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Research on University Education Quality Assurance: Methodology and Results of Stakeholders' Satisfaction Monitoring

Olga Belash[a]*, Mikhail Popov[b], Nicolai Ryzhov[a], Yan Ryaskov[a], Sergey Shaposhnikov[a], Mikhail Shestopalov[a]

[a]*Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University "LETI", 5 Professora Popova Street, Saint Petersburg, 197376, Russia*
[b]*The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 11 Tverskaya Street, Moscow, 125993, Russia*

Abstract

The paper deals with quality assurance in university education and training graduates demanded by the labor market. It reveals the role of research conducted according to the DPCA cycle for the continuous improvement of degree programs. The essential component of a degree program quality assessment and assurance is monitoring of stakeholders` satisfaction with education results. The necessity of quality assessment based on the feedback from students and employers is also proved by the criteria and practice of public professional accreditation of degree programs. The paper presents a complex methodology for monitoring of stakeholders` satisfaction with degree programs education results. The results were obtained at Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University "LETI" (Saint Petersburg, Russia) in the frames of research on quality assurance of its degree programs. Some research results are given based on surveying students and employers on their satisfaction with teaching degree programs. The presented methodology of monitoring students, graduates, and employers` satisfaction with education results can be used by higher education institutions as a mechanism of quality assurance for degree programs.

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Keywords: quality of education; degree program; education results; assessment of quality; monitoring of stakeholders` satisfaction

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-921-790-53-84.
E-mail address: marketing_office@mail.ru

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1. Introduction

As a result of its activities, any university produces two kinds of products:

- Educational programs in the market of educational services;
- Degree programs` graduates for the labor market.

The peculiarity of university educational activities and interconnectedness of the offered products is that its students being direct customers in the market of educational services become a product at the labor market after completing their studies. The problem of teaching students demanded by the labor market should be solved in a systematic way through quality assurance of university education in competitive degree programs (DP). The Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" defines a DP as "a complex of the main educational features (study workload, content, expected learning outcomes, etc), teaching and organizational environment, and forms of attestation" (Federalinyi zakon №273 ot 29 decabria 2012 goda "Ob obrazovania v Rossiiskoi Federacii", 2012).

Quality of education is usually understood as the balanced compliance of education (its outcomes, processes, environment) with identified needs, goals, requirements, norms and standards (Terminologicheskii slovar v oblasti upravlenia kachestvom vishego i srednego professionalinogo obrazovania (proekt), 2005). Quality of a DP is the level of compliance of the program's characteristics and outcomes with the requirements set for this DP (Gerasimov & Shaposhnikov, 2014). There are several approaches to the assessment of quality in education described in the works of Damiechili F. et al. (2011), Dr. Marjorie Peace Lenn (1992), Haris I. (2013), Fatima H. Eid (2014).

One of the effective mechanisms for quality assessment of DPs is public professional accreditation including accreditation according to the international guidelines and rules conducted by some accreditation bodies (e.g members of the European Network for Accreditation in Engineering Education, ENAEE. In Russia it is the Russian Association of Engineering Education, a ENAEE member). The value of such accreditation of DPs is proved by the international experience presented in the works by Finocchietti C. et al. (2003), Judith S. Eaton (2010), Pinedo M. et al. (2012), Yu.P. Poholkov (2010), S.O. Shaposhnikov (2013).

Criteria and procedures of public professional accreditation of DPs have strong attention to the effectiveness of the DP stakeholders` feedback (students, graduates, employers) in terms of their satisfaction with the education results. Assessment of the quality of education based on students` feedback is widely covered in the works by A. Lidice et al. (2013), A. Arbor (2001), A.A. Rusanova (2011), Henard F. at al. (2012). C. Douglas (2001) who pay special attention to the "added value", i.e. what a graduate gets "at the exit" compared to what he had "at the entrance". This approach underlines the validity of assessment of graduates` satisfaction with the education they got. Issues on the importance of quality of education for employers and the employers` role in the quality of education assessment are considered by A. Chevalier (2014), M. Humburg et al. (2013), A.V. Kosminin A.V. et. al. (2011). Thus, monitoring of DP stakeholders is a very important component of the education quality assurance system.

2. Objectives, methodology and research design

A DP quality assurance should be based on the implementation of the PDCA (Plan – Do – Check – Act) cycle which provides continuous improvement of the educational service offered by a university (see Fig. 1).

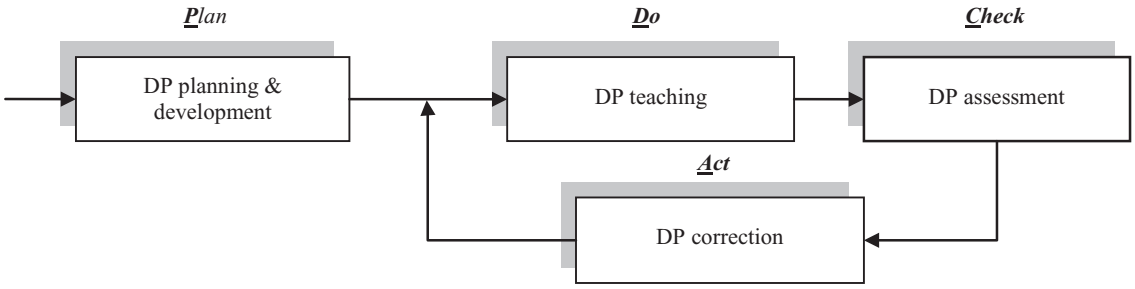

Fig. 1. PDCA cycle of DP continuous improvement

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