

MEASUREMENT OF STUDENTS' SATISFACTION IN LIEPAJA UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Higher education establishments are very important in implementation of European Union strategy “Europe 2020”, respectively in advance and maintenance of growth. Main educational target of Europe 2020 strategy is to achieve that 40% of youth would graduate successfully the tertiary education by 2020. The preventive work performed by higher educational establishments is important to achieve the aim that is partially justified with the analysis of students’ inquiry data and conceptualization of obtained conclusion. Liepaja University (hereinafter – LiepU) implements a quality management system (hereinafter – QMS) in accordance with the requirements of the standard ISO 9001:2009. QMS has developed procedures that regulate the measurement of overall student satisfaction. Accreditation provisions of study programmes of the institution of higher education or college and study direction were adopted in 2013 in the Cabinet of Ministers on the base of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education were it is determined that “... the Ministry of Education and Science or the authorized institution elaborates and the Committee for the Accreditation of Studies approves the compulsory issues to be included in the questionnaire of students, employers and graduates”. At this moment such document is not elaborated, however the higher educational establishments, being aware of the development possibilities of their activity, summarize themselves information on the aforementioned issues, and especially on satisfaction of students with the study programs they have chosen. It’s a topical matter to introduce the guidelines elaborated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education which anticipate that the educational establishments provide not only gathering and analysis of information required for efficient management of curricula and other activities, but also application thereof.

Aim of the research was to detect the criteria for measurements of satisfaction of students offered in current European normative documents and update importance thereof not only the internal quality provisions system of Liepaja University, but also in implementation of the study programs.

Keywords: Quality of higher education, internal quality provision system of a higher educational establishment, criteria for measurements of satisfaction of students.

Introduction:

Internal quality provision system as a compulsory requirement in the institution of higher educational establishments was updated from study year 2011/2012 on the base of the requirement included in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education section 5 *Tasks of Institutions of Higher Education* part 2.1 where it is specified that the institutions of higher education shall implement their internal quality assurance system, establish a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education, develop mechanisms for the creation of their study programmes, for internal approval, for supervision of activities and periodic inspection thereof, develop and make public the criteria, conditions and procedures for the evaluation of student results, which enable reassurance of the achievement of the anticipated study results, develop internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of academic staff and the work quality, it shall be ensured that information regarding student results, graduate employment, the satisfaction of students with the study programme, the work effectiveness of academic staff, the study funds available and the disbursements thereof, essential indicators of the activities of an institution of higher education is compiled and analysed. Accreditation provisions of study programmes of the institution of higher education or college and study direction were adopted in 2013 in the Cabinet of Ministers on the base of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education where it is determined that “... the Ministry of Education and Science or the authorized institution elaborates and the Committee for the Accreditation of Studies approves the compulsory issues to be included in the questionnaire of students, employers and graduates”. At this moment such document is not elaborated, however the higher educational establishments, being aware of the development possibilities of their activity, summarize themselves information on the aforementioned issues, and especially on satisfaction of students with the study programs they have chosen. Liepaja University (hereinafter LiepU) implements a quality management system (QMS) in accordance with the requirements of the standard ISO 9001:2009. QMS has developed procedures that regulate the measurement of overall student satisfaction.

The procedure prescribes that a questionnaire on overall satisfaction of students is performed at the beginning of term 2. All students of LiepU are questioned. Results of the questionnaire are available in LiepU QMS. Results are prepared both for faculties and each study program individually, that is

afterwards included by the dean in the faculty self-evaluation report and by the directors in the study program self-evaluation reports. Summary of overall student satisfaction questionnaire results is described in LiepU self-evaluation report.

