

EXPLORING ROLE OF MANAGEMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AT PRIVATE AND STATE UNIVERSITIES OF GEORGIA

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Abstract

Today Georgia as never before faces challenges of quality assurance. Despite reforms carried out by the Georgian government aiming at the quality improvement of higher education, many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of the country still faces real problems. The concept of “management” is not so widely known, not to say anything about the lack of human resources with theoretical knowledge and experience in education management.

The purpose of the research was to analyze universities management in general terms and identify how quality-oriented universities’ management is in Georgia. For this purpose quantitative research was carried out. The universities were selected according to their legal status, period of functionality and qualitative experience. By combining certain data we elaborated indicators for the purpose of comparing various aspects of universities. For ensuring validity criteria validity was applied.

Results of the research show that management is the main pre-requisite for quality assurance. Drawbacks and gaps in university management have also been identified the improvement of which will make a basis for enhancing management quality and establish a management culture at the Universities of Georgia.

Key words: *quality management, quality assurance, HEI’s management.*

Introduction

Nowadays, in the conditions of increased competition, quality education is important for Georgia as never before. During the last 8 years Georgia carried out a number of reforms aiming at improvement of quality of higher education. Georgia introduced Unified National Examinations that completely diminished corruption that existed during university enrollment examinations, Georgia joined the Bologna process the aim of which is the improvement of quality of higher education, institutional and program accreditation process of Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s) has also started. It is obvious that in parallel with these changes, in Higher Education Institutions of Georgia there should be a quality management system that will enhance a successful implementation of these reforms.

Problem of Research

Unfortunately, in the majority of Georgian universities the concept of “management” is not so widely known, not to say anything about the lack of human resources with theoretical knowledge and experience in education management. This might be resulted from the conservative nature of education, scarcity of education management programs and general lack of management culture at universities of Georgia.

Focus of the Research

In the article focus is made on identifying drawbacks and gaps in universities management improvement of which will enhance management quality and establish management culture at universities of Georgia.

Therefore, research objectives are to:

1. Define how effectively the Universities of Georgia work nowadays, including the analysis of management and definition of to what extent the management of universities is oriented on quality
2. Identify the aspects that influence management quality in Georgian universities.

Significance of the research is conditioned by the following factors: (i) despite the fact that there are many theoretical works written on universities' management and universities' quality management, still, papers describing effectiveness of management in practice of particular universities are scarce; (ii) such a research has never been carried out in Georgia; (iii) the research gives us an opportunity to see general picture of management at universities of Georgia in transitional period (iv) the improvement of which might form a basis for enhancing management quality of HEI's of Georgia and of other countries that undergo similar processes.

Quality assurance in higher education has become a major phenomenon worldwide (Skolnik, 2010). It is well-known that quality of universities is conditioned by various aspects. These are academic and administrative staff involvement in management processes, constant improvement of processes and results (Eliot, 2008).

Hypothesis of the research is that the management can be the main pre-requisite of quality assurance at universities of Georgia as other factors do play a significant role in quality assurance but it will not be possible if the university administration does not consider them. This is why management may be the primary pre-requisite of quality assurance at universities. Here, "management" is viewed as the interrelation of four main components: management principles, human resources, prevention and processes (Besterfield, Besterfield-Michna & Besterfield, 2003). The analysis of these factors allows us to determine the general picture of management, at the Universities of Georgia. In case of the effective management model these components have the following characteristics:

Principles: these are vision, goals and values of the educational institution that is clear for everyone and is shared among the employees of the educational institution and they are always considered during institutional activities.

Human Resources: as educational institutions largely depend on functions realized by individuals, human resources play a significant role in management. In an ideal management model the organizational structure is flat and a great focus is on learning and development and human relations.

Prevention: this component should represent one of the important aspects of management, as educational institutions have to work on preventing or at least on eliminating drawbacks and gaps in their functioning; in a theoretical point of view, prevention is a widely accepted philosophy and is applied in all activities.

Processes: this component of management implies that when it comes to effective management of an institution, any organizational process is considered on the basis on to what extent it is oriented to consumer (Besterfield, Besterfield-Michna & Besterfield, 2003); in the case of educational institutions' students may be viewed as primary consumers.

These four interrelated components: principles (organizational vision/goals), human resources, prevention and processes are the very aspects that enable the study of the general picture of management at universities of Georgia and identify the extent to which they are quality-oriented. Therefore, the main issues of the research involve study of these very components of management at universities of Georgia.

