



HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY: FROM THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT¹

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Teach another, it will be your greatest legacy.

(Dositej Obradović)

Abstract: Important indicators of higher education quality are teaching and learning environments, research reputation and projects, authors' citations, international recognition and collaboration, students' achievements, students' abilities and competencies for their future work. The best way for the university to achieve these goals include good knowledge about the historical context of the development of education and about the needs of a particular society. The aims of our research were to determine: 1) historical values of education as a starting point of its development, 2) how higher education quality is determined in relation to the needs of the society. We have confirmed that modernity and innovation are the basic starting points for the development of higher education. However, it is also necessary to recognize historical values of education as a starting point of its development. The quality of higher education and the best pedagogical practice can only be accomplished if the good sides of the system of traditional teaching are not neglected. These are the historical values of the social system of education and basic educational principles in contemporary higher learning and teaching.

Key words: education development, historical values, society needs, dynamic society changes, innovation

THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

The quality of higher education is a complex and relevant issue due to the increasing competition among higher education institutions and more complex needs of a modern society. It implies students' achievements, determined by

¹ Note: This research was funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Contract No. 451-03-68/2020-14/ 200140).

modern concepts of teaching and learning, as well as developed professional competencies for the future occupation. This quality is also determined on the basis of the research and project activities of teachers, teaching associates and students. A special determinant of the quality of higher education is international institutional cooperation, with students' full engagement and activity. Higher education institutions are obliged to continuously evaluate quality, including the quality of teaching activities and teachers, communication between teachers and students, students' achievements, their satisfaction with the achieved results and acquired professional competencies.

Strategic directions of the education development in the Republic of Serbia clearly define the goals of development and improvement of higher education, possible directions and mechanisms of action for all the factors within this system. The starting points for such actions are the socio-historical and pedagogical contexts in which our higher education has developed and should continue to develop. These starting points are in line with the principles of higher education, on which the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA) were formed. The principles imply respect for institutional autonomy, academic freedoms and flexibility within the system. They also envisage modernization of study programs, compliance of national with European standards and the implementation of the Bologna Process, through learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and competencies of students (Pekic-Quarrie, 2019). Adherence to these principles contributes to ensuring the quality of higher education. This quality implies wider availability of studies, curricula development, student and teacher mobility, pedagogical practice research, employment opportunities and lifelong learning. The above mentioned starting points include a long-term role of our higher education in domestic and international academic, scientific and artistic fields, with the aim of further economic and socio-cultural development of our community and its members.

The development of higher education in Europe implies its openness in the system of preparing an individual for a future profession. This development also contributes to the training of individuals for lifelong learning and improvement of their work. We should not ignore the request to act in order to raise the quality of education at all levels, transparency and competitiveness in the knowledge market (Kopas-Vukasinovic, Golubovic-Ilic and Cekic-Jovanovic, 2017; Strategija razvoja obrazovanja ..., 2012* Education Development Strategy ..., 2012). Therefore, there has been an increase in the number of study programs, especially at the master's level and doctoral studies in the European educational area. International and multidisciplinary study programs in the field of education and management have been organized with the purposes of higher education research and professional

training improvement, promotion of entrepreneurial learning, development of entrepreneurial culture and cooperation with the economy (Kem, 2007; Maksimovic, 2013). These are significant reasons for the development of multidisciplinary study programs, achieving mobility, networking and exchanging examples of good practice and developing research strategies. They also contribute to fostering students' initiative, cooperation and creativity, students' partnership skills, business and innovation, cooperation with the economy. It is also necessary that stimulating, rewarding and training university teaching staff remains purposeful (Ivanovic and Radevic, 2013; Reilly, 2016).

Research confirms that the quality of higher education has three basic determinants: knowledge transfer, knowledge creation and the realization of individual social roles. This further implies that faculties prepare students for the labor market, where they will be competitive with their knowledge and abilities, which contributes to their personal and social development (Bracek Lalic, 2017). However, practice confirms that there are certain limitations to meeting these requirements. The question of the quality of higher education and the efficiency of studying arises. This efficiency is determined by non-systemic factors, such as individual characteristics, student potentials and their family conditions. These factors are often either impossible to influence or can be influenced only to a lesser extent. However, the efficiency of studying is also determined by intra-systemic, institutional factors, which are important for determining the quality of higher education. First of all, they refer to the organization of teaching and scientific work and its effectiveness. The question arises whether it is possible to achieve this effectiveness in a situation that students themselves recognize as problematic, and that is lowering the criteria and expectations that they must meet (Jaric and Vukasovic, 2009).

