QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN LITHUANIAN COLLEGES: WEBSITES INFORMATION ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Activity questions of non university schools (colleges) are becoming very relevant in Lithuania. Having in mind, that binary higher education system functions in the country – the demand rises to properly and adequately understand education quality provided by universities and colleges, the educational specifics provided by every institution. Both universities and colleges declare the goals of carrying out qualitative studies and providing qualitative education. However, declaration is one thing, and real results – another. College activity quality control evaluation is becoming the main political and practical attitude.

Quality management systems (QMS) in Lithuanian colleges have been started to implement without having a clear conception and basically keeping up with the political requirements. On the other hand, QMS is tried to be shown as an advantage over the colleges competing both with universities and among each other. It is likely, that this process is inconsistent, the goals of implementing such systems are not clear, the information presented publicly is very often contradictory and incomplete. There is lack of experience in quality management sphere.

Information analysis research has been carried out. During the research, data was analysed, presented in college networking websites, and their produced QMS documents. The information was analysed in October and November, 2014. Websites of all colleges (13 state and 10 non state) working in Lithuania were analysed and the documents, presented in them.

The research allowed to more exhaustively and accurately evaluating, what is the situation in non university higher school QMS sphere at the moment, what information about QMS can be available for the society in the college networking websites. The distinguished QMS situation of state and non state colleges allows comparing whether the actions of private and state colleges differ. The research revealed that most of the colleges present the information about the QMS; however, the information is often not systemised, presented in separate college activity documents.

Looking in perspective, one can think that a priority attention will be devoted to quality management questions in Lithuanian colleges, QMS will acquire much bigger importance, and the effectiveness of their functioning will be checked constantly. It is hopeful, that quality improvement will acquire more realistic than declarative character.

Key words: *information analysis, college websites, quality management systems, quality standards.*

Introduction

In the environment of changeable higher education, labour market changes, increasing organisation and society requirements in higher education institutions, quality management questions are becoming more relevant and this is world tendency. Growing competition, learning people demands and their expectations encourage quality seeking. Both the decreasing number of students, and government critics concerning higher education and study quality, determine this in Lithuania. There have been more and more discussions going on in recent years about the quality of service provided in different level and different type of educational

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institutions. It is not one educational institution that characterizes quality as the most important priority of the activity. However, one thing is to characterize and declare and another one is to actually strive for this quality. In other words, the priorities of educational institutions can be quite different however, it is inevitably obligatory to try to survive in the market. Quality system is one of the mechanisms helping the institution to organize and fulfil the activity so that to ensure its effective work under competitive conditions. Moreover, no institution should wait for its prestige to start diminishing; on the contrary, it has to do its best to guarantee successful functioning in the future. Thus, the head of every educational institution today has to care about how effectively its institution functions, what are possible ways and methods of its activity improvement (Lamanauskas, 2009).

In 2000, in Lithuania in the high school basis, the first non university schools – colleges were started to be established. It is noticed that higher non university schools still feel a lower status comparing with universities and in order to become stronger in the market, they are searching for mechanisms how to develop their activity, improve the image. One of the instruments is quality management system implementation and certification. Certified QMS testifies that a higher school steadily develops quality policy and has systemised, documented quality processes. Republic of Lithuania Law on Science and Research, article 40 states, that „Higher education and research institutions shall be responsible for the quality of research (artistic) activities, studies and other activities. They must publicly announce the quality indices of their activities and foster the culture of the quality of activities regarding higher education and research together with assessment institutions (...) The quality of research (artistic) activities and studies shall be ensured through the internal systems of ensuring of the quality of higher education and research institutions (...) Activities of higher education and research institutions must be constantly improved, taking into consideration the findings of self-assessment and external evaluation".

