

SOME FEATURES OF EDUCATION MONITORING

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Education monitoring is quite a fresh field of the science of education, especially in Lithuania. This field is closely interrelated with methodology of educational research, education politics, education management, education economics, etc.

The term “*monitoring*” has recently been introduced. It was first used by naturalists. This term was used in 1972 at a United Nations conference on environmental issues (in Stockholm).

The term “*monitoring*” can be understood in diverse manners. Monitoring is defined as precise observation, as a precise scientific investigation and verification aiming at collecting certain information (The American Heritage Dictionary; cit. Cotton, 1988). Self-monitoring has also been widely discussed. Scientific literature indicates that M. Snyder was the first who used the term “*monitoring*” in 1974. Education monitoring has been investigated from different angles; much attention has been paid to the problem of quality of education in relation to monitoring. Education qualimetry (*qualimetry* is the sum of methods of quantitative evaluation of qualitative indexes, theory of the evaluation) has been increasingly developed. Obviously, the purpose of monitoring is to analyse the efficiency of a certain system of education or any of its subsystems. Indeed, despite normal functioning of the whole system of education its separate subsystems might malfunction seriously. On the other hand, it is unfair if problems of education monitoring are focused exclusively on qualitative education monitoring. Being conscious of the importance of quality of education in the context of European Union expansion we shouldn't leave aside other significant spheres of education (e.g. monitoring of the development of students' general abilities), without cohesive functioning of which it would be impossible to ensure quality of education. On the grounds of different opinions we assert that *education monitoring* is the system of collecting, processing, storing and disseminating information about the system of education or its components, oriented towards informational provision of education administration, which allows judging the condition of the system at any time and forecasting development of the system.

The elementary operation of monitoring process is measurement. There are qualitative and quantitative measurements. From the methodological point of view it is essential to understand the object of monitoring, its structure and interrelations, and fundamental processes etc. The most important characteristics of monitoring are the following:

- Organization;
- Accuracy;
- Dynamism;
- Continuity;
- Singleness (the aspect of forecasting).

The object of monitoring determines the choice of monitoring methods. Obviously, objects of monitoring vary among educational institutions of different level and type.

Various kinds of monitoring can be distinguished. Monitoring systems can be distinguished according to the sphere of application, means of implementation, purpose, means

of collecting information, objectives, the aspect of comparison, users and intensity of using the products etc.

The process of monitoring raises a significant problem – how to ensure high quality of instrumentation used in measurement, precise criteria of evaluation, relevant indexes and indicators, quality of the process of measurement, quality of statistical processing of data and its adequate interpretation. Consequently it becomes clear that training of education monitoring specialists is a task of prime concern.

Distinctive monitoring systems exist in many countries. Usually our knowledge about them is only fragmentary. We can state that local monitoring systems are most widely developed. Obviously, most countries, including Lithuania, are interested in effective functioning of their systems of education: minimal expenditure, maximal results. As we have already mentioned, education monitoring is one of the most important instruments. It also includes *an audit* of schools. Analyzing Lithuanian experience of the educational reform it is evident that education monitoring was hardly ever discussed from 1990 until 2000. Problems of monitoring became a talking point after 2000.

Global tendencies, international competition, the intellectual potential of the country – these concepts are encountered very often. Education monitoring is as a central pivot which links together different problems in Lithuania. Obviously, only an educated nation is able to survive international competition and other international problems. The issue of education quality should be approached from different angles – elite and mass education, formal and informal education, state and private, democratic and liberal education, even “shadow” education. It all has to do with education quality. It is necessary to establish an efficient system of qualitative education monitoring. Evidently, monitoring of quality of education is the instrument which reveals a current situation and provides with findings and recommendations concerning improvements in quality. Education quality monitoring can be described as a systematic and persistent procedure of collecting information on the most relevant issues of education. Education quality monitoring must be carried out systematically.

The value of monitoring is also a very important approach. The value of monitoring is significant on an international scale. Provided with comprehensive information about the situation of a certain system of education one could easily compare it to other systems, carry out forecasting, and shape possible perspectives of development.

Monitoring can be perceived as a complicated phenomenon in making, characteristic of interdisciplinarity (integrity). Monitoring can be analyzed as an *informational, diagnostic, scientific, prognostic* etc system which is most usually implemented in the context of process administration. The effective realization of the monitoring process requires adequate managerial skills.

The connection between educational diagnostics and education monitoring is evident. Before we carry out monitoring at a certain level of the system of education we must have relevant instruments for collecting, processing information and the like. Monitoring results are influenced by such substantial factors as quality of instruments, mastery of specialists, social peculiarities of the groups under investigation, lapses in the stream of information, divergent motivation of monitoring participants, statistical regression and many others. All these factors can show themselves jointly, in different combinations, compensate one another etc. Some of them are controlled and in most cases depend on the qualifications of monitoring specialists, for example, quality of instruments, mastery etc. Awareness and evaluation of these factors reduce the risk of obtaining overweighted results.

The *essence of monitoring* is consistent diagnostics of in-system processes, when different necessary measurements are carried out in order to get information about development (succession of condition) of the system under investigation (Lamanauskas, 2004). Timely

corrections in the progress of educational changes help to avoid gross mistakes and undesirable subsequences.

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