I:

In the European higher education planning documents it is specified “... that education and especially the higher education and its link with the research and innovation has a decisive meaning in development of individuals and the public and provision of highly qualified human capital and competent citizens who are necessary for Europe to create workplaces, growth of economics and welfare” (9, 2). In the result, the higher educational institutions are very important in implementation of Europe 2020 strategy, respectively in advance and maintenance of growth. Main educational target of Europe 2020 strategy is to achieve that 40% of youth would graduate successfully the tertiary education by 2020. With emphasis on responsibility of member states and educational institutions in qualitative implementation of the reform, the “knowledge of triangle” (9, 3) is emphasised that consists of education, research and business and that is materially influenced by international mobility of students, researchers and personnel and evaluation of international aspects. So the opinion of parties involved in provision of quality on material program improvement issues is very important in provision of study quality. Since the summarization of opinions and finding a compromise in definite social and economic conditions is a complex occurrence, the attention in this summarization is paid to the criteria for measurements of satisfaction of students that must be considered both complex and in connection with the existing higher education external quality provision system of Latvia and internal quality provisions system of the higher educational institution, namely, LiepU.

When characterizing the possibilities of measurement of student satisfaction, the definition of quality of higher education must be emphasized. Taking into account the specific features of pedagogy as a science that offers a range of different explanations for individual categories, the following definition of quality is used in the research Quality – sign, property or totality thereof that characterizes the conformity of a subject, occurrence or process to particular preliminary foreseen (proposed) requirements (10). But on the base of the conclusions obtained in the project “Assessment of higher education study programs and suggestions for increase of quality” of European Social Fund, the quality of higher education may be characterized as a conformity directed to some measurement result, quantitative, standardized or qualitative, previously hard-to-define results, respectively “quality as a conformity to the aim” (1).

In this definition, aims of the higher education institutions, their content are very important. Since the higher education institutions implement several tasks concurrently, namely, provide acquisition of high level education that corresponds to the requirements of labour market and the needs of state, provide each person with acquisition of higher education to develop the personality, provide development of science and give investment in formation of democratic society, the criteria of students' satisfaction analysed in the article may be assessed by taking into account the aforementioned tasks.

The opinion on the different targets of students when commencing the studies at an educational institution fixed in the aforementioned research is important in the context of the article, namely, the students are to be divided in three groups where the aim of the first group is to obtain knowledge to develop the personality, acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge to be used in the work. Aim of the second group is to receive certification on acquisition of particular education and the aim of the third group is to continue studies at higher level because they like learning/studying already from secondary school. In the result each target group will have its own determining satisfaction criteria. When assessing the achievements from the point of view of market, it is the easiest to measure the satisfaction as conformity to external standards. Higher education institutions understand the satisfaction as achievements, distinctions and deserving an academic acknowledgement, etc.

Quality of higher education is nowadays closely connected with the results of learning (studies) the importance whereof is emphasised once again in higher education policy documents at European level. Approach of learning results is more and more accepted as the decisive principle in the education sector of the current cooperation that is provided by the necessity to focus the education to precisely defined standards that are determined jointly by the concerned parties – society, labour market and the individual. All European instruments and processes, and especially the framework structure and credit point transfer systems implemented at this moment are based on this approach. Basically, results of learning are the sole common element for all events and mechanisms of education. Existence of results of learning provides common language for the dialog on tasks of education and this causes better understanding of learning. Results of learning are more and more frequently used as a base for the standards of professions and education, assessment criteria, descriptions of qualification of education and level descriptions in the national qualification infrastructures. In all these instruments, results of learning are defined in different degrees of details and are anticipated for several purposes (e.g. determine what abilities can be expected from a person who has obtained the particular educational

qualification; management of learning process; management of assessment process). Although there is no common approach in application of the results of learning, common understanding of the main ideas and principles facilitate introduction of such common European tools as European credit point system of professional education and training and system of transfer and accrual of European credit points because the results of learning from the base of them (4).

When updating the quality issues in the higher education, it is important for the higher education institutions not to get confused in the crush of the preliminary foreseen requirements, maintaining the autonomy of higher educational institutions prescribed in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education adopted in Latvia, and summarizing the opinions of parties (in this article – the students) involved in the processes of higher education regarding the topical issues providing the quality.

Especially topical it gets when new normative documents are elaborated and adopted. At this moment, the following external quality provision documents are topical to provide the quality of LiepU studies which are the base for operation of the internal quality provisions system:

- study programs licensing provisions;
- provisions regarding the national standard on academic education;
- accreditation provisions of institutions of higher education, colleges and study directions;
- standards and guidelines for quality provision in the space of European higher education;
- results of the project “Assessment of higher education study programs and suggestions for increase of quality” of European Social Fund;
- requirements for ECTS label;
- U-Multirank pilot project;
- draft provisions on national standard of second level professional higher education.