Methodology of Research

A quantitative research was carried out. For the selection of universities the following criteria were considered:

- University legal status: Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL's) and Private Universities
- Period of functionality: this meant that the selected university had to have an accreditation and more or less regulated management system, as the majority of HEI's are accredited institutions, and
- Qualitative experience: selection of universities according to their qualitative experience was based on research results on private universities in Georgia carried out by Tbilisi State University Department of Sociology, in 2000 (this was the only one research of universities carried out in Georgia during last several years); as a result of this research 5 universities were identified that were rated as best performing private universities in Georgia for that period and these universities continue functioning successfully up to nowadays.

Considering these criteria 5 universities were selected: two state universities (hereinafter, "state universities"), two private universities that were in the top 5 university list based on the research carried out in 2000 and one "neutral" private university that was not in the list mentioned above (hereinafter, "private universities"). The research was carried out in these five universities. Administrative staff (head of administration, staff of quality assurance department, faculty/schools administrative staff etc.) of these universities were surveyed within the framework of the research.

Instrument and Procedures

Quantitative research was carried out by means of questionnaires and employees' survey of administrative departments in selected universities. 6 questionnaires were developed for every target group of research. The questionnaires were on general management principles, collaboration between departments, communications effectiveness, employees' involvement, HR development, benchmarking. The research instrument involved closed and open-ended questions.

The data were analyzed according to the universities. Then, by combining certain data indicators for the purpose of comparing various aspects of universities were elaborated. For ensuring validity criteria validity was applied – when two different variables measure one and the same feature. For example, while determining the extent of unity of mission at universities, the analysis of questionnaires filled by heads of departments as well as middle-line and first-line employees of universities was made as the unity of mission means that all employees understand and share mission of the university and at the same time they have a clear understanding of what role they play in realization of university goals.

Considering the time-frame survey of 50 employees (from 896 employees) was possible, that made 5.6 % of the total number of employees; the margin of error in this case is 9 %. The margin of error was calculated by the following formula:

$$e = \sqrt{\frac{z \cdot z p q (N-n)}{(N-1)n}} \sqrt{\frac{z \cdot z p q (N-n)}{(N-1)n}}$$

in which, e is margin of error, z - statistical constant 1.96 for 95 % reliability, p=1-q (probability),

we assumed that in our case probability is 0.5 as in this case margin of error is maximum possible amount, N - general number of employees, n – sample volume guarantying desired accuracy of estimation with the desired confidence probability.

Statistical Data Analysis Procedures

Basic data analysis was made in Microsoft Excel data analysis ToolPak. For getting means and standard deviations for separate groups “Descriptives “ in the Data Analysis Tool was used. It was done by choosing several adjacent columns of data for the Input Range and each column was analyzed separately. For getting means and standard deviations of particular results for each treatment group Pivot Tables were used. As a result average, standard deviations and number of observations in each treatment group were identified. Functions were used to generate statistical measure like correlation coefficient.

Results of Research

The goal of the research was to analyze management of universities in Georgia and identify the aspects that influence management quality in these universities. For this purpose data received from universities were combined and indicators were developed for the purpose of making a comparison of universities easier. Development of indicators was based on the assumption that total quality management principles can be applicable to academics, as many educators believe that the Deming’s concept of TQM provides guiding principles for needed educational reform (Mehrota, n.d).

Information gained from respondents was analyzed according to the following criteria:

1. Unity of mission
2. Caring for human resources
3. How are universities customer-oriented
4. Use of prevention procedures

One of the primary indicators that largely define quality management is the unity of vision/mission. According to this principle an organization must have a mission and vision that is shared and understood by all employees (West-Burnham, 2000). Usually, it is not easy as it requires that the missions of particular departments to be in full correspondence with the mission of the institution (Ronald & Serbrenia, 1991). It means that every employee of the institution understands his or her role in realizing the mission of the institution (Miller, 1983). Mission statements and goals of universities published on university web-sites were used for checking whether employees of institutions had good understanding of it. Results of the research showed that responses from employees fully corresponded to vision and mission statements that were published on university web-sites but employees had certain difficulties in relating missions of their structural units to the mission of the institution. One third of employees of state universities did not answer what the mission of their university was. This might be caused by organizational changes that took place in those universities. This might be conditioning the fact that although at state universities functions and responsibilities of employees working at certain positions are usually presented in a formally written form, still some duties, functions and responsibilities are not completely defined. The situation in this regard is better at private universities (Figure 1).