Research on the quality of higher education confirms the importance of developing modern teaching and learning strategies to develop an individual's ability to think, reason and connect, explore and learn through activities (Desinan, 2011; Stoicai, Morarui & Mironi, 2011). In addition, it is necessary to create conditions for the development of knowledge management systems, in which an individual will be ready to make his/her implicit knowledge explicit. This will contribute to the transfer of the acquired knowledge and its application in practice (Mirkov, 2013). In her research, Elizabeth Christopher (E. Christopher, 2018) deals with the quality of higher education. She identifies four basic components of this quality: 1) good organization, safety and order in the classroom, 2) relationships, outcomes and academic expectations (advanced academic work, changed roles of lecturers, course design, etc.), 3) leadership and development. Similarly, the research conducted by

Ukrainian researchers (Bezpalko, Klishevych, Liakh and Pavliuk, 2016) identified indicators of the quality of higher education, which are classified into four categories: 1) resources of educational activities; 2) organization of educational activities; 3) results of specialist trainings. The following indicators of the quality of higher education have been identified in the category of resources of educational activities: teachers, students, material conditions, methodological support. Indicators of the organization of educational activities are the application of educational technology and the presentation of educational achievements. In the category of results of specialist trainings, the following quality indicators were determined: competitiveness of graduate students on the labor market and their professional achievements.

When it comes to global trends in higher education, the OECD Directorate of Education has published a publication on the assessment of learning outcomes. The authors point out that more than 40-50 years ago, higher education meant a traditional research university, and today the image of modern universities is completely different. According to the needs of modern scientific and technological development, today the profiles and programs of higher education institutions are more diverse. Their internationalization and application of modern technology is also evident, with the strengthening of the responsibility of all participants. In this way, graduates will be competitive in the labor market and prepared for their future occupations according to the needs of employers (Tremblay, Lalancette and Roseveare, 2012).

Based on the presented results of the above foreign research on the quality of modern higher education, we note that the determinants of this quality are recognized in our current strategic directions. They include openness, internationalization, transparency, innovation, competitiveness and development. Efficiency of studies, quality, transfer and applicability of acquired knowledge, connecting theoretical and practical knowledge and skills are the expected outcomes in our higher education. However, we should not ignore the fact that most of these requirements have existed in our education system since the establishment of the first higher education institutions in Serbia. When it comes to higher and high-school education of future educators in preschool institutions, these goals were also realized in the previous periods by careful choice and combination of educational contents, by applying the acquired knowledge in the practical activities of students and by nurturing their creative potentials. In today's concept of university education, these goals are still relevant, with the application of modern technology, design of the teaching content and organization of innovative teaching models.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Starting points for determining the subject and goal of our research are the strategic directions of the development of university education in the Republic of Serbia. The subject of this research is the quality of higher education of future educators in preschool institutions. As the goal of this research, we wanted to establish whether the expectations of the students are adjusted to the current strategic directions of its development when it comes to the quality of their university education and to which extent these expectations and contemporary directions of the development are determined by historical-pedagogical context in which our higher education developed.

In this review paper we will present the results of our research, which we conducted by examining students' attitudes about the quality of their university education, in the period from 2017 to 2019. These results can be a good starting point for establishing a system of measures to improve the quality of our university education.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Before we present and analyze the results of our research, it is important to point out that the quality of education, the acquisition of applicable knowledge and the development of modern society have been the goals of higher education since the first higher education institutions in Serbia were established. Therefore, we will look back on the historical data about the tasks for institutions and requirements for teachers, which we recognize even today in current strategies for the development of education. The Great School of Ivan Jugovic was founded in Belgrade in 1808, following the example of the Hungarian Royal Academy, the first principal of which was Dositej Obradovic. This school is considered a forerunner of higher education in Serbia. The first high school in Serbia (Lyceum) was founded in 1838 in Kragujevac, by the decree of Prince Milos Obrenovic, and in 1863 the first Great School was founded in Belgrade. In 1905, this school officially grew into the first university in Serbia and became the center of scientific, educational and cultural life. The first rector, academician Sima Lozanic, on the occasion of the opening of the University of Belgrade, pointed out that education must be developed and nurtured, because it is a basic factor in the unification and progress of the Serbian people. This idea has remained relevant in Serbia ever since, which is confirmed by the current in-service teacher training programs at all levels. Therefore, it is indisputable that the issue of the quality of higher education is essential for the overall development of the social community

and its members. When it comes to the tasks of teachers, back in 1898, at the grand opening of the Men's Teachers' School in Jagodina, Sreten Adzic, its first director, confirmed that the educational progress of Serbian people is possible only if we teach students to apply the acquired knowledge in life along with the scientific knowledge, to encourage them to be practical, as science cannot be separated from life and from their future vocation. He also pointed out that a teacher must know how to present science to students in an understandable, obvious way, connecting it with examples from life and by its application in life. The connection between education and the economy must be one of the basic tasks of education, for the benefit of the homeland and its people (Djordjevic, Lazarevic and Nedeljkovic, 1998). In these few sentences we recognize the determinants of modern higher education: the quality of education, the acquisition of practical and applicable knowledge, the development of the modern society, the link between scientific knowledge and future occupation, intelligibility, obviousness and applicability as prerequisites for a good quality teaching process.

