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## THE COMPETENCE OF THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

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### *Abstract*

*The article analyzes the basic concepts related to quality management: customer satisfaction and product quality of the educational services. It is proposed a model to analyze the output of the activity of the institution, which can be classified as follows: Performance, Unsatisfied quality, Formal quality, Non-formal quality, Unsatisfied specifications, Unsatisfied needs, Waste.*

**Keywords:** *quality, quality management, standards, customer satisfaction, educational services.*

The new economic and social context, related to Moldova's European integration aspirations, means superior performance in all fields of activity. Because of the special contribution as a long-term investment, the improvement of the quality of education will have certain repercussions on the quality of life and work, ultimately, the quality of education is a necessary condition for human resources development, for social cohesion and economic competitiveness.

In this context, quality is without doubt, one of the most important requirements of any result of any actions under taken and any activity designed to detect problems, to evaluate the influence and find solutions to solve them is, for any educational institution the key to progress. Only at first sight the issue of ensuring a quality educational process is a simple question, and that can be answered based on common sense, somewhat like "Economy is taught qualitatively at the lessons of economy". We believe that teachers and managers should be continuously concerned with creating a learning environment that is pleasant and productive, focused on meeting the training needs of pupils / students. This is possible if the educational institution promotes an effective management of quality.

Quality management means evaluating the real potential and improving the performance, not creating a good impression in the context of the organization's external environment. Pursues the achievement of didactic benefits based on responsibility for quality at all ranks of the school organization by promoting quality awareness and an appropriate discipline behavior. It is an effective strategy to improve the quality of services provided by all the staff, because it relies on making teaching, non teaching and auxiliary activities quality, on time, the first time and every time.

The basis for implementing a quality management system is the clarity and transparency of organizational structures and the processes of the educational institution, which must be focused on certain values of organizational culture.

Value is one of the most important criteria of human socializing, it defines the system of personal or group options and the guidance of the subject or community in the complicated network of conditions of a developed institution differentiated efficaciously and decision oriented. In the space of human action, value is the dominant criterion for reporting and qualification of a situation; it determines the goal of the individual, the means of realization and the strategies of taking over of the effects of achieving a goal - providing quality services. Also, the document "Official European Report on Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning" mentions that there is a clear connection between quality and accepted values [1, p 69].

Analyzing the researches, we formulate the following definition: *The quality of management in an education institution is a set of organized activities, aimed at ensuring and improving the quality of offered products.*

Currently, the Russian researcher Кушцов О. [2] mentions that there are two complementary approaches to quality education in Europe. The first approach – the practical, which relates to defining quality as the degree of satisfaction of consumers' needs (different consumer needs form different quality as they dictate the need of its management). The second approach continues the first approach and refers to the institution's internal processes taking place in the educational process.

Combining these two approaches, we propose the following definition of educational institution quality - *the competence to satisfy certain needs / current and future requirements of direct and indirect clients of educational services as well as quality standards foresights.*

Quality means obtaining economic results and social affirmation through an appropriate strategy, aimed to satisfy the customer as well as an internal efficiency. The Education institution (EI) must always be concerned with quality of educational services offered. Kotler and Fox [3] stated that the central idea of educational marketing is represented by the "correspondence" between what the institution (Professor, Chair, EI) has to offer and the consumer's (students and parents) needs, desires to achieve the purpose of the institution. All of them become achieved through the products offered by EI.

### **1.1. The Competence fo the educational institution**

The Competence of an institution is achieved by synergistic combining **of resources and skills of the institution**. Resources are elements required in the process of implementation of some services and represents individual social or institutional contributions. Resources of a EI can be grouped into tangible resources (financial, material and human) and intangible resources (technology, reputation).

The Experience of the last years showed that EI success was assured, in a greater extent by the intellectual capacity and the institutional efficiency, than the existence of equipment and buildings.

The Capability of EI reflects its ability to use its resources most efficiently, so that the existing potential will transform into beneficial results for the organization as much as possible.

EI is characterized thus by the existence of resources and capabilities and differs from other institutions through their capitalization capacity. Capabilities have an intangible nature and are sometimes more difficult to define or evaluate, but they can be clearly identified by the produced results. For a good management the distinction between resources and capabilities is very important.

For example, a EI can have valuable resources (rooms with modern computers), but if it doesn't have the necessary capabilities to use the smartest way possible (are only used for computer classes) these resources, then it cannot achieve a competitive advantage in the external environment.

Capabilities are obtained by integrating over time the quality of human resources, the knowledge, the organizational structure and the organizational culture.

A more and more emerging capability is the ability to be an EI which learns. This means a continuous development of the knowledge base and knowledge management improvement.