When characterizing the Quality Management System implemented by LiepU, its advantages regarding the satisfaction of students are:

- Provisions for assessing the directions anticipate a definite procedure for preparing the reports: reports of study directions – reports of self-evaluation of faculties – report of self-evaluation of the university – work plan of university;
- Management procedures of organization are formed in the implemented Quality Management System;
- Overlapping of similar programs of one study direction is eliminated offering specialization modules and, within the limits, full cycle study programs;

- Alignment of full time foreign students in the study process is implemented;
- Improvement of professional skills of university lecturers is implemented with participation in mobility programs and international projects.

But the following statements testify of the weaknesses of the internal quality:

- Irrespective of the fact that extension of professional skills acquisition spectrum has taken place, unsystematic involvement of the concerned parties in the program development and decision-making processes is observed in individual study directions;
- Irrespective of the offer of budget study offers and the attempts to create and reform the existing study programs, a comparatively high proportion of expelled students is in the sciences and the funding for the aforementioned study programs is endangered;
- Proportion of theoretical studies over the practical ones and incomplete usage of e-study environment;
- Lacks in assessment criteria of independent works of students and results of studies.

Referring to the normative documents regulating the external quality of education, attention was paid to the criteria for measurements of satisfaction of student that are focused on evaluation of studies. A requirement to provide the questionnaires of students is included as a suggestion in most of the external normative documents mentioned in the article. Particular indicators are mentioned in the materials of U-Multirank pilot project (2).

Indicators for assessment of studies – questionnaire of students

- overall assessment of the program;
- assessment of teaching;
- assessment of infrastructure;
- arrangement of program;
- arrangement of program towards the science;
- quality of courses.

But in the description of higher education quality improvement methods by the Higher professional education expert group of Netherland that is based on EFQM (European foundation of quality management) model, it is suggested to analyse the following aspects included in criteria: assessment of students in accordance with the profile of profession / end results of education, study plan, study components, study load degree, evaluation of success, study environment, study carried advising, informing the society and provision of relevant information on the particular study course (5).

The recommended indicators or data on satisfaction that can be used to measure the satisfaction of students in the particular aspects are the following: satisfaction with study load, the amount of load for each component such as lectures, independent work, tests, etc; with assessment of success; with availability of lecturers, advisors; with improvement of scientific and professional qualification of lecturers – regarding to the content, preparation and holding of lectures; with coordination of study plan, with professional orientation, with registration and administering of complaints; with planning of lectures; with provision of information; with rooms; with formal and informal involvement of students; with accommodations of students; with open days, informative materials, with content of education; with work methods, with study materials, with computer provision; with the work of mentors, advising of students, religious care (5).

Documents describing the higher education rooms mentioned also other measuring standards, such as number of complaints; number of students participating in the official decision-making bodies; number of students using particular accommodations of students; number of students using (particular) computer provision, media libraries, etc.

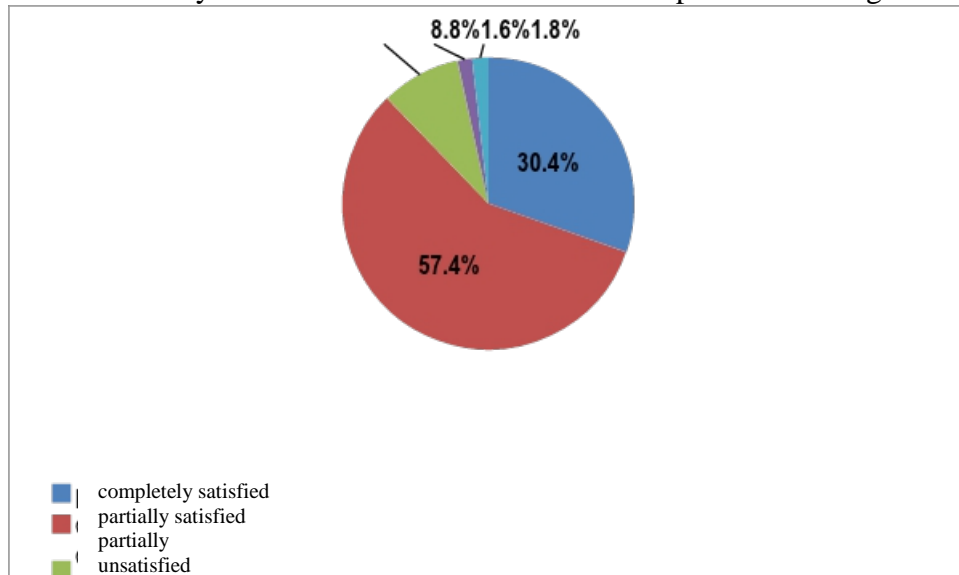
Guidelines anticipating that the educational institutions collect, analyse and use information required for efficient management of curricula and other activities elaborated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education shall be used as a base to be able to implement the tasks of a higher education institutions referred to in the introduction. As to the satisfaction of students, in the aforementioned guidelines it is specified that information on satisfaction of students with the study program shall be summarized, analysed and used in further work of higher education. The guidelines are also the base for elaboration of Cabinet Regulations of Latvia.

