COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDY QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS OF ŠIAULIAI UNIVERSITY (LITHUANIA) AND OPEN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT "UKRAINE" (UKRAINE)

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Abstract

In the article the research data on study process assessment in two Lithuanian and Ukrainian Higher Education Institutions (N = 244) have been presented. The research aim is the exploration of the assessment of students studying at Šiauliai and "Ukraine" universities about the study process. Main findings and conclusions states, that student' of both countries Higher Education Institutions similarly assess peculiarities of the study process. Assessing organization of the study process in the aspect of e-teaching/learning technologies, it was noticed that respondents (of both universities) favourably assessed their manifestation in the study process but the obtained statistically significant differences demonstrate different levels of preparation of universities for such organisation of the study process.

Key words: *Studies in higher education institutions, study process assessment.*

Introduction

In the modern society, in the context of fast shifts in various processes, increasingly more focus is given to quality parameters, enabling not only to state the results of the process but also assess the effectiveness of their implementation. Assessment of various processes is widespread in various areas; therefore, it has acquired interbranch features and distinguishes itself by its flexibility (e.g., quality assurance and management models employed in management are also applied ensuring quality of educational processes). However, anyway, the objective to create an effective quality assurance system in higher education, corresponding and cohering with systems in other European countries, is very significant and complex (Žekevičienė, 2005). Study quality assurance models implemented in higher education institutions can distinguish themselves by their component design but particular emphasis should be placed on one of the main components which is significant to all models: the necessity of assessment of interaction between participants of the study process. Analysing researches into study quality at the national level, the necessity of such assessment is also highlighted. Students' feedback

on various study quality aspects is researched (Alifanovienė & Jankauskaitė, 2009; Bobrova et al. 2010; Želvys, 2007), researches in university teachers' (Raišienė, 2004) stakeholders' (Pileičikienė, 2011) opinions are carried out.

Many researches distinguish "study didactics" as a significant aspect of study quality assessment, in other words, methods of learning and teaching. According to Pukelis and Pileičikienė (2006), the paradigm that is "convenient" to effectiveness of the process is the student-centred study paradigm, which emphasises that students should spend much time self-studying but the duty of the higher education institution is to ensure possibilities of such studies. Authors also emphasise the significance of such learning and teaching methods as problem-based learning, project assignments, case analysis, group works and other active methods, promoting students' autonomy.

Developing the ideas of applying such methods in the study process, the possibilities provided by e-learning/teaching are significant. Many authors (Zuzevičiūtė, 2010; Saugėnienė, 2010) offer to treat them as the teaching/learning process grounded on application of modern technologies. Currently, the manifestation of e-teaching/learning ideas, implementing distance teaching/learning, is particularly relevant. According to Valiukevičiūtė (2005), it is developed not that much as modernisation of education processes but as the means of implementing the idea of openness of learning. Exploring possibilities of applying distance teaching/learning in the context of development of continuous professional training, Teresevičienė et al. (2008) indicate that development of distance teaching/learning network, participation of scientific and study institutions in this process create conditions to implement lifelong learning principles, reduce exclusion of various residents' groups (village and city residents', residents of different social groups, etc.). Therefore, preparation of study process participants to take part in the e-teaching/learning process is also a significant "element" reflecting study quality (this is particularly actualised creating joint study programmes).

One more significant component of models of study quality assurance is internationality of the higher education institution, which is accentuated in Lithuanian national documents on education and strategic documents of Šiauliai University (International Strategy of Šiauliai University 2007-2013, Strategic Development Plan of Šiauliai University 2009-2020, etc.), both improving study quality and seeking acknowledgement of higher education at the international level and training specialists who would be competitive in Lithuanian and international labour market.

