QUALITY MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS IN GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

**Abstract.** The transition of the Georgian education system to European standards has put on the agenda the need to introduce new principles of quality management in education, modern concepts of quality management, which, in turn, requires systematic study of the issue and deepening of scientific research. The paper aims to analyze the quality management process in higher education institutions, identify the factors affecting quality assurance and develop recommendations for quality improvement. The object of research is the system of management, quality assurance, and control of the educational process in universities. The paper discusses the mechanisms for improving the quality management of higher education, the main challenges for the adaptation of universities in the European educational space, and the optimization of quality management. Suggestions and opinions for the development and further improvement of the quality management system of universities got presented.

**Keywords:** quality management, higher education.

The development of the education system is one of the main preconditions for the long-term economic growth of the country. Since the beginning of the process
of transition to a market economy, a number of fundamental reforms have been carried out in the Georgian education system: the introduction of unified national examinations has ensured corruption in the system, fairness and transparency in the process of admitting students to higher education institutions; Increased financial and managerial autonomy of educational institutions, academic and representative councils in higher education institutions have been empowered to independently manage the administrative and financial resources of the institution; Access to education has improved; Steps have been taken to achieve a high level of quality education, management transparency and efficiency; Updated curricula and professional programs have been introduced; Legal public services responsible for the quality, control and setting of education were established under the Ministry of Education and Science; The introduction of mandatory authorization / accreditation of educational institutions helps to ensure compliance with European and national standards [1].

Despite the positive changes in the education sector, there are many problems: according to international studies (TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA, etc.), the academic results of students in Georgia are unfavorable. The education system does not fully ensure the training of graduates in accordance with the requirements of the labor market; Unemployment is high; Lack of practical skills remains one of the major challenges for employers.

Due to the existing problems, in the government program "Freedom, Rapid Development, Prosperity" the main priority was given to the fundamental reform of the education system and large-scale investments in the field of education. It is planned to gradually increase expenditures in this direction from 2022 from 3.6% of current GDP to 6% of GDP [2].

The strategic goal of the Georgian state is to join the European Union. Therefore, it is especially important to actively participate in the ongoing processes in the European educational space, which's the main goal is to create a unified, European educational space.

The Bologna Process has a special role to play in the formation of the Common European Higher Education Area. Georgia joined the Bologna Process at the Bergen
Summit in May 2005 and committed itself to align the higher education system with the development visions of European countries [3]. Georgia's integration into the European Educational Area got linked to the consistent implementation of the principles recognized by the parties involved in the process. Ensuring the quality of education, the introduction of the European dimension of higher education, lifelong learning, and the participation of students in the management of higher education institutions contribute to the implementation of the principles of the Bologna Process.

Higher education in Georgia consists of three levels: undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral. The rules and procedures for receiving higher education got regulated by the Law on Higher Education [4].

Ensuring the quality of education, its evaluation, and monitoring is crucial for achieving and maintaining the welfare of the country. On June 27, 2019, the National Center for Quality Development in Education got registered in The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) [5], which reaffirmed the quality assurance mechanisms, procedures, and standards implemented in Georgia. With quality assurance standards and guidelines in place in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015).

According to Georgian legislation, quality assurance is: "internal and external evaluation procedures, the implementation of which helps improve the quality of education in higher education institutions" [4]. Quality assurance usually involves the following steps: planning, evaluation, monitoring, maintaining, and improving the positive results achieved. Both internal and external quality assurance should be based on consistent and formulated criteria.

The internal quality assurance system includes the provision of continuous assessment and development of the quality of the teaching, learning, and research process at both the institutional and program level, the professional development of the staff, and the improvement of the quality of services and conditions provided by the institution.

The external quality assurance system consists of institutional authorization and software accreditation. Authorization is an external quality assurance mechanism for
higher education implemented by the National Center for Education Quality Development. It is an institutional assessment that determines an institution's compliance with authorization standards. The evaluation process is carried out by a group of experts and is based on the analysis of the information reflected in the self-assessment report of the institution and the information obtained during the visit of the experts. Authorization is mandatory for all higher education institutions to be able to carry out educational activities and issue a state-recognized diploma.

