QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM:
A LITERATURE REVIEW

Ana Alexandra GORA [a]*, Ion POPA [b], Simona Cătălina ŞTEFAN [c]

[a] *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*
[b] *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*
[c] *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*

ABSTRACT

In the current process of globalization and implicitly of internalization, the quality of educational services became a key decision factor, that enables evaluation, comparison and classification of universities nationwide and internationally, while the notions of quality assurance and management are considered among the most modern and used concepts at higher educational system level. This paper aims to study and analyze the current stage of knowledge on higher education system quality management aboard, but also from Romania. Moreover, there will be identified and presented the responsible players of the insurance of educational quality services from the universities in Romania and Europe, along with standards and criteria formulated with the purpose of assuring and recognize a higher educational system quality culture. In the last part of the paper, there are presented some relevant previous studies regarding this field, followed by concluding remarks.

KEYWORDS: *educational services, higher education, quality assurance, quality management, university system.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over time, it was begun to realize that the economic success of a country significantly depends on the educational system's quality, especially in higher education, as this is the level at which students are formed and trained as the main factor of production, thus higher education becoming the defining factor which enable the human capital as the propellant of economic growth (Zamfir, Popa, Cicea, Dobrin & Marinescu, 2017). The higher education system became one of the key sectors of any economy, with a major role in sustainability, development and modernization of society.

In addition, in the current context of globalization, the competitiveness of universities is increasingly dependent on the quality and quality management. As a central element of any organization, the concept of quality management sparked interest at the educational system level also, being at the moment a priority factor in the field of education, ensuring the competitiveness of educational products/services available, both nationally and internationally. Having as a starting point the importance of the notion of quality management, which has become a primary objective for educational institutions, their stakeholders but also for various quality assurance agencies, it is desired through the present paper the identification and presentation of the agencies and associations responsible of quality assurance at the European and Romanian level, alongside with standards and documents used in higher education quality management insurance. We chose this topic since we are stakeholders of Romanian educational process, thus interested in the analysis of the quality concepts, quality management and quality assurance in higher education and to offer

---

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: anaalexandra.gora@gmail.com

more information for an in-depth understanding of these concepts and the way in which quality assurance is applied and achieved in the European and Romanian higher education

2. STAGE OF KNOWLEDGE ON HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Over the years, concerns on quality management have intensified in all domains, quality being one of the determinant factors of competitiveness for any organization. Regarding the concept of quality management, J.M. Juran (1981) defines it through its functions: to plan, to control, and to improve the quality. Another specialist in this field, Kélada (1990), defines quality management as a set of activities (planning, coordination, organization, control and quality assurance) aimed to achieve some objectives through the efficient use of resources. Irina Maiorescu (2016) states that quality management is a form of management that aims to develop a better long-term relationship with clients. Being the central element of any organization, the notion of quality management also raised interest in the educational system, right now representing an upmost factor in the educational domain.

Two directions should be taken into account, and they could be implemented at the university level (Baciu, 2014): (1) the first direction refers to the definition of the concept of quality in terms of quality management, that assumes the absence of defects and the compliance with certain specifications and (2) the second direction that refers to satisfying the client requirements and supposes to get the level of satisfaction of the clients (students) regarding the characteristics of this service (the educational process).

Starting from the general definitions on quality management, we could state that, at the higher education system level, quality management could pe perceived as an assembly of measures that allows universities to plan the way of getting the quality, to include it in certain specific parameters and to demonstrate the obtained results.

According to Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA, 2018b), quality should be understood as a final product of the interaction between students, teachers and the institutional environment in which the learning process takes place. In the opinion of Harvey & Green (1993), quality means different things for different people; at the level of higher education there are many stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, government, employers, professional bodies), each with its own conception of what the quality of higher education should means. Cheng (2003) cited by Elassy (2015), presents three paradigms of quality in education: "internal quality", "quality interface" and "future of quality": (1) "internal quality" refers to the improvement of the internal academic environment in order to increase the effectiveness of learning, (2) the "quality interface" aims to ensure that education services are in line with the needs of those concerned; and (3) the "future of quality" considers relevance to the aims, content, practices and outcomes of education for the new generations' future.

Being an increasingly important issue, quality management of higher education has become a topic of debate among researchers, with numerous articles and studies published in various international journals.