The different quality assessment documents offered to the higher education institution propose different criteria that encumbers selection of the most important criteria for development of the higher education institution. Existence of individual criteria contradicts with the structure of higher education program (e.g. Latvian language for a foreigner, requirements of Civil Protection Law and Labour Safety Law). Methods for acquisition of data are not clear for part of the criteria.

When characterizing the work performed by LiepU in 2013 in context of measurement of overall student satisfaction, payment is to be paid to the following conclusions: satisfaction measurements were performed in accordance with the procedures of the quality management system; the following principal criteria were selected to measure the satisfaction: overall satisfaction with the study program; study results and their relation with

development of personality and needs of the labour market; funding for the education; study process and practice; mobility; student service; the results obtained were described both in program reports and in the self-evaluation reports of LiepU.

Summary of overall satisfaction for 2013 is represented in Figure 1.



To what extent are you satisfied with the chosen study program? (figure 1)

The results obtained testify that 30.4 % students are completely satisfied with their study program and 57.4% are partially satisfied.

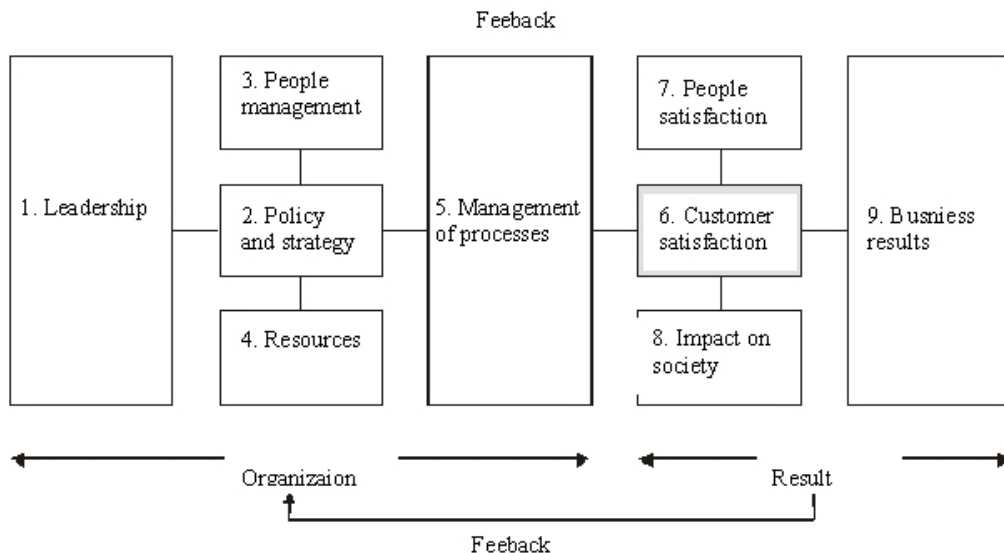
When compared the overall satisfaction of students per year (see Figure 2),