So a EI that has satisfied customers ensures itself a constant development. Thus, to adequately respond to clients' requests and expectations, EI must be able to meet the required demands.

Integrating resources and capabilities of EI in a creative and effective way, one can obtain basic skills that give uniqueness to the institution and generate value for its customers, for a period of time, which is intended to be as long as possible. The Fundamental skills are "The cherry of the pie" of an Educational Institution.

For example, a EI may have the necessary resources (buildings, appropriate equipment), the capability (organizational structure for protection, tolerant and well-trained staff), the dynamic

integration of which can form a fundamental competence of the institution: to provide educational services, ensuring physical and mental safety of the students.

At the same time, as Iosifescu Serban considers [4], we can thus define two sides of quality:

- the objective - expressed through standards, which represent the compliance of EI with some specifications, which refer to the process, system, results;
- the subjective - expressed by the satisfaction of customer's needs towards the educational services provided, which represents the attractiveness of these services.

Customer requirements, in EIs case, are expressed in terms such as "what should a graduate know and be able to do?", "Which are conditions in which the educational process takes place?" Etc. Nowadays these requirements are implicit, some of them not being subject to a contract. The identification and definition of them cannot be the exclusive domain of EI, but must be carried out successfully only together with customers' representatives.

The customer often uses the concept of quality when he considers a product, a service or anything else in relation to which he has an interest. The Client is saying that he has acquired a high quality product, that there was provided a service of an excellent quality or that a certain person is not of a very good quality to the extent of the interest that has been satisfied towards that product / service / person.

An important element, relative to the concept of quality is the interest towards the object / subject of matter. The concept of quality has no object if there is lack of interest. Interest is the form of manifesting a need of which we are more or less aware.

A need can be satisfied in the extent that there is a certain competence to satisfy that need. We can be appreciated as competent, we are a competent EI in the extent that we meet certain requirements / needs (expressed or not) of those interested in the results of our activities.

Concluding everything said up till here, we can affirm: the quality is strictly subject to the level of competence. We may say that a service is of a high quality (gives high satisfaction) if the person that provided is competent.

## **1.2. The Product of educational institution**

The product is the result of any process. This result can be a good, a service or a piece of information. When we talk about a product, we don't refer only to a tangible good, but also to services and information that are the results of common processes and results provided by EI.

A major study related to the quality of services in the economy of knowledge was conducted by Vargo and Lusch [apud 5], who suggest that the major changes in the way of thinking of the producers are: (1) "from the way of thinking from the view of the company's goal to achieve something (products or services), to a process of client assisting in their processes of value creating" (2) "from the way of thinking on the value as being produced and sold, to the thinking of the value being co-created together with the customers and other partners to create value", (3) "from the way of thinking regarding the customers being as isolated entities, to understanding the context of their own networks (4) " from the way of thinking regarding the firm resources as being mainly tangible (such as natural resources), to the thinking of them being intangible (such as knowledge and skills)" (5) " from the way of thinking on consumers as targets to the thinking of consumers as a resource ", and (6) " from putting efficiency as the main thing, to increasing efficiency through effectiveness ". We believe that these changes in the way of thinking are a priority for teachers and management staff of the system of education, if we want to achieve quality.

On the education segment, the final product of EI is not the graduate, but its human development as an added value, the competence gained by it by graduation. That means the results of learning, results expressed in terms of:

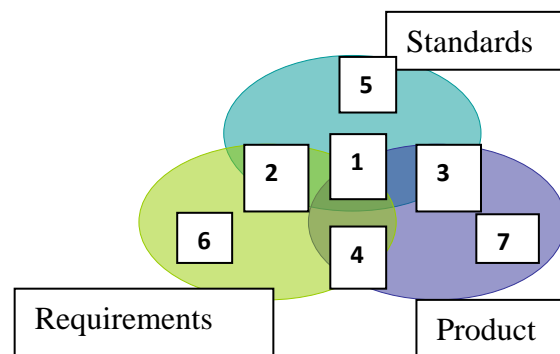
- Gained knowledge; Formed intellectual abilities , level of development of these abilities (to be documented, to process information, to systematize, to unite in cognitive structures, to operate inductive and deductive reasoning);
- Abilities of implementing, using acquired knowledge to deepen, gain new information, to solve theoretical and practical problems;

- Personality traits: attitude, behavior;
- Level of culture, professional training, the preparing quality of the graduates.

All these results are correlated with educational aims expressed in "to know", "to know how to do", "to know how to learn", "to know how to be" i.e. knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, which are obtained by attending an educational level, which enables the graduate to effectively affirm himself in the social environment, to continue his studies or to realize himself as a professional in a specific area of the socio-economic life.