Thus, Glushak, et al. (2015) were interested in the contemporary economic aspects of quality in education context. In their study, they assume that one of the greatest problems of social development and scientific and technological progress is the quality of higher education. Rusu (2015) argues that, in reality, quality is a serious, difficult and complex problem that has now become part of any university management system. Bărbulescu (2014) analyzes various aspects regarding the culture of quality in Romanian higher education over the last 20 years. Through its reflection study, there is stated that over the last 20 years, as a result of the European reforms and international tendencies, based on the definition of quality, quality insurance and guarantee, from the inside of the universities to the outside, it has been registered a change the culture of quality in universities. Kettunen (2012) studies the external and internal quality auditing in higher education,

aiming to analyze the maintenance of the quality assurance system of a university. He concludes that in the first place, should be assess the improvements applicable to educational processes in order to avoid reporting quality deviations.

When talking about the implementation of quality management in higher education institutions, it should be considered that the educational services are different from other services, especially in terms of measuring the organizational performance. Mehralizadeh & Safaeemoghaddam (2010) state that in higher education, student satisfaction is a performance indicator, therefore, if the quality management would be centered on student assessment and appreciation, the quality systems will lead to improved academic outcomes for students. Hapenciuc & Hapenciuc (2002) is of the opinion that the implementation of a quality management system of education is an essential condition necessary for the fulfillment of the mission, purpose and objectives established by each higher education institution.

O'Mahony & Garavan (2012) undertake a study identifying four factors that underpin the effective implementation of a quality management system, namely: (1) the leadership and sponsorship of the university, (2) stakeholder involvement, (3) the management of cultural change and (4) the implementation of the quality process, while Dragut (2011) considers that an effective quality management system in universities should be based on a system of criteria for external evaluation (quality assurance function) and a guide for internal organization (quality management function). The author believes that the main models that should be used in the higher education system to ensure quality management are: (1) models based on internal evaluation, (2) models developed for excellence awards (e.g.: European Model of Excellence - EFQM), (3) models based on the principles of total quality management.

On the basis of the above, we can conclude that quality assurance is a comprehensive term, covering policies, processes and actions through which the quality of higher education is preserved and developed. That implies the academic autonomy of universities, competitiveness and the principles of efficiency and effectiveness and academic and scientific performance. Quality assurance can only be achieved if institutions adopt a culture of quality at the level of their organizational culture.

3. RESPONSIBLE ACTORS IN ENSURING QUALITY MANAGEMENT WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Ensuring quality management in higher education depends both on an internal assessment of quality of the educational process carried out by each university and on an external evaluation carried out by specialized international or national agencies.

At European level, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has since 2000, under another name, aimed at promoting European cooperation in the field of quality management. Of this association, there are about 50 agencies specialized in the quality assurance of university education from 28 countries.

The ENQA (ENQA, 2018a) mission is to participate in the development of quality assurance by representing those member agencies internationally, by supporting them at national level and by providing networking services and opportunities. ENQA seeks to promote both quality improvement and development of a culture of quality in higher education.

Since 2005, on ENQA's proposal, a series of standards have been adopted, called "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area (SEIS)" (ENQA, 2018b) aiming at internal and external quality improvements in higher education institutions. These ESG standards do not require how to implement quality assurance processes but provide guidance.

Among the main objectives of ESG are (ENQA, 2018b):
• defining a common framework for quality assurance of learning and teaching at national, European and institutional levels;

- ensuring and continuously improving the quality of university education in SEIS;
- supporting mutual trust in order to ensure recognition and mobility internally as well as across national boundaries;
- providing information on quality assurance for SEIS area.

ESG standards are structured into three parts (ENQA 2018b): (1) Ensuring internal quality determined by the actions of each educational institution and stakeholder level, (2) Ensuring external quality, monitored by quality agencies, and (3) quality assurance of agencies pursued by ENQA. These three sides are closely interlinked and must be considered as a whole, because only together they can create the foundations of a European quality assurance framework.

In Romania, the quality assurance of higher education, part of quality management, is not exactly new. Following the emergence of private universities, the rapid increase in number of universities and faculties, laws emerged that referred to the notion of accreditation of higher education institutions and the need for recognition of study diplomas. In order to meet this need, the National Academic Evaluation and Accreditation Council (CNEAA) operated between 1993 and 2006. Romania's participation in the Bologna Process since 1999 and the developments in the university system have led to a new approach to evaluation and quality assurance. Thus, in 2005, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) was set up and developed its own quality assessment methodology. In addition, ARACIS benefits from institutional recognition at European level, being a full member of ENQA and also enrolled in the European Register for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EQAR).

