economic, social and personal needs and performs the educational function. In the period of rapid social changes in the society an institution of education should respond by the changes in the structure and forms of relationships, so education is a system-forming institution of the society.

The article aims to study the processes of quality assurance as one of the drivers of institutional transformation higher education of Ukraine in the context of integration into the European Higher Education Area.

2. REVIEW OF PRECONDITIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Attention and expectations from an institution of education as a basic component of the socio-economic potential changed at various evolutionary stages of the society. An institution of education is a source of scientific and cultural progress which contributes to the competitive advantage in terms of rapid and dynamic changes in the environment.

On the one hand, Ukraine's national system of higher education, which was formed between 1991 and 2014, inherited a lot of features of the Soviet educational system. On the other hand, it is a reflection of its own complex and contradictory evolution during this period. Adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On Education" (1996), "On Higher Education" (2002, 2014) and Ukraine's accession to the Bologna process (2005) had a significant impact on it. The state educational policy is constantly subjected to the significant fluctuations which have shaped the changes in the attitude towards integration in the European Higher Education Area and Scientific Research: from a pure desire to imitation and opportunistic adaptation.

The period from 2010 to early 2014 was marked by the proclamation of the right pro-European slogans and declaration of need for important changes. At the same time there was noticed slowdown of the adoption of the new legislation, further management centralization and bureaucracy of plethora of the processes in education. It should be noted that there was the absence of practical steps to reform higher education and a real fight against negative phenomena in it. Finally, no wonder it ended up with the mass protests and revolutionary events on the verge of 2013 and 2014.

Since March 2014 the vector of the Ukrainian educational policy has radically changed towards Europe. Not only the adoption of the new Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education", rejection of the obsolete or harmful regulations, changes in licensing and accreditation but also changing in the way of thinking from proclamation to the actions, from non-transparency to transparency, from centralization to autonomy became the distinctive features of the events in 2014.

Ukraine has preserved the tradition of the state supervision and control of universities and strict administration. Although the Bologna process has led to formation of the accreditation institution with the elements of independence, actually today it is a state accreditation institution which does not have the role that the accreditation institution plays in the European countries. The Ukrainian accreditation system which existed before 2014 had the following disadvantages:

- insularity of the system since state accreditation was done in compliance with the state educational standards;
- disregard of the educational needs and demands of the society and the market;
- lack of a set of criteria and compliance with the international and European standards for quality assurance;
- absence of verification of the obtained qualification compliance with the professional requirements.

Thus, an important component of the European model of higher education, namely independent quality assessment and independent accreditation of the educational programs, was not

even created by the legislature in Ukraine. The prospect of establishing the independent accreditation institution appeared by adoption of a new educational law.

Since the early 2000s the main point of discussion about development of higher education has been a problem of conforming quality to modern challenges and future vision. The desire to increase the competitiveness of the European society has caused fetishization of quality in the Bologna process. Development of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2005) has enabled this document to become a unique international one which is harmonizing the educational policy of the continent [3].

It is quite natural that countries understand the need and have more opportunities to invest in quality assurance and form the best human capital. These countries are becoming increasingly attractive to international students and contribute to the development of economic and social innovations. Unfortunately, Ukraine has been only dreaming of joining the clusters of such countries.

During the period of independence quality of the national higher education has not become a national priority, although it has been consistently declared in all doctrinal and strategic documents concerning the educational policy of Ukraine.

There is still an illusion in Ukraine that the educational sphere can be reformed inside relying only on its own intellectual potential with the limited external resource support.

In fact, without real involvement of external stakeholders the system of higher education will receive neither vital direction signs nor necessary resources to achieve high quality.

There is the lacking culture of meeting needs and respecting rights of participants of the educational process as well as the outdated administration principles in Ukraine's educational system. These factors have led to the negative phenomena in the field of quality assurance:

1) Lack of motivation of students, teachers, employers and governmental and non-governmental organizations aimed at improving the quality of education. There are no links between the performance of higher educational institutions and the state resources allocated for them. Therefore, universities are not motivated to develop and perform self-certification objectively, etc.

2) The national QA system is based on the distorted and outdated "system of values" (meaning quality indicators) that is why monitoring the educational system does not meet the objectives of quality improvement. The normative definition of the "quality of higher education" does not have the required differentiating ability which leads to the fact that it is difficult to find those who can give a clear answer to the question what is "good" and "bad" in higher education.