Since 2011, implementing a unanimous system of study credits (ECTS) and provisions of the Bologna process, emphasis is placed on promotion of students' and teachers' mobility, European cooperation in the quality assurance domain, enhancement of European higher education aspects, focusing on study programmes, institutional cooperation, diversity of mobility and integrated programmes of studies, mobility visits and scientific researches (Bologna declaration, 1999). Promoting interculturality of study programmes, since 2010, the programme of interculturality enhancement includes measures providing possibilities to update both on-going programmes and new joint study programmes (Jungtinių studijų programų bendrieji reikalavimai, 2010). Alongside with implementation of joint study programmes of various levels in higher education institutions (between the country's universities or faculties of universities or with other countries' higher education institutions) it is also significant to carry out surveys on opinions of study process participants on study quality. Therefore, seeking to assess possibilities of implementing joint study programmes in Lithuanian and Ukrainian higher education institutions, the research was conducted, **aiming** at exploration of the opinion of students studying at Šiauliai and "Ukraine" universities about the study process.

Research subject: students' assessment about quality of studies in higher education institutions.

Characteristics of the research process and research sample. During the research, the written survey was conducted (in the mother-tongue of participants), which consisted of 6 diagnostic blocks and 96 features. The structure of the questionnaire consisted of the instruction (instruction manual), the block of social-demographic variables (data about gender, place of residence, etc.) and the main part: the block of diagnostic variables (of the construct). This block consisted of scales for assessment of competencies of the master specialist in social sciences (social work, social rehabilitation), of current and desirable situation related to peculiarities of the study process, and of development of professional activity. Research data were processed, systematised and presented graphically employing SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Analysing data, statistical methods were applied (descriptive statistics, non-parametric Mann-Whitney test) and qualitative-interpretational methods.

The survey was attended by 242 students from Šiauliai (N – 123) and Ukraine (N – 121) higher education institutions. Demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents by Universities, Year of Studies and Place of Residence

	University				
	"Ukraine" University		**Šiauliai University**		
N	121		123		
%	49,6		50,4		
	Year of studies				
	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	
N	30	145	39	28	
%	12,4	59,9	16,1	11,6	
	Place of residence				
	Capital	**City**	**Regional centre**	**Town**	**Village**
N	99	49	27	46	23
%	40,6	20,1	11,1	18,9	9,4

Seeking to ensure reliability of the sample with regard to students' speciality, approximately similar numbers of students of similar specialities were surveyed (of social pedagogy at Šiauliai University and of social work at "Ukraine" University).

Research results. Research instrument applied for the research enabled to disclose students' opinion on various aspects of organisation and implementation of the study process. One of them is learning/teaching methods. Students' opinion in this aspect is presented in Table 2.

Analysing obtained results, reflecting assessment of methods and strategies applied in the study process of students of both countries, it was noticed that the study process was dominated by "traditional" study forms. Students of both countries confirm that teachers are more active in the study process than students both organising and implementing this process. Students are involved in this process in a fragmentary manner: they are given the role of "passive" listeners (*teachers dictate, students take lecture notes, insufficient engagement in general discussions, etc.*). It should also be noted that in the aspect of the country there are statistically significant differences between statements reflecting domination (distribution) of open teaching/learning ideas in the study process, which give a sense to the very learner's active participation in the study process. The analysis of obtained results enables to notice that students of Lithuania noted study process peculiarities grounded on namely these ideas. Students are provided with a possibility to "experience" various roles in the study process, both passive and active, enabling them to create the study process themselves, choosing study forms and strategies.