ARACIS carries out the process of external evaluation of universities and accreditation based on its own methodology (ARACIS, 2006), documents entitled "visit card" and specific assessment guides, carried out in accordance with ESG standards established at European level.

Quality management and quality assurance at the level of higher education are therefore a major objective for educational institutions, but also for their stakeholders and for quality assurance agencies. Currently, quality assurance is well regulated by standards, criteria and performance indicators, both at European level, through ESG, and in Romania through the ARACIS external evaluation methodology and other specific documents used by this agency.

4. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The study of quality management in higher education system involves both the institutional evaluation reports, the quality management documents that exist in universities, and the degree of satisfaction of the teaching staff and students about the quality of the services provided by the university they are part of.

At European level, the partners of the project Enhancing Quality through Innovation Policy & Practice (EQUIP), including ENQA, produced and published in 2018 a study titled "Enhancing Quality: From Policy to Practice" (Gover & Loukkola, 2018). Through this study, they present the role of quality assurance in improving higher education within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The results of this study show that there is a common understanding on quality assurance among ENQA countries at European level, but there are differences in their approaches, due to specific factors, such as the recognized goal of higher education, the level of trust in the quality assurance system at institutional level, the balance between accountability and the improvement of the quality assurance system. The study also highlights that efforts are still needed to reduce the differences between the quality assurance system theory and how it works in practice. Moreover, the results of the study have shown that the notion of quality assurance should be treated as a tool for promoting the quality of higher education.

Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis (2010) sought to evaluate a series of factors that determine quality in higher education and measured the relative importance of these factors from the students' point of view. The authors used in their research the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) methodology to

measure the relative value of each quality factor. Therefore, the results of their research may be used to quantify the internal quality of higher education institutions and assess the way students perceive quality. The study results showed that (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010):
- Regarding the academic staff criterion, students appreciate the most the communication skills and their degree of friendship, which shows that for the respective students the personality traits are more important than the professional skills of the teachers;
- In connection with administrative services, students place the importance of how guidance is provided and provide useful advice, staff courtesy and computerized data processing;
- As regards the structure of the curriculum, students consider the most important quality factor as the existence of practical modules (i.e. laboratories);
- As regards infrastructure, the students consider that the most important aspect is how the course and laboratory rooms are adequately equipped, followed by the quality of catering and accommodation and the least important is the sub-criterion "availability of event rooms".

In Romania, the ARACIS has produced a "Synthetic Report on trends in the evolution of the quality of higher education as a result of the evaluations" (ARACIS, 2015), through which it presents the state of the Romanian higher education quality at the level of 20 universities. More specifically, this report (ARACIS, 2015) analyzes how the quality assurance system, the policies and strategies in place in the analyzed universities are organized, the periodical evaluation of the quality of the teachers, etc. The results of the report demonstrate that the organization of the quality assurance system has become a major concern at the level of the universities analyzed compared to the previous years, being more comprehensive, broader and more fully applied at all levels (faculties, departments), the educational quality becoming an important dimension of the education system, being carefully monitored at the level of each university. Moreover, this report (ARACIS, 2015) identified the opinion of the representatives of the universities participating in the study on the processes of self-evaluation and external evaluation of the university quality using a questionnaire elaborated on the basis of the items provided by the ARACIS External Evaluation Methodology. Regarding internal procedures, policies and methodologies and mechanisms for improving the quality of educational processes, the data obtained reveals a positive perception of them by the representatives of the evaluated universities. Regarding the external quality evaluation mechanisms (performed by ARACIS), the results show that they meet the needs and expectations of universities.

Manea & Iatagan (2015) undertake research to identify and analyze the perception of Romanian PhD students about the quality of higher education services and use an online survey and the SERVPERF model, concluding that Romanian PhD students are more satisfied not satisfied with the quality of the educational services, they consider important both the endowment of the rooms, the libraries and the quality of the teaching, the relations with the professors and the secretariat of the university.

Nicolescu & Dima (2010) studied the perceptions regarding the quality of educational services of various stakeholders (students, graduates and employers) of an educational institution in Bucharest, in the economic field. Student study highlights the relationship between the importance they attach to different activities in their faculty and the perception of the quality of these activities. The results of the study show that students classify different activities in their university according to their importance, such as: teaching methods, scientific and professional content of courses, student assessment methods, teacher prestige, administrative services and rewards (other than grades). Comparing the importance that these students give to their activities with their opinion on the quality of activities, we see that the results differ, with students perceiving the best quality of the scientific content of the courses and seminars, the prestige of the teaching staff and the quality of the evaluation methods.