3) The complete and consistent quality assurance system, as it is understood in the European sense, does not exist in the Ukrainian education. Universities partially implement it in the form of quality monitoring procedures but they are performed on the basis of the same criteria without consideration of the diverse nature of the universities.

4) The Ukrainian quality assurance system is aimed not at encouraging educational institutions to improve but at controlling, pressurizing and punishing those who do not meet the set criteria.

5) The existing quality assurance procedures are transparent neither for the participants nor for the outside observers.

6) Information about the university activities which is presented in various reports is mainly redundant, irrelevant and often outdated. In addition, its statistical nature does not reflect the real quality of higher education, merits and achievements of universities.

7) Almost all the state obligations about higher education and science are not performed as reported (financing, benefits, etc.).

8) All the players in the quality assurance system depend on the government (i.e. created and funded by the state) so their activities do not have enough trust because of biased decisions and actions.

9) External stakeholders do not have power in the national quality assurance system and legal means to influence important decisions in higher education.

10) Activities of the university staff are related to an extremely big amount of paperwork that is more important than their performance. So the time left is not sufficient to allow working to improve results.

These estimates refer to the period before spring in 2014 when real changes in higher education in Ukraine were initiated. Currently, transformation of the quality assurance concept is based on the autonomy of universities and use of the EHEA recommendations. The new version of the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" [9] is the main direction of transformation which, unfortunately, is not happening fast enough.

Confirmation of these and other findings can be found in the report containing the results of monitoring Ukrainian integration of the system of higher education in the European area [3].

These negative facts result from the so-called institutional traps in the Ukrainian system of higher education similar to most of the post-Soviet countries (Russian Federation [11], the Republic of Belarus [2], Ukraine [5]).

Thus two types of institutional traps have been formed in higher education in Ukraine. The first (organizational) type is an inefficient but steady system of universities that do not provide complete education (Balatskiy [1] defined such an institution as a university-mutant). The second (mental) type is an inefficient system of customs that directs students to "evasion" of knowledge.

Above-mentioned is the main prerequisite for institutional transformation of higher education and revision of the approaches to quality assurance, the view about the state institution accreditation generally as well as the role and place of the independent institutions which are in charge of evaluation of higher education quality.

3. NEW APPROACHES AND PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

In our opinion, the current law has opened up new prospects in higher education quality assurance, namely:

- institutional foundations for real independent quality assessment have been laid;
- social demand for high quality education has been emerging;
- a "window of opportunity" for an independent assessment system of the higher education quality has been opened;
- formal conditions to get out of the institutional traps of higher education have been formed by institutional transformation based on the European experience;
- the way for institutional transformation of Ukrainian higher education has been opened, i.e. search, study and selection of optimal directions for institutional development of higher education in Ukraine.

The current stage of institutional transformation of higher education is seen as a positive process of development and change of the educational system management. In the context of the institutional approach, educational institutions should be considered in their interaction. Development of education is influenced by numerous institutional factors.

An institutional factor of the system of higher education means a limited social system that affects formation of the institutional environment and a number of formal and informal rules of conduct in the particular situation and actions of the interested parties aimed at changing or keeping the rules.

In general terms, these factors include bureaucracy, business coalitions, community, a judicial system, corruption, openness of the society, etc. [8]. All the institutional factors are in close cooperation with each other and should be treated in such interactions. Research of higher education, development of institutional factors in Ukraine, their classification, the impact on the educational institutional environment is a separate research task. The related issues also include conducting research into the formation of a new structure of the educational institutional environment and its impact on the efficiency of the educational system in Ukraine. Similar studies were conducted in the context of the country's economic development [6] but we believe that such

research may be relevant in the context of the institutional transformation of higher education in Ukraine.

In this paper the authors have tried to formulate the basic principles of establishing a higher education quality assurance system:

1. The ***principle of institutional equilibrium*** of the objects (agents) of the higher education quality assurance system. Institutional equilibrium is a situation of the institutional agents' power relations and a given set of institutional relationships (contractual agreements) when none of the agents considers spending resources on the structuring of the given agreements to be rational. Practical implementation of the principle lies in construction of institutional relations between the main agents of the educational quality assurance system. This construction ensures avoiding institutional conflicts and new institutional traps.