2012/2013	2011/2012	2010/2011	2009/2010	
30.4%	32.9%	25.2%	35%	completely satisfied
57.4%	57.2%	60.9%	55%	partially satisfied
8.8%	7.9%	10.7%	9%	partially unsatisfied
1.6%	1.6%	2.5%	1%	completely unsatisfied
1.8%	0.4%	0.6%	0%	no answer

Comparison of overall satisfaction of students per years (figure 2)

the number of students who are completely satisfied with the chosen study program has reduced a bit, but the number of students who are only partially satisfied with the chosen study program has increased a bit, and the number of those students who are completely unsatisfied with the chosen study programs has also increased a bit. Although small % changes can be seen in figure 2 that can be measured in tenths, attentions shall be paid not only to the acquisition and analysis of the measurements of satisfaction of students, but also to further application of data obtained. It is displayed

graphically in the description of methods for improvement of higher education quality that is based on excellence model of European Fund for Quality Management (hereinafter – EFQM model) (7) (see Figure 3).



EFQM quality model (Figure 3)

Using the EFQM model to use the data obtained from measurements of student satisfaction, the main thing for a higher education institution is to determine the extent to which the organization fills the direct customer, i.e. the expectation of students. The overall experience shows that the most frequently used world-scale guideline regarding the quality is the quality norms of 9000 series of International Standardization Organization (ISO) and the higher education institutions satisfying the norms of ISO may get an ISO certificate. By means of EFQM quality model, also in this case we can compare:

- the objects related with the stages;
- the objects related with the criteria;
- functioning of the system.

According to the opinion of education quality experts, the central element of ISO assessment is the control of those processes that should lead to a specific product and norms these processes must meet. ISO doesn't control the quality of products or quality of content of education in case of educational organizations. When compared with EFQM model, ISO is focused to "leadership" (particularly to distribution of responsibility among the levels of management), "people management" and "People satisfaction". In the result the main emphasis is put on "management of processes". ISO is a great system for quality control, but it gives only the indirect references for improvement. It's not possible to use ISO for arrangement purposes (except

“yes” and “no”). When using the EFQM quality model, the used idea “criterion” (e.g. student satisfaction) is broad and a range of individual criteria must be discussed to assess it, e.g. satisfaction with leadership, policy and strategy, people management and resources.

The higher education institution must update the written questionnaires of students regarding the arrangement of program and quality of study components/program elements to implement the requirements on applicability of data obtained from measurements of student satisfaction which is included in the guidelines of education. Obvious measures shall be implemented on the base of the assessment results. The results obtained and events organization experience shall be discussed regularly with the students.

Conclusion:

1. When implementing the internal quality provisions system in the higher education institutions, quality of the higher education is characterized as a conformity directed to some measurement result, quantitative, standardized or qualitative, previously hard-to-define results, respectively “quality as a conformity to the aim”.
2. When updating the quality issues in the higher education, it is important for the higher education institutions not to get confused in the crush of the preliminary foreseen requirements, maintaining the autonomy of higher educational institutions prescribed in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education adopted in Latvia, and summarizing the opinions of parties (in this article – the students) involved in the processes of higher education regarding the topical issues providing the quality.
3. Liepaja University implements a quality management system (QMS) in accordance with the requirements of the standard of International Standardization Organization 9001:2009 and the system was certified in 2013. QMS has developed procedures that regulate the measurement of overall student satisfaction. ISO is a great system for quality control, but it gives only the indirect references for improvement (except “yes” and “no”).
4. With voluntary participation in European Education quality assessment systems, having analysed the experience of other universities outside Latvia, methods are searched to fix results that correspond to the criteria. In the result LiepU quality management system and cooperation of Sociological Research Centre in processing of questionnaires and summarization of results is consolidated.
5. When using the EFQM quality model to ensure the internal education quality, the guidelines elaborated by the European Association for

Quality Assurance in Higher Education must be updated which anticipate that the educational establishments provide not only gathering and analysis of information required for efficient management of curricula and other activities, but also application thereof to reach particular aims in their work.

6. The higher education institution must update the written questionnaires of students regarding the arrangement of program and quality of study components/program elements to implement the requirements on applicability of data obtained from measurements of student satisfaction which is included in the guidelines of education. Obvious measures shall be implemented on the base of the assessment results. The results obtained and events organization experience shall be discussed regularly with the students.

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