

# HARMONIZATION OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT ASPECT

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## DEFINITIONS OF KEY WORDS

*Harmonization of higher education system* – the unity of higher non-university and university studies and harmony of all its parts when the content and form of studies is explicitly defined.

*The binary system of higher education* – entirety of university and non-university level study programmes which are delivered at universities and colleges.

*Quality improvement of studies*– systematic and steady procedures supported by an action plan or conditioned by participants and assessors of a study process that facilitate to ensure the quality of studies.

## INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe/UNESCO convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region (1997) and The Bologna Declaration (1999) are the documents that explicitly determine trends and tendencies of higher education. In the context of various changes and globalization knowledge society is raising specific requirements for higher education which is essential for achievement of public welfare. For this reason scholars devote a great deal of attention to the position of higher education and examination of its problems. Research has been carried out into the formation of the binary system of higher education, its perspectives and their influence on studies. These issues were examined by P. Jucevičienė (1997, 1998 and 1999). Responsibilities raised by the binary system were discussed by Bražiūnas (2001), Lepaitė (2003) and Targamadžė and Krivickas (1996). The transition of higher education into mass higher education was researched by Barnett (1994), Gudaitytė (1998, 2000 and 2002) and Jucevičienė (1998). A lot of attention has been given to the topics of quality assurance of higher education, assessment of the quality of university studies and parameters of the quality assessment system of studies. However, hardly anything is mentioned about harmonization of higher education as a means of quality improvement of studies.

*The aim of this article* is to discuss the harmonization process of higher education in quality management aspects.

*Object* – harmonization of higher education studies quality.

*Research methods* include the analysis of scholarly literature and documents in terms of harmonization and quality of higher education studies.

The needs of the world of work, market economy and knowledge society conditioned the transition of higher education into mass education and stimulated processes of its diversification (a phenomenon when higher education becomes a diversified and, usually, binary system). The phenomenon of the transition of higher education into mass education has touched a great number of European and other countries where the binary system of higher education has been established (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Philippines, Japan, Cyprus, Croatia, France, Latvia, Poland, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, Holland, Portugal, etc.). A frequent case was to establish, beside universities, university colleges providing higher education (Great Britain) or in higher university type schools to realize non-university higher education programmes (Spain).

In theoretical literature one can find various models of higher education classification. J. Jallade distinguishes binary, unified (a university system which includes colleges realizing non-university study programmes) and fragmentary higher education institutions which because of their diversity cannot be considered neither binary nor unified, e.g., in France) systems. (Jucevičienė, 1997). P. Scott (1996), cited by P. Jucevičienė (1997), notes university, binary, unified and stratified promising, all inclusive and comprising diverse institutions systems. Defining the binary system P. Scott (1996) emphasizes that these are not lower than university level higher education institutions which are established to expand the higher education system and to encourage the competition of universities with them. A. Targamadžė points out that ‘the binary higher education system alongside classical universities that train wide profile specialists special universities emerged training specialists of a more narrow but more specific and deeper education’ (1997, p. 43). After the analysis of legal acts and articles published in scholarly literature it became clear that the binary system and non-university studies were necessary in the Lithuanian higher education system. When the reform of higher studies began and the Law on Higher Education was passed in 2000 non-university studies, which had already been popular for some time in other countries, were legitimized. The legitimating of non-university studies was influenced by The Council of Europe/UNESCO convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in

the European region (ES PHARE programme, 1999). This process is also motivated by endeavor to realize principles of the common European education space and realization of the Bologna declaration (1999) in Lithuania.

The binary system of higher education consolidated in most European countries, the phenomenon of the transition of higher education into mass education, a growing need and popularity of quality assessment of studies also conditioned changes in the Lithuanian education system. The reformation of high studies into non-university was carried out at three levels: 1) at institutional level – since 1991 high schools fulfilled preliminary work and declared “their resolution to become higher non-university type schools” (Levickas, 1999, p. 86); 2) at national level – in 1997 the realization of the ES PHARE higher education programme began, one of the aims of which was ‘improvement of high schools activity: the creation of the assessment and accreditation system of high school study programmes promoting the development of those programmes, thus creating prerequisites for a consistent transformation of high schools into non-university level higher schools’ (Domarkas, 1999, p. 79). In 1998–1999 analysis was carried out aiming to determine which high schools can first start drafting projects of non-university study programmes and submit them for assessment; in 2000 the Law on Higher Education legitimated colleges and enabled to realize non-university study programmes; 3) at international level – according to the data for 1998, from 20 European Union and EFTA<sup>1</sup> countries only two did not have a non-university higher education sector (Higher education of Lithuania, Establishment of colleges in Lithuania workshop; Kolegijų steigimo Lietuvoje studija 1999).

The emergence and development of the binary system has generated diverse discussions. The first scholarly discussions concerning the emergence of a new non-university sector rose in 1996. In the article by A. Targamadžė and J. Krivickas (1996) it is maintained that it is necessary to fill the vacuum of non-university studies in Lithuania and there are two possible ways to do this:

- 1) a quicker way – the integration of a high school into the composition of a higher school;
- 2) a slower one – based on consistent development and the common high and higher schools agreement of non-university studies organization and enabling to retain high school autonomy and independence. When high schools had turned into the third direction and dissociated from university control to be able to gain the status of a completely independent institution that of college, and later when that status had been gained discussions became more active. All these processes determined the development of colleges. Analyzing theoretical literature it is important to pay attention to several main ideas related with the emergence of colleges:

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<sup>1</sup> EFTA – *European Free Trade Association*