Figure 1 presents the possible consequences, the results of interaction of: requirements, standards and product (educational services), respectively:

1. Performance;
2. Unsatisfied Quality;
3. Formal quality;
4. Non-formal quality;
5. Unsatisfied Specifications;
6. Unsatisfied needs;
7. Waste.



**Fig. 1 The model of analysis of activity results in terms of quality assurance**

Applying the model proposed by us, which is a way of analyzing the results of interaction: requirements, standards and product (educational services) we can analyze the activities and the obtained results (performance, unsatisfied quality, formal quality, non formal quality, unmet specifications (standards), unsatisfied needs, waste) to obtain performance (achieved requirements and standards) through a continuous improvement. In the view of ISO 9001:2015 (ISO Standard), the continuous improvement aims to achieve a performance management.

Applying a performance management for EI is very important because:

- it allows to evaluate the current state of EI as a whole;
- it offers a coherent and balanced framework for improving performance in: management, educational and research activities, evaluation.

Performance management is, in fact, the way how a EI is run, reflected in the nonfinancial and financial effects of its performance. It consists of organizational culture and the working system. Performance is a dynamic process that follows in a natural manner the progress of a EI. The reasons for applying performance management within an EI are mainly the following:

- The will to work more efficiently, with lower consumption of resources and time;
- The willing to work for clear objectives, well defined and acknowledged by each employee;
- The need to know any time what actions must be accomplished and justifying their implementation;
- The will to obtain satisfaction and both professional and material recognition by all members of EI.

In this way, one can identify the main features of a performing management. The first feature refers to the fact that EI should have a focused vision oriented towards the "effect" and in this context to be lead by a well established mission. From this approach, we conclude that the following strategic aspects should be well defined:

- A clear direction, arising from the customers' needs and preferences which EI addresses to;
- The comprehensive set of objectives which should be accomplished by EI to meet its customers' quality needs regarding the quality of the products, so it means strategic objectives and clearly established policies;

- A coherent set of performance indicators which can keep EI on the right road, therefore, operational tactics and plans;
- Reconsidering the role of student, which is subject, client and partner in the educational process;
- Transition from hierarchy organized educational systems to flexible and mobile learning systems and oriented to customer satisfaction;
- Concern for social and professional skills training;
- The use of information technologies to communicate in education (computer, Internet, virtual role play) for: design teaching, learning organization, assessment of academic value added obtained by the student;
- Reconstruction of school space in order to create a learning environment able to support interaction, cooperation, fair competition, competitiveness, equity, experience and opinions exchange.

Using the model proposed by us, we can analyze EI processes and services to improve the activities and to get a competitive product. In this way we will tend to realize the following: the product will contain all the provisions of the standards and requirements of customers, and also will provide a valuable addition, developing them.

The model of analyzing the results of activity in terms of quality assurance was validated experimentally at the activities of organization and professional development from the Institute of Educational Sciences of Moldova. The trainees (121 school managers and master degree students) were asked to evaluate the model according to the following criteria: utility, efficiency, applicability. The assessments to all these criteria were over 85%, allowing us to consider the model as being valid.

### **1.3. Evaluation of the quality of teaching**

In quality management philosophy, the dialogue and agreement to all partners in establishing and monitoring the processes is an essential condition. Consequently, the students as consumers of educational programs should be encouraged to actively participate in the process of ensuring the quality of education. This is part of the policy of building culture quality in school environment.

With this purpose, the educational institution will establish a continuous and systematic process of obtaining information regarding customer requirements. The data are used to ensure the efficiency of the process of teaching-learning-evaluating.

The information that can be obtained from the students is various and with a special utility and refers to: the student-teacher relationship (availability, accessibility, timeliness), teaching ethics (honesty in relationships with the students, positive attitude toward the students), the level of difficulty of teaching activity, the communication ability of the teacher (clarity and organization in exposure), the information provided meets the expectations of students and is updated, the knowledge gained the teaching activities (the volume, quality, knowledge utility), level of attention and interest aroused by the teaching activity, equity in evaluation (accuracy and objectivity of the evaluation methods, the clear specifying of marking criteria), teacher's passion for teaching, choosing and using the most appropriate methods of instruction and evaluation, suggestions for improving the teaching activity.

Ensuring the quality of teaching staff is a fundamental requirement for any educational institution that aims to apply its own strategy in the field of quality of educational programs and activities.

**Conclusion:** As a result of analyzing the approach of quality assurance in education, in scientific researches and development trends of education in Moldova, Romania and other EU countries, we can say that in order to ensure real quality in EI, it is necessary to develop institutional competence, it is necessary to ensure the functioning of a system of quality management and its continuous improvement, it is necessary to guide the activities towards satisfying customers and other interested party in order to obtain performance and excellence.

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Figure 1 - The model of analysis of activity results in terms of quality assurance

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