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania does not suggest a concrete quality management model for higher schools, the latter can select or create it themselves. In other words, quality management model selection is related with the initiative "from below", for central institutions not applying any regulation by compulsory acts. QMS creation "from above" is encouraged by recommendation character documents. Regardless various positions, the colleges rather bravely implement QMS, based on international ISO 9001 standards. First of all, it is sought to improve internal processes and procedures of a concrete institution. There is quite a lot of criticism in respect of ISO 9001 standards. Generalising, one can state, that criticism, as a matter of fact, is based on the argument, that higher schools (colleges) are not ordinary business enterprises; they do not have typical clients and services, they are institutions creating science knowledge and administering the studies. The research shows that standardised quality management creation and implementation system obstacles slightly often are institutional problems than standard ones (Kasperavičiūtė, 2012). The researchers also notice that quality management in colleges is more advanced than in universities: in colleges one can find an agreement concerning distribution of responsibility for quality, one tends to take bigger responsibility for many quality management spheres (Valiuškevičiūtė, Žiogevičiūtė, 2006). It is obvious, that over the last ten years, much more attention is devoted to the college quality management system analysis, to the search of their functioning improvement ways (Kučinskienė, Kučinskas, 2005; Misiūnas, 2007; Senšila, Skiparienė, 2007; Ruževičius, Daugvilienė, Bacevičiūtė, 2008; Papečkienė, 2009).

It is not an easy task to implement and to sensibly apply QMS in colleges. Various barriers exist; every period of time raises its own challenges. Foreign researchers have noticed a long time ago, that in order to implement QMS, big changes are necessary in the institution itself (Winter, 1991). Finally, in the years 1980 – 1990, in many countries, e.g. UK, much disappointment was expressed concerning higher education systems. As the researchers notice, this encouraged QMS implementation (Kanji Gopal, Malek, Tambi, 1999). The research studies, carried out in the USA showed, that total quality management principle implementation in

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colleges significantly improved mission development, strategy determination, and the setting of goals (Vazzana, Elfrink, Bachmann, 2000). Despite the research studies carried out and being carried out in various countries, the researchers notice that Total Quality Management principle implementation in non-profit organizations, such as higher education institutions, presents more challenges and difficulties than those encountered in business organizations (Sirvanci, 2004).

Thus, there is no doubt, that quality management system implementation in educational organizations is very urgent. Quality management system forms conditions to control not separate, disintegrated processes and activities, but to see them as an entire whole. It is undoubted, that it is very important, seeking to guarantee concrete organization's vitality (Lamanauskas, 2009). Colleges in Lithuania seek to improve study quality, search for proper instruments for increasing QMS functioning effectiveness. On the other hand, rather big internal as well as external disturbances remain here. Constant and complex research studies are necessary for their analysis.

It is obvious, that non university higher school quality management system has to be not only structured, but also has to function properly and be constantly improved and information has to be publicly announced about that. It is not enough to just only implement QMS and to certify it. Constant work is necessary in that direction, seeking systematic and productive process quality management model implementation in all college activity spheres. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse, how quality management systems, the necessity of which stress not only the laws, but also Lithuanian higher education system development strategy, operate at the moment, what information about the state of QMS produce the colleges. Therefore, the object of this research is Lithuanian higher non university school (college) quality management systems. The aim of the research is to ascertain, what information about higher non university school structure, functioning indicators and improvement possibilities is presented in their websites.

Research Methodology

General Research Characteristics

Descriptive analytical complex research has been carried out, analysing the findings, presented in higher non university school networking websites and the documents produced by colleges on quality management system subject, seeking to collect the information about the current condition in QMS sphere among the higher non university schools. The research is based on objectivity, which requires from social sciences and researchers neutrality, indifference, fact registration and their social, political evaluation. The authors think, that the research grounded on objectivity, accepts social information as objective information about really existing phenomena and processes. The research was carried out during the second half of 2014.

Research Procedure and Data Analysis

Totally, websites of all colleges working in Lithuania were analysed, 13 – state and 10 – non state and the documents produced in them: activity strategies, self-evaluation documents, quality policy, quality guides, activity statements, accreditation documents, quality management system certificates and other documents. It was referred to LAMA BPO website information about higher non university schools in the country (http://www.lamabpo.lt/turinys/holders-foreign-qualifications). Most of the colleges are in the biggest Lithuanian cities – Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, only state colleges are also in smaller cities, such as: Utena, Panevėžys, Marijampolė and other. During the research all college websites were operating, so data have been collected from all college websites operating at the moment. In every internet café, the

information about college QMS is presented differently, therefore, some of the findings are interpreted, referring to objectivity and impartiality. Quantitative information is presented in absolute frequencies.

Research Results

It has been analysed how many colleges present information about quality management system in the websites. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Information presentation about QMS in college websites.