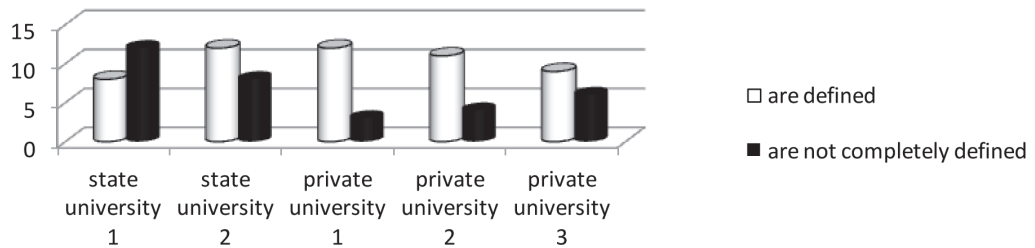


Figure 1: Comparison of responses regarding defining duties and responsibilities at private and state universities.

Unlike state universities there has never been a case of modifying or cancelling working position at private universities. This can be an indicator of the fact that management of these universities had clearly identified functions of every department and structural unit from the very beginning.

Caring for human resources (HR) implies realization of activities aiming at development of administrative staff and other interested parties and determining how satisfied these individuals are (Thompson, 2011). For the purpose of evaluation of this aspect two indicators were analyzed: 1. How many universities are oriented on HR development. 2. Consideration of interests of interested parties. Employees of private universities consider their professional development within the university more possible than the employees of state universities (Figure 2).

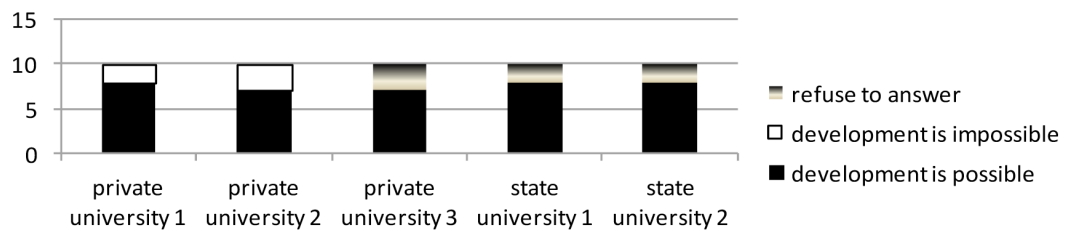


Figure 2: Comparison of responses regarding possibility of professional development in state and private universities.

Though, the majority of respondents could not answer how much is spent annually on their professional development.

Private universities more frequently finance professional development of their employees than state universities (Figure 3).

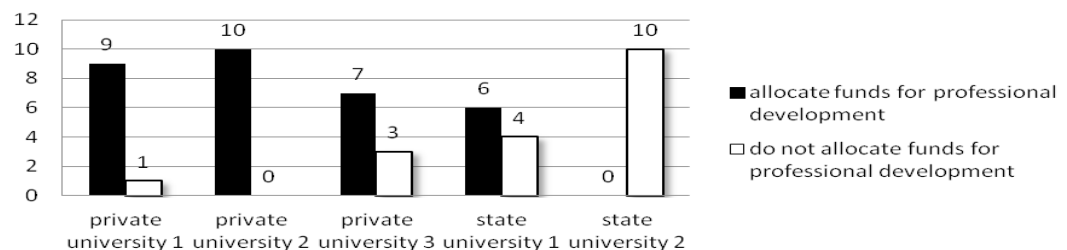


Figure 3: Allocation of funds for employees' professional development at state and private universities

Private universities typically consider interests of students and employers of greater priority, whereas state universities give priorities to interests of academic personnel and administrative staff (Figure 4).

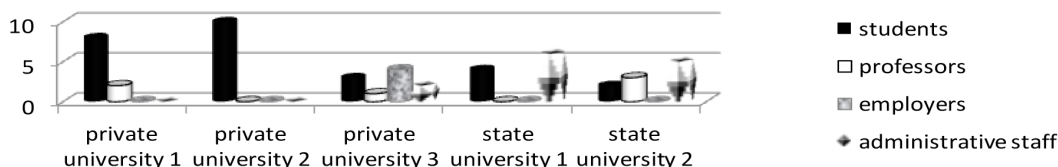


Figure 4: Comparison of data on whose interests are considered more in state and private universities.

As for the use of prevention procedures, in only two universities were named means for improving administrative processes. These were: making discipline in departments, information technologies, making procedures simplified. The universities typically make student surveys and focus-groups for the purpose of improving learning environment for students.