Table 2
Assessment of Learning/Teaching Methods in the Aspect of the Country

Statements	ŠU (per cent)	UU (per cent)	M-U	p
Studies focus on discovery of scientific, problematic, new knowledge and not on the very knowledge	43,09	47,06	6918,00	0,41
Study process is related to practical activities	65,85	63,03	6855,00	0,36
Teachers familiarise students with their or other scientists' researches and their results, organise discussions to discuss them	55,37	57,63	6817,00	0,51
Drawing up timetables, students' needs are considered	45,90	27,12	5951,00	0,02
Teachers and students cooperate	88,62	71,30	5864,00	0,01
Students' opinion and activeness are important for the majority of teachers	77,24	72,88	6572,00	0,17
During lectures teachers often apply active methods	71,54	61,02	6593,50	0,17
Course materials are delivered in a problem-based and vivid manner	59,02	48,72	6491,00	0,19
Teachers and students take part in project activities	57,38	46,61	6403,00	0,11
Teachers are ready to cooperate and consult not during the lectures (the possibility to find a tutor, be consulted individually, by e-mail, etc.)	80,17	71,19	6181,00	0,05
During lectures the majority of teachers dictate, write on the board and we take lecture notes	58,20	71,43	6587,00	0,18
Only the teacher is mainly active during the lectures	64,75	52,99	5944,00	0,02
The majority of teachers familiarise students with assessment aims and terms in advance	86,18	66,67	4920,50	0,00
Teachers provide students with the possibility to choose the form and the term of accounting	74,80	34,45	4210,00	0,00
During accounting most often all students are given the same assignments	87,70	33,61	2972,50	0,00
Preparing accounting works, students have a possibility to individually choose topics and forms, methods of performance	64,23	31,90	4589,00	0,00
Teachers and students cooperate, conducting scientific researches/disseminating them	54,10	54,62	7148,50	0,83
Knowledge acquired during lectures is related to practice	69,11	58,47	6176,00	0,03

It is also significant that the research instrument provided with a possibility to disclose both the current assessment of the study process and to "see" guidelines of organisation of the desirable (wished) study process. Differences between these assessments provide with a possibility to observe the shift of the "elements" of the study process: from the current manifestation of the feature to the desirable, the one that should be. The value of the least difference indicates high level of implementation and vice versa. Obtained differences are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Difference of Assessing Application of Learning/Teaching Methods in the Study Process: Applied Now vs. should be Applied?

Statements	ŠU	UU
Studies focus on discovery of scientific, problematic, new knowledge and not on the very knowledge	1,55	0,53
Study process is related to practical activities	0,87	0,61
Teachers familiarise students with their or other scientists' researches and their results, organise discussions to discuss them	0,85	0,60
Drawing up timetables, students' needs are considered	1,22	1,33
Teachers and students cooperate	0,53	0,54
Students' opinion and activeness are important for the majority of teachers	0,66	0,51
During lectures teachers often apply active methods	0,73	0,68
Course materials are delivered in a problem-based and vivid manner	0,93	0,39
Teachers and students take part in project activities	0,93	0,65
Teachers are ready to cooperate and consult not during the lectures (the possibility to find a tutor, be consulted individually, by e-mail, etc.)	0,65	0,63
During lectures the majority of teachers dictate, write on the board and we take lecture notes	-0,26	0,20
Only the teacher is mainly active during the lectures	-0,25	-0,01
The majority of teachers familiarise students with assessment aims and terms in advance	0,52	0,36
Teachers provide students with the possibility to choose the form and the term of accounting	0,76	0,92
During accounting most often all students are given the same assignments	0,49	0,54
Preparing accounting works, students have a possibility to individually choose topics and forms, methods of performance	0,79	1,01
Teachers and students cooperate, conducting scientific researches/ disseminating them	0,79	0,63
Knowledge acquired during lectures is related to practice	0,87	0,68

The obtained differences demonstrate that students of both higher education institutions, assessing peculiarities of study process organisation, favourably assessed indicators of this process in the aspect of learning/teaching methods; i.e., the difference between the current and desirable study process is not particularly big. Students of Šiauliai University noted application of methods of problem-based teaching/teaching methods in the study process by the biggest difference (statements: *during studies students are taught to discover scientific, problematic, new knowledge and not the very knowledge; course materials are delivered in a problem-based and vivid manner*). Meanwhile students of "Ukraine" University noted individualisation possibilities in the study process at the higher education institution by the biggest difference (statements: *preparing accounting works, students have a possibility to individually choose topics and forms, methods of performance; drawing up timetables, students' needs are considered*). This demonstrates that the study process in higher education institutions is grounded on different paradigms: from impact to learner-centred; the study process is characterised by the mix of learning/teaching methods. This is confirmed by obtained particularly small differences, assessing statements describing the study process grounded on the impact paradigm (statements: *during lectures the majority of teachers dictate, write on the board and we take lecture notes; only the teacher is mainly active during the lectures*).