Information presentation	State colleges	Non state colleges
The information about QMS is presented in the website	12	9
There is no/or almost no information presented about QMS	1	1

The websites of private colleges are more interactive and attractive than the ones of state higher schools. A few colleges do not present information about quality management system at all, e.g. St. Ignatius Loyola College. It presents only external accreditation evaluation outcomes and does not allude to internal study quality system guidelines. Also, Utena College, presents information only about external accreditation results.

Finding the information is an important parameter. It is systemized, what link about QMS is suggested in college networking websites. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Information links about QMS presentation place in college websites.

Link place	State colleges	Non state colleges
A separate link in the menu path	6	2
In the menu path "About us", "about college"	4	5
In the menu path "For the society", "Studies" and other.	2	2
Not presented	1	1

As one can see from the results, in state colleges information about QMS in half of the networking websites is presented on a separate link in the menu path. In non state colleges, this is only in two colleges. In non state colleges, in the menu paths „about us", „about college", QMS is described more. Thus, QMS is identified with the information about college; there is no necessity to exclude it as a separate field. Also, in non state colleges, information about quality is presented in some other menu path fields, while in state colleges this has been noticed less frequently, comparing with the general number of colleges.

QMS standards is a very important thing. It is useful to know, what quality standard is applied in a concrete college, whether it is clearly identified and so on. The analysed information is given in Table 3.

Table 3. The applied quality management system standard/system in colleges.

Standard/system	State colleges	Non state colleges
Internal study quality assurance system	2	0
ISO 9001:2008 standard	5	7
Not named, or assigned	6	3

It can be seen, that non state schools outrun state colleges according to management system standard ISO 9001 application in the activity. Such standard is applied in 5 state and 7 non state colleges. In the case of state colleges, in almost half of the networking websites there was no information to what standard/system the applied internal quality assurance system is assigned. Two state colleges publish, that they apply the internal study quality assurance system. One can make an assumption that private colleges, feeling bigger competitive pressure, try more to implement a certified quality management system according to ISO 9001 standard requirements.

It has been analysed, how many colleges have already implemented certified quality management systems. The main indicator is a quality management certificate, published in college networking websites. Information is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Certified quality management systems in colleges.

The state of certification	State colleges	Non state colleges
Is certified	5	7
Is not certified or information is not presented	8	3

As some colleges announce in the networking websites that they follow a certain quality management system standard, but not all of them present certificates, therefore the following aspect – how many higher non university schools have certified systems – was discussed. As it was expected, non state colleges present more certificates in their networking websites (7cases). In a higher navy school, quality management system was certified by Great Britain "Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance Limited" organisation. Utena, Panevėžys colleges are "DNV GL-Business Assurance" certification institutions. Šiauliai state college is JSC "Bureau Veritas Lit." and other. Most of the colleges, which have qualified management systems, publish the certificates in the networking websites. Most of the colleges have recently implemented certified management systems, for example, in Panevėžys state college QMS is certified on the 6th - 2013, in Šiauliai State College – on the 8th - 2013. In non state Social Sciences College, QMS is certified on the 10th – 2013, V. A. Graičiūnas higher management school – on the 3rd – 2013.

Colleges produce separate documents, in which information about QMS is presented. Seeking to systemise what documents are presented and what documents cover the biggest part, the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. QMS document presentation in the college websites.

The name of the document	State colleges	Non state colleges
Quality policy	10	8
Quality guide	5	2
Quality management strategy in a separate document	3	1
Quality management strategy integrated in a college general activity strategy	3	1
Self- evaluation document	3	2
Self - evaluation information integrated in an annual activity report (s)	1	1

It can be seen, that colleges mostly present quality policy in the networking websites. Not of all colleges the quality policy is exhaustive, also it is described referring to different criteria and different things are identified. For example, college vision, mission, goals, engagements are presented in Alytus College. In Vilnius Trade College, the college goals are described, activity principles, values. Quality policy is usually one page long.

Quality guide is not a frequent document in college websites or it is not a freely available one. Quality guide is presented only in some websites. A logger name and password are necessary to some documents in the websites, but it says, that they are. The other documents, related with QMS are also presented in the websites, individually depending on scientific institution. This is a quality management strategy, in which future vision is foreseen and the institution's self-evaluation document, which describes how QMS is implemented. Also, it has been noticed, that QMS strategy and self – evaluation happen to be integrated in a larger size documents, generalising all college activity directions.