2. The ***principle of institutional balance***. The principle means that any agent acts in accordance with the division of powers defined by the law and other legal acts, and other interacting agents [7]. Institutional balance is based on the following conditions:

- each institutional agent must have sufficient independence to implement their powers in the quality assurance system;
- institutional agents should not transfer their powers to other institutional agents;
- institutional agents cannot encroach on the powers and prerogatives of other institutional agents when they perform their functions.

3. ***Viability of instruments and mechanisms of education quality assurance***. Tools and mechanisms of education quality assurance should be focused on improving quality and based on the principles of reasonable quality evaluation.

4. ***Transparency*** mechanisms of education quality assurance for all stakeholders.

5. ***Ensuring international accreditation procedures*** followed by recognition of accreditation of the educational programs in Ukraine.

In our opinion, special attention should be paid to the theoretical and practical study of the principles of institutional equilibrium and institutional balance in higher education [4]. It is a further direction of developing this research.

The principles of higher education quality assurance system are given in Fig. 1.

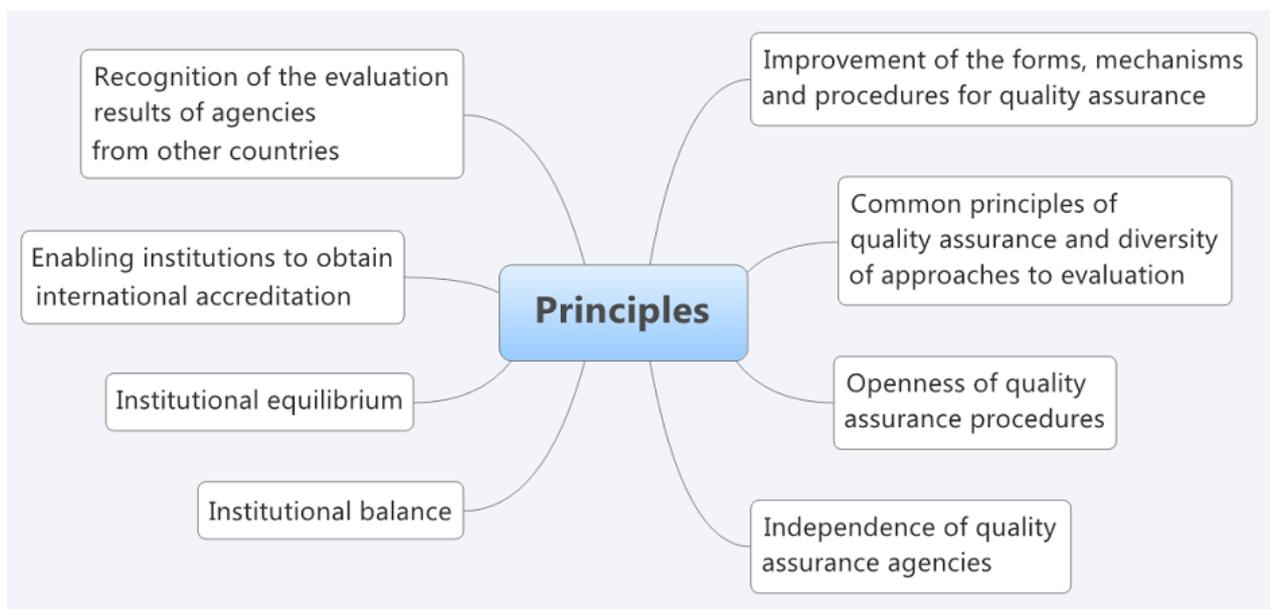


Fig. 1. Principles of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

4. CONCLUSION

Institutional factors are relevant drivers of institutional changes during the reforming of higher education. In our opinion, quality of higher education and quality assurance processes in higher education are these drivers. Quality is the basis of institutional consensus which should be reached by different educational institutions: universities, the government, society and so on. The need for quality assurance is the trigger of new institutional changes in higher education, i.e. continuous quantitative and qualitative changes and transformations of various institutions of the educational environment. These changes will be seen not only and not so much at the level of changes in rules but changes at most of the institutions which are operating in the educational environment and define it. Thus, we can say that the process of quality assurance is getting the features of an institutional process. It has involved both existing and new institutions. The process will promote and ensure institutional balance of the stakeholders' interests.

Thus, quality is one of the key drivers which is increasing efficiency of higher education in general and implementation of institutional transformation of higher education in Ukraine.

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