Accreditation of higher education programs is an external mechanism for quality assurance in higher education, implemented by the National Center for Quality Development in Education. Accreditation is a program evaluation that determines a program's compliance with accreditation standards. The assessment is carried out by a group of accreditation experts and is based on the analysis of the information contained in the program self-assessment report, as well as the information obtained during the expert visit. Accreditation is mandatory for regulated professions and doctoral programs [6].

At the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year, 64 higher education institutions were in Georgia, of which - 19 were states and 45 private institutions. 60.9% of higher education institutions are located in Tbilisi [7].

![Chart № 1. Number of higher education institutions in Georgia in 2017-2022 years](https://www.geostat.ge/)
At the beginning of the 2021/2022 academic year, 45.4 thousand students were enrolled in Georgian higher education institutions - 28.1 thousand in state universities and 17.3 thousand in private universities. Student admissions decreased by 1.3 thousand compared to the same period of the previous year. The decrease mainly is based on state universities [7].

![Chart № 2. Number of students admitted to higher education institutions of Georgia, (thousands). Source: https://www.geostat.ge/](image)

The number of students in Georgian higher education institutions amounted to 159.8 thousand, which is 1.6% more compared to the previous academic year. 63.6% of the students study in state higher education institutions and 36.4% in private institutions [7].

![Chart № 3. The number of students in the higher education institutions in 2017/2018-2021/2022 academic years. Source: https://www.geostat.ge/](image)
In 2021, 25.9 thousand students graduated from higher education institutions, which is 10.1% more than the previous year. 57.9% of the graduates are women, and 42.1% are men. The number of graduates in state higher education institutions is almost two times higher compared to the number of graduates in private universities. At the beginning of the 2021/2022 academic year, 484 students got sent abroad for study, which is 195 students more than the previous year. The number of students sent from public universities is 2.4 times higher than the number of students sent from private universities. The number of foreign students in Georgian higher education institutions amounted to 17.5 thousand, which is 19.7% higher compared to the previous year [7].

![Chart](https://www.geostat.ge/)

**Chart № 4. A number of students studying abroad and the number of foreign students in higher education institutions in Georgia in the 2021/2022 academic year**

*Source: https://www.geostat.ge/

The number of professors in higher education institutions is 10.5 thousand, which is 7.0% more than the same indicator of the previous year. 56.4% of professors are women, and 43.6% are men. Most of them, 39.0%, are associate professors [7].

In 2021, 33 universities had doctoral programs (one more than in 2020). The number of doctoral students admitted to these universities decreased by almost 6.8%
compared to the previous year and amounted to 979. The total number of doctoral students decreased and amounted to 3,879, which is 3.3 percent lesser than the same indicator of the previous year [7].

![Chart](https://www.geostat.ge/)

**Chart № 5. The Number of professors in higher education institutions in the 2021/2022 academic year**

*Source: https://www.geostat.ge/*

Higher education in Georgia is funded from two sources: the state budget and tuition fees paid directly by students. Universities have four types of funding from the state budget: tuition grants, social program funding, free faculties (public institutions only), and program funding (state universities only).

The annual tuition fee for Georgian language programs in Georgian higher education institutions varies from 1500 GEL to 8000 GEL. The price for English language programs even reaches 19,000 GEL.

Globalization, internationalization, and the development of new technologies are the most important factors of change in the field of higher education today. Competition in higher education is an important driver of change. Universities have not been able to avoid the current changes in the world. New conditions require new forms of management and new skills for university leaders and managers. The European Unified Economy implies the existence of a unified market, where the graduates of higher education institutions of any European country will be able to
realize their knowledge in the same way. That requires the "recognition" of diplomas issued by various educational institutions in these countries. The second necessity is the principal requirement for European university culture, the so-called Academic mobility. Changes in the functioning of higher education institutions hastened the need for its organizational transformation. The main direction of transformation is the creation of an adaptive management system and the implementation of strategic management.