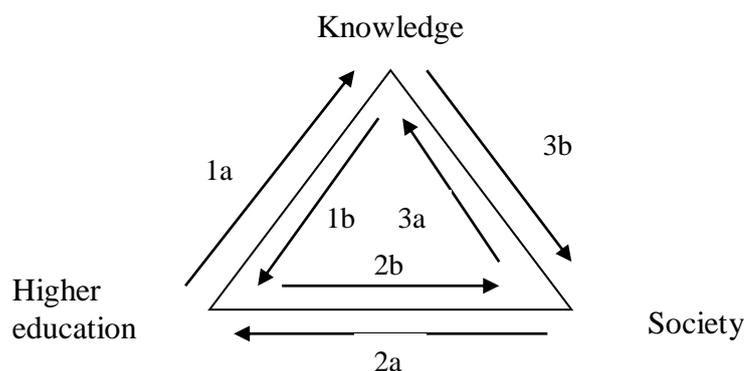
1. A college is protected and controlled by a university, and non-university studies are carried out at colleges associated with universities (Vaitekūnas, Laurutis and Jurkauskas, 1999; Targamadžė and Krivickas, 1996; Targamadžė, 1997).

2. The qualification of academic personnel in high schools and colleges has to be improved or it is insufficient (Targamadžė, 1997; Želvys and Žilinskaitė, 2003). At times the qualification of academic personnel is compared overestimating the experience of other countries, e.g., it is noted that in Germany ‘only people who have the Doctor’s degree and practical work experience of not less than five years after acquisition of this degree can be admitted to teach in colleges (Fachhochschule)’ and that ‘willingness to become colleges with the same collectives of teachers are unfounded’ (Zavadskas, 1999, p. 69 and p. 72). It is stated that the presence of teachers without a scholarly degree in a college contradicts the principle of unity of science and studies (Jucevičienė, 1999).

3. Even high schools aiming at acceleration of their development do not have to be forced to identify themselves with higher schools (Jucevičienė, 1997).

In 2000 first seven autonomous colleges were established. In the same year they offered 41 study programmes and admitted to study 3547 students. In 2001 there were 16 colleges, 96 study programmes and 10337 students admitted, and in 2002 - 16 colleges, 242 study programmes and 26236 students studying in these programmes. A year later, in 2003, 27 colleges existed. The number of universities in 2003 was 20 and in 2004 – 21. Since 2003 the development of new study programmes in colleges and universities has been similar. In 2003 colleges offered 269 study programmes and universities - 945 programmes. In 2004 colleges made available 292 programmes and universities – 975; a year later, in 2005, colleges provided a possibility to study in 305 study programmes and universities - in 994 study programmes (Statistika, [www. mokykla.smm.lt](http://www.mokykla.smm.lt)).

The reform of higher education was stimulated not only by changes in Lithuania but also in Europe. The change of higher education at European level is grounded in the most comprehensive way by R. Barnett’s (1994) triangle which shows the need for specialists of versatile education and high qualification and the need in society for twofold knowledge, fundamental and applied. (Picture 1).



- 1a – knowledge created in higher education (fundamental);
- 1b – newly created knowledge, tested in real life, becomes academic and returns to universities;
- 2a – society expects from higher education institutions high level specialists trained for a specific activity;
- 2b – higher education determines the development of society both by ensuring the training of high level professionals and providing them with versatile education;
- 3a – society is characterised by a relatively selective need for newly created knowledge: it is more interested in applied knowledge;
- 3b – new knowledge is twofold: fundamental and applied. Knowledge of both types is significant for society.

Picture 1. The interaction of higher education system, knowledge and society (based on Barnett, 1994).

A mass character of higher education is both a positive and dangerous phenomenon. Aspirations to get a higher education diploma (e.g., Master's) in pursuit of popularity sometimes even distort the essence of higher education (at the conference 'Master – fashion or a necessity' - 2004), a conclusion was reached that the higher education, as the expression of fashion, is conditioned by the current market situation. It is possible to choose from variety of different study programmes, however, a number of unmotivated students, having not found their study field, resort to any study programme, but by no means at higher school. Different studies show that students often too scantily realize the purpose of university and non-university studies. Part of students who chose colleges frequently regard them as courses enabling to prepare to study at universities, e.g., according to the research carried out in two stages in Marijampolė college by Ž. Advilonienė and A. Murauskienė (2005), 87–93 percent of final year students intend to continue studies at a university. Reality of intentions is verified by the fact that in 1998–2004 43.3 percent of graduates of pedagogical specialties continued their studies at Šiauliai University. A too large number of students in higher schools and academic personnel that is not spared (high teaching load, low pay for work) are raising the need for quality assessment of studies. In 1999 first university study

programmes were assessed in Lithuania and assessment of non-university study programmes began. Criteria of quality assessment of non-university and university study programmes until 2004 differed. For several years now university and non-university study programmes have been assessed according the same criteria, only their structural specification has differed (amount of credits, etc.) However, principles of designing of university and non-university study contents are different and their purpose differs as well. A question arises whether the unification of assessment criteria of these different purpose study programmes agrees with the mission of universities and colleges which is different in both of these higher education institutions. Since the quality assessment of study programmes is an essential part of the system of quality assurance of studies.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The analysis of the development of the binary higher education system in Lithuania reveals that higher university and non-university studies lack harmonization
2. Unified assessment criteria point to the lack of harmonization of higher non-university and university studies as well as difficulties in the realization of the mission of components of the binary higher education system.
3. Harmonization of higher education studies and their quality assurance should be closely related with the quality management of higher education.

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