It has been analysed, what QMS functioning quantitative and qualitative indicators the colleges usually present in the networking websites. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Information about qualitative and quantitative indicator presentation in college websites.

QMS functioning indicator	State colleges	Non state colleges
Entrance student competition indicators, admission statistics, student changes	8	4
Graduate from a higher institution placement indicators	7	6
Student, employer, social partner opinions and evaluation research (questionnaire) indicators	4	5
Information about college rankings	4	4
Teacher qualification, publication number, quality, reports	8	3
Participation in projects, scientific activity	9	6
Information about institution's accreditation	10	9
Common with foreign universities and integrated in international programmes study programme number	3	3
Study programme accreditation	9	8
Have a Diploma Supplement label	5	3
Sustainable development and nature security system or culture in the organisation and socially responsible activity culture	7	3
Wide multifaceted socialising network with foreign and Lithuanian institutions, trade	4	5
Facility and learning recourse quality increase; advanced information technology application, aesthetical environment	8	5

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It is obvious that colleges present various functioning indicators. Most frequently, the information produced in the networking websites is about institution and study accreditation also, entrance students' indicators, admission statistics and placement indicators. Less information is found about college international relations.

It has been stated, that college information about QMS improvement is presented not only in quality improvement strategy, but also in other activity documents. The results are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Information about QMS improvement presentation in activity documents.

Document	State colleges	Non state colleges
In a college activity plan	2	0
In a college annual report	3	3
In a college several year strategic plan	5	2
In a quality management strategy	2	0
In a college self-evaluation document	1	1
It is not presented in any document, other	4	4

It can be seen, that more information about QMS improvement in college activity documents present state colleges. Such information is not presented in four state college websites or it can be presented in general in the networking website, analogically - in the case of non state colleges. In state colleges, information is usually presented integrated in a college several year strategy, in non state colleges – in an annual report. Thus, in the college networking websites more information is presented about QMS functioning than about QMS improvement.

Quality management system implementation in a higher school is not a short- term process. There can be distinguished several organisation quality management system maturity stages. According to certain criteria, college quality management systems are ascribed to some maturity stage (Table 8).

Table 8. College quality management system maturity period.

QMS maturity period	State colleges	Non state colleges
Quality management system *creation, documentation* (I stage)	4	3
Quality management system is *created and functions* (II stage)	4	5
Quality management system *works and develops* (improves) (III stage)	2	1
Not enough information is presented about QMS	3	1

If the college does not have a certified QMS but presents at least a few documents describing QMS guidelines, then it is treated that QMS creation, documentation is going on in the college. If QMS is certified, QMS functioning indicators are presented, one can say, that it is created and functioning. But if QMS is certified, repeatedly evaluating is audited and quality improvement strategy document or integrated steps in a common college quality

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activity strategy are suggested, then one can make an assumption that QMS is in process and develops. As it is seen from the results, state college QMS is mostly of I and II maturity stages, non state college – of II maturity stage. There are not many colleges of III maturity stage in Lithuania, because QMS were certified in the majority of colleges not long ago and still there is lack of experience in this sphere.

Conclusions

Having carried out the analysis of the information presented about QMS, it became clear that the majority of colleges as the laws require, give rather exhaustive information about QMS in their websites. Most of the colleges declare that they follow ISO 9001:2008 standard principles in the quality sphere. Unfortunately, about a half of state and a third of non state colleges do not point out, what QMS standard they follow. Most of non state colleges and a little more than a third of state ones publicly declare, that QMS are certified. The attention is drawn, that most of the colleges implemented quality management systems and certified them comparatively not a long time ago. (1-2 years ago).

The colleges present various QMS documents in the websites. Most frequently it is quality policy, quality guide. Most of the data about QMS functioning indicators, the colleges present in their annual activity reports. Most of the colleges have already defined study quality criteria; however, they are in separate documents, not systemised, in other – partly defined, renewable. Colleges present various QMS functioning indicators. Most often, the information presented in the networking websites is about institution and study accreditation also, the applicant indicators, admission statistics and placement indicators. However, college quality improvement strategy is presented rather rarely; it is usually integrated in a common college activity strategy. In other words, the carried out research allows us to think, that colleges practically do not present information about what progress they make in quality management sphere. Despite the fact, that colleges rather actively implement QMS, there is still lack of exhaustive information about QMS functioning, improvement, certification and so on.

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