Most of the universities in our country have approached the issue of strategic management with high responsibility. That got primarily determined by the current analysis of the socio-economic situation as well as the separate recommendations and targeted projects of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Universities were allowed to participate in a variety of educational and research programs related to university management.

Their cooperation with management specialists and consultants is of great importance in the implementation of university management. Modern universities are formed in various organizational-legal forms, including educational-scientific-industrial complexes, scientific-technical holdings, modern adaptive structures - matrix universities, TQM (Total Quality Management) - universities focused on the process of integrated quality management, modern universities, university - techno Innovation-Entrepreneurial University and others.

The large number of stakeholders involved in the management of educational institutions (academic staff, administration, students, employers, other social partners, support staff, etc.) greatly complicates quality assurance. In Georgia, this is compounded by the rapid pace of higher education reform, constant change, the lack of management specialists in higher education, and, most importantly, the lack of a quality culture.

The impact of quality assurance on current academic processes and the community within the University got well studied by academic circles:

– The quality assurance process promotes institutional leadership and its centralization;

– Involvement of students and external stakeholders in the planning and
management of the educational process;
  – Creating new forms of academic and administrative cooperation;
  – Reduces time costs;
  – Promotes the awareness of higher education institutions;
  – Popularization of educational activities;
  – Making the right, evidence-based decisions;
  – Integration of various aspects of higher education (personnel data, resources, etc.)

Nowadays, the basic principles of Total Quality Management in higher education institutions are actively used in the international educational space to ensure continuous quality and the development of a quality culture [8].

The main goal of the quality assurance system reform in higher education institutions in Georgia is to fulfill the obligations towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the objectives of the Georgian National Strategy for Education and Science, strengthening the development-based and result-oriented functions of the quality assurance system, developing the quality of education, etc. The Quality Assurance Service provides the HEI administration with timely and thoroughly analyzed information that should be used in making appropriate governance decisions. According to the Unified Strategy for Education and Science for 2017-2021, internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions should be in line with European quality assurance standards and guidelines (ESG 2015). Authorization of higher education institutions should ensure the continuous development of teaching and learning, research activities, professional growth of academic staff, and the creation of a student-centered learning environment. A necessary condition for the professional development and employment of students is the provision of quality higher education and the internationalization of higher education [9].

Improving the quality management of individual universities requires more state support to strengthen the organizational, institutional and infrastructural capacity of higher education institutions, namely:

  – Optimizing and improving administrative resources and capabilities in
universities;

– Taking into account the results of internal and external quality assurance in the decision-making process;
– Optimizing the number of educational programs;
– Compliance of educational programs and qualifications with the classifier of fields of study;
– To better understand learning outcomes and to update them in line with modern requirements, to link learning outcomes with relevant learning resources, teaching and assessment methods to ensure their achievement;
– Introduce and use plagiarism software to enhance academic integrity;
– Fully implement the human resource management and evaluation system, monitor the results of the evaluation of academic staff, and take into account the results obtained, offer relevant opportunities for their professional development;
– Introduce incentives for affiliated academic staff of universities;
– It is especially important to develop and diversify student services; Activation of student support, and career, and counseling structural units, which will help to improve students' learning outcomes and their personal growth;
– Establishment of mechanisms to support the development of academic research activities of academic staff and students: increase domestic budget funds for funding scientific research, promote participation in international scientific research projects;
– Creating adapted conditions for students with special educational needs;
– Development of library resources and services; Stimulating the use of electronic library-scientific databases;
– Increase transparency and efficiency of financial management and budget planning.

Conclusion. Thus, the success of a university largely depends on its commitment at all levels - to ensure that the programs are clearly planned outcomes. Gaining the trust of students and stakeholders should be based on effective quality assurance measures that enable the development, implementation, and monitoring of comprehensive programs.
Despite the successes achieved, we consider it expedient to further improve the quality management of higher education in Georgia: Consistent implementation of quality management and assurance mechanisms, for which the active involvement of various stakeholders and the political support of the state are extremely important; Focus on improving the strategies, resources, and ongoing processes of higher education institutions in the management process.

References:
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