Nica et al. (2014) analyzed the main values of the higher education institutions by conducting a research based on a questionnaire among the teaching staff and students of Alexandru Ioan Cuza

University of Iasi (UAIC). In order to evaluate the cultural values of the university, they use the "Organizational Values Inventory" to measure the intensity of 37 organizational values. The results show that the most important values promoted within the UAIC are "quality, competence, tradition, responsible attitude, result orientation and competition". Moreover, in order to determine whether there are differences of opinion between students and teachers on the most promoted values of organizational culture, a series of tests for independent samples were applied and it was concluded that there were no significant differences in the values promoted in the present UAIC culture between the two categories of stakeholder. In conclusion, we can state that, according to UAIC students and employees, the ideal culture of the university is one that is oriented towards achieving organizational excellence by promoting quality, communication and cooperation.

At the level of the **Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies**, the "Annual Report of the Rector of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, on the State of the University" (ASE, 2017) analyzes the quality assurance of the educational process. According to this report, the system of quality assurance of educational services adopted by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies aims at developing a quality culture, ensuring the correlation between the educational services and the requirements of the stakeholders, improving the quality of the teaching services, etc. Moreover, this report (ASE, 2017) also presents the results of a survey of student satisfaction regarding study programs (didactic activities, quality of teaching staff, university endowment, etc.) and social services (accommodation in dormitories, cafeterias, scholarships, etc.). Thus, related to the study programs, the satisfaction of the respondent students is the aspects related to the quality of the teaching staff (their professional training, communication skills), the quality of didactic activities (the knowledge gained at the seminars, the student-teacher interaction) and are more dissatisfied when it comes to endowing the university (laboratories, classrooms). Regarding social services, students are generally satisfied with these aspects, with the results of the report showing that 82% of the respondent students who eat at the ASE's canteens favorably appreciate the quality of the canteens services and when we refer to the quality of the accommodation conditions 70% of respondents who lived in ASE homes are satisfied and very satisfied with this.

In conclusion, by analyzing the literature, one can notice that the issues of quality management and quality assurance in higher education are analyzed from several perspectives, with studies covering how the quality assurance system is organized, how the standards, the principles and strategies specific to this area, but also studies that analyze how quality is perceived by stakeholders in the educational process (students, teachers).

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From a theoretical point of view, it may be observed that the quality assurance of higher education has become one of the biggest problems of social development and of technological progress, being in fact a serious and difficult problem that has become at the moment a part of the university management system. Moreover, the literature offers a multitude of studies regarding the notion of quality management within higher education system in which it is discussed about the factors that define the quality of higher education, the introduction and recognition of the quality management culture in universities, implementing quality management and the factors behind implementing this quality system.

Starting from the many definitions that have been given to the notion of quality management in general, but also at the level of university education, we can state that it has become a key factor at the level of any organization, being the one that provides the competitiveness between the products/services, both nationally and internationally. Quality management in the university system should be perceived as a set of measures that allow universities to plan their way of achieving the quality, fitting it into various parameters and demonstrating what results are obtained.

Therefore, it can be concluded that quality assurance is a broad term covering policies, processes and actions through which the quality of higher education is preserved and developed. This term implies the academic autonomy of each university, being dependent on the competitiveness, the principles of efficacy and the academic and scientific performance of each institution. Quality assurance can only be achieved if institutions adopt a culture of quality at the level of their organizational culture.

Regarding the actors responsible for quality assurance in the university system, they have made management and quality assurance a major objective for any educational institution and for their stakeholders. Currently, quality assurance is well regulated by standards, criteria and performance indicators, both at European level, through ESG, and in Romania also through the ARACIS external evaluation methodology and through other specific documents used by this agency.

From the practical point of view, it can be concluded that in the field of quality management in the university system there have been made studies that emphasize the way in which the specific standards in the field are being respected, as well as studies that analyze the issue of quality assurance from the perspective of the actors interested in the educational process, in terms of their perception of various activities that determine quality in universities. Studies conducted in the field of quality management in higher education highlight that the notion of assuring the quality of higher education has become a necessity because it offers and guarantees the high quality of teaching activity, of research activity and leads to an increase in the number of students and the prestige of universities. Moreover, based on these studies it can be stated that it is important for universities to develop and assess their quality assurance policies both by implementing standards, existing principles in the field, and taking into account the way and the extent to which quality culture influences stakeholders' behavior of the educational process.