Starting from this historical context, in this paper we deal with the quality of higher education, connecting the strategic directions of its development with the attitudes of students about the determinants of that quality. We will present the results of three surveys that we conducted in the period from 2017 to 2019. The data we obtained confirm our assumption that students understand and clearly determine the quality of higher education. We find the starting points for their determination in the ideas of prominent professors and founders of the first higher education institutions in Serbia.

The first research was conducted in 2017, in cooperation with the teachers and students of the Faculty of Education, University of Primorska (Koper, Slovenia) and the Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac (Jagodina, Serbia). With this research we wanted to determine how students (N=258) recognize teachers as a factor in improving the quality of university education. The scale of ranks examined the attitudes of students. They confirmed that the quality of university teaching is enhanced by the application of different methods and forms of teaching. Additionally, the quality of teachers' work implies clearly stated class aims, a careful selection of stimulating content for learning and a possibility for applying the acquired knowledge in practice. Students' interest in engaging in teaching activities is conditioned by the quality of teachers' preparation for the class and their ability to find ways to engage students. Students recognize the work responsibility of teachers in situations when the teacher regularly organizes classes, answers students' questions in a timely manner and is available to students during consultation hours (Kopas-Vukasinovic and Lepicnik-Vodopivec,

2018). Based on these results, we can conclude that students believe that the preparation of teachers for work, the organization of teaching activities and the responsibility of teachers are the most important determinants of the quality of higher education.

The second survey was conducted in 2018. With the scale of attitudes, we wanted to determine how students value teachers' work which encourages the development of their professional competencies for future careers. Students, future educators in preschool institutions, the Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac, Jagodina (N = 104) participated in the research. Based on the scale of attitudes, they came up with their claims about the most important determinants of the quality of teachers' work, which contribute to the professional preparation of students for their future profession. The findings confirm that well-organized teaching practice plays a significant role in preparing future educators for their professional work. Furthermore, the applicability of the teaching content and the pedagogical influence of teachers as a model of behavior and actions contribute to the development of professional competencies of students. Improving and modernizing the teaching practice, applying and checking the effectiveness of new approaches in working with children contribute to the quality of the teaching process and determine students' achievement. In this research, students confirmed that university teachers should use more innovative approaches in teaching. They also expect to be involved in research and project activities with teachers during their studies (Kopas-Vukasinovic and Mihajlovic, 2019). These research results confirmed our assumption that students recognize and clearly determine the quality of teachers' work, which ensures the development of students' professional competencies for future careers.

The third research was also conducted in 2018, with students of the Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac, Jagodina, in the teacher and preschool teacher departments (N = 174). Applying the scale of attitudes in this research we wanted to establish whether students recognize the possibility of organizing teaching activities that would encourage greater engagement, better learning and the acquisition of new, applicable knowledge, and if so, in which manner they do that. This research once again confirmed that students recognize the importance of joint activities with teachers, planning and implementation of research projects. They emphasized that this kind of work encourage them to expand their knowledge, enrich their experiences and develop their abilities. They believe that such activities contribute to their motivational readiness for more efficient learning and better acquisition of applicable knowledge. Teachers are expected to organize activities in which students will be able to master the teaching content gradually, step by step, because this kind of work contributes to better adoption of the content

and more permanent and functional knowledge. The quality of teachers' work was determined by the students as the basic factor of the quality of education. They expect teachers to encourage students' initiative and co-operation in the teaching process by applying modern teaching systems. Based on these research results, we can conclude that students expect teachers to encourage them to joint activities and research work. They have made clear recommendations to teachers on how to implement this.

CONCLUSION

The quality of higher education is determined by the quality of teaching and learning of students and joint research activities of teachers and students. The outcomes of such education are recognizable because the acquired knowledge and skills are applicable in practice and transparent, and the graduates are competitive on the market of knowledge and work.

With this research, we wanted to determine whether the expectations of students, when it comes to the quality of their university education, are in line with the current strategic directions of its development. At the same time, we wanted to check to which extent these expectations and modern directions of development are determined by the historical-pedagogical context in which our higher education developed. It was important to determine whether we recognize the importance of historical values, which are the starting points for the further development, in the modern higher education system.

If we compare current strategic directions of development with the historical context in which the ideas about the development of our higher education were born, we notice that the basic ideas of its development arose at the time of the opening of the first university institutions. They focused on, as is also the case today, the availability of education, comprehensibility and obviousness in teaching. These are the basic assumptions of a quality teaching process. The outcomes of such education are practical and applicable knowledge, directed towards developing a modern society, as well as the connection of scientific knowledge with future occupation. In relation to the requirements for the application of modern technology and innovative teaching models, as well as the internationalization of higher education, today we have made significant progress. The progress reflects in the discovery of new possibilities, their application and verification. The overall scientific and technological development of a modern society has created the conditions and provided an opportunity for university systems to improve the work and quality of that work.

In the next research cycle, the starting points for new research will be the results presented in this paper, with the aim of comparing formal determinants of higher education quality with the real situation in the knowledge market and labor market in order to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of university education.

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