As it was already mentioned indicators were developed for comparing universities and these indicators were given a certain range (1-low, 3-high) according to the degree of unity of vision/mission, human resources, employees' involvement in administrative processes etc. as a result of this general picture of management at universities was received. Comparative data according to universities are presented in Table 1. Table 2 represents comparative data on to what extent universities are quality-oriented.

Table 1. Comparison table of management general picture at state and private universities.

Management (general picture)							
	Employees' understanding of university mission/goals	Degree to which goals of departments relate to goals of the university	Management quality evaluation by employees	Department managers' performance evaluation by employees	Colleagues performance evaluation	Degree of human resources development	Total
Private university 1	3	2	3	3	2	2	18
Private university 2	3	2	3	3	2	2	18
Private university 3	3	2	2	3	1.8	2	16.8
State university 1	2	2	1.4	1	2	1	10
State university 2	2	2	2.4	2	2	1	11

Table 2. Comparison table of quality management indicators at state and private universities.

University quality management indicators								Total
	Focus on internal and external customers interests	Processes improvement indicators			Collaboration between departments	Employee involvement/sense of ownership	Evaluation indicators	
		Human resources development	Considering interests of involved parties	Improvement of administrative processes				
Private university 1	2	3	1	0	3	3/3	1	19
Private university 2	2	3	1	0	3	3/3	1	19
Private university 3	1	1	2	1	2.6	2/2	1	15.9
State university 1	0	1	1	0	2	1/1	1	9
State university 2	1	2	2	1	2.6	1/2	1	12.6

Tables 1 and 2 show that private universities have higher total scores than state universities. This comparison was made on the basis of generally accepted quality management principles: focus on customer, continuous improvement, encouragement of mutual respect and teamwork etc. (“Total quality management,” 2012). According to these results private universities in Georgia have more effective management systems and their management systems are more quality oriented than management systems of state universities.

Discussion

The results of some researchers, for instance (Grendel, Rosenbuch, 2010; Palfreyman, 2012; Hatch, Schultz, 2008) show that system accreditation definitely gives a better picture of quality at educational institutions. However, its main benefit may be that it strengthens the delicate nexus between evaluation and governance, creating the environment for effective quality management. The step from check to act can be seen as one of the most crucial and challenging problems for systematic, evidence-based and effective quality development in higher education (Grendel & Rosenbusch, 2010).

While in terms of reforms carried out in Georgia university management largely defines quality of education and effective implementation of reforms, some authors (Heller, 2009; Clark, 2009; Hazelkom, 2009) outside the country assign greater role to reforms carried out in higher education and the evaluation of quality of universities is made from the perspective of reforms carried out by governments; this includes for instance the analysis of how effectively higher education is serving society in light of global economic crisis or by analyzing factors that result in best performance of universities. According to Clark the factors affecting this performance of universities are postulated by comparing policies and approaches in the UK with that elsewhere (in particular in continental Europe). Three factors – the level of autonomy,

the amount of competition and the level of funding, combined with the universities' direct control over funding – are identified as the most important factors (Clark, 2009).

Several authors also assign a great role of management in effectiveness of organizations (Boxall, Macky, 2009). Managerial effectiveness is a complex and versatile concept to explain and quantify (Bamel, Rangnekar, Rastogi, 2011). This research gives us an overall description of management at universities of Georgia. But aspects of quality management at universities of Georgia discussed in the present study alone do not completely describe the management of universities; though, on the basis of the research findings it becomes possible to study each aspect of management for particular university that will give a more detailed picture of university management in transition. Obviously, there are many other aspects to be studied to explore the issue. Nevertheless, the findings of the research demonstrate importance which is worthy of consideration when discussing university management at universities of Georgia.

Conclusions

State universities management is less effective than the private universities management; this is reflected in ambiguous mission statements, aims and objectives, unclear functions and responsibilities of employers, as well as bureaucratic/formal procedures at state universities, that often become barriers to their effective functioning.

In comparison with state universities the private universities management is more quality-oriented as they spend more on HR development; they mainly focus on students and employers interests, rather than on university administrative and academic personnel that is the case for state universities. The level of subordinates' involvement in management processes and the sense of ownership is higher at private universities.

As a result of comparative analysis (Table 1 and 2) it was found that each indicator is in positive correlation with quality management. Aspects resulting in the effectiveness of universities are responsibilities of management or represent management function. Therefore, we may conclude that the management is the main pre-requisite of quality assurance in universities of Georgia. And the indicators and aspects that were studied are primary determiners of quality.

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