REFERENCES

ARACIS (2015). *Raport sintetic cu privire la tendințele de evoluție a calității învățământului superior în urma evaluărilor realizate*. Retrieved September 22, 2018, from: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/Publicatii_ARACIS/Romana/2015/Raport_sintetic_ro_online.pdf.

ARACIS (2006). *Metodologia de evaluare externă, standardele de referință și lista indicatorilor de performanță a Agenției Române de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior*, București. Retrieved September 3, 2018, from: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proceduri/Metodologie_de_evaluare_externa.pdf

ASE (2017). *Raportul anual al rectorului Academiei de Studii Economice din București privind Starea Universității*. Retrieved September 22, 2018, from: http://www.ase.ro/2013_files/despre_ase/legislatie/strategia1420/RAPORTUL%20RECTORULUI%202016.pdf.

Baciu, S. (2014). *Paradigmele managementului calității în instituțiile de învățământ superior,* Academia de Studii Economice a Moldovei, Chișinău.

Bărbulescu, A. (2014). Quality Culture in the Romanian Higher Education, *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 191*, 1923-1927.

Dragut, B.M. (2011). Quality management in higher education services, *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 15*, 3366-3368.

Elassy, N. (2015). The concepts of quality, quality assurance and quality enhancement. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 23(3), 250-261.

ENQA (2018a). *ENQA Mission Statement*, Retrieved September 3, 2018 from: http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/about-enqa/enqa-mission-statement/.

ENQA (2018b). *Standardele și liniile directoare pentru asigurarea calității (ESG) în Spațiul European al Învățământului Superior (SEIS), revizuite și aprobate la Conferința Ministerială de la Erevan din 14-15 mai 2015*. Retrieved September 3, 2018, from: http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/esg/ESG%20in%20Romanian%20by%20ARACIS.pdf.

Glushak, N. et al. (2015). Contemporary Economic Aspects of Education Quality Management at the University. *Procedia – Social Behavioral Sciences 214*, 252-260.

Gover, A. & Loukkola, T. (2018). *Enhancing quality: from policy to practice*, realised by EQUIP ("Enhancing quality through innovative policy & practice"). Retrieved September 22, 2018, from: http://www.equip-project.eu/wpcontent/uploads/21022018_EQUIP_Brochure_A5_WIP_v7_LowRes_Pages_InteractivePDF.pdf.

Hapenciuc, V., & Hapenciuc, C. (2002). Aspecte privind managementul calității în învățământul superior. *Revista Română de Studii Culturale (pe internet) 1-2*, 82-95.

Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993). Defining Quality. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), 9-34.

Juran, J.M. (1981). *Qualité des produits, un imperative pour l`Occident*. Les Industries Mécaniques, Paris.

Kélada, J. (1990). *La gestion intégrale de la qualité. Pour une qualité totale*. Québec: Edition Quafec.

Kettunen, J. (2012). External and internal quality audits in higher education. *The TQM Journal*, 24(6), 518-528.

Maiorescu, I. (2016). *Sisteme de management al calității – ISO 9001:2015*. Bucharest: Editura Nouă.

Manea, N.P., & Iatagan, M. (2015). Perceptions of PhD Students Regarding the Quality of Educational Services of Romania. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 191(2015), 1735-1739.

Mehralizadeh, Y., & Safaeemoghaddam, M. (2010). The applicability of quality management systems and models to higher education: A new perspective. *The TQM Journal*, 22(2), 175-187.

Nica, P. et al. (2014). Main values of the higher education institutions. The case of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi. *International Journal for Quality in Higher Education Institutions*, 1(1), 41 -56.

Nicolescu, L., & Dima, A.M. (2010). The Quality of Educational Services- Institutional Case Study from the Romanian Higher Education. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 6(29) 100-108.

O'Mahony, K., & Garavan, T. (2012). Implementing a quality management framework in a higher education organization: A case study. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 20(2), 184-200.

Rusu, C. (2016). From Quality Management to Managing Quality. 13th International Symposium in Management, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences 221* (2016), 287-293.

Tsinidou, M., Gerogiannis, V., & Fitsilis, P. (2010). Evaluation of the factors that determine quality in higher education: an empirical study. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *18*(3), 227-244.

Zamfir, A., Popa, I., Cicea, C., Dobrin, C., Marinescu, C. (2017). New Experiences for International University Cooperation in Economic Education and Research in Romania, *INTED2017: 11th International Technology, Education and Development Conference*, pp. 1392-1400.