Therefore, we can notice that namely orientation of the study process to students is a priority axis of improvement of study quality in both higher education institutions.

The results of assessing study process organisation peculiarities in the aspect of application of modern technologies and participants' competencies in this area are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Manifestation of E-Teaching/Learning Technologies in the Study Process in the aspect of the Country

Statements	ŠU (per cent)	UU (per cent)	M-U	P
Students are provided with possibilities to hear out part of the course unit/all course unit in a distance mode	49,17	44,92	6798,00	0,57
Teachers place part of teaching materials in virtual teaching environments/on the Internet	62,81	50,41	6099, 50	0,03
Students are provided with good conditions to use computers and the Internet	78,69	65,52	5392,00	0,001
In the study process teachers use ICT, presenting / checking/assessing materials	70,83	46,55	4899,50	0,001
There are good conditions to use technical equipment (copy machines, printers, projectors, etc.)	75,41	52,14	5158,50	0,001
Students have a possibility to receive support (consultation) in the distance mode (e-mail, correspondence software, social networks, etc.)	72,13	60,68	5858,00	0,01
There is a possibility to use electronic sources (data bases, articles, etc.)	91,80	60,68	3852,00	0,001

The results demonstrate that in both universities the distance mode of study organisation is given sufficient attention: the majority of students favourably assessed statements describing it. However, almost all statements given for assessment are assessed differently with regard to the country; i.e., the statistically significant difference in this aspect was obtained. This demonstrates that preparation of universities for such organisation of the study process differs. At Šiauliai University students are familiarised with the mode of distance studies, applying virtual learning environments, already in the first year of studies. It should be noticed that students of both countries pointed out that distance teaching/learning possibilities were used only in separate study subjects and were not applied implementing all/part of the study programme. However, namely implementation of e-teaching/learning in the study process, implementing joint study programmes, could contribute to improvement of quality of studies.

Students had different opinions regarding availability of information and communication resources. Šiauliai University students assessed availability of these resources more favourably. Respondents' opinions were particularly different with regard to possibilities of using electronic sources. The majority of Šiauliai University respondents assessed these statements particularly favourably because the community of Šiauliai University has a possibility to use the most modern regional library, which is renewed in frame of The European Science Foundation and has sufficient number of computerised working places and information sources.

Comparing assessment of manifestation of e-teaching/learning in the study process, it was also noticed that students of Šiauliai University more favourably assessed teachers' competencies of applying information and communication technologies in the study process.

The latter demonstrate these possessed competencies both applying such innovative study organisation forms as distance/virtual teaching and during lectures and organising students' self-studying.

Because during the research it was sought not only to identify manifestation of e-teaching/learning ideas in the on-going process but also to assess the need of their implementation, differences between students' current and desirable study process assessments were calculated. Obtained results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Differences of Assessing Manifestation E-Teaching/Learning: Applied Now vs should be Applied

Statements	ŠU	UU
Students are provided with possibilities to hear out part of the course unit/ all course unit in a distance mode	0,93	0,66
Teachers place part of teaching materials in virtual teaching environments/ on the Internet	0,86	0,64
Students are provided with good conditions to use computers and the Internet	0,53	0,63
In the study process teachers use ICT, presenting /checking/assessing materials	0,50	0,71
There are good conditions to use technical equipment (copy machines, printers, projectors, etc.)	0,58	0,80
Students have a possibility to receive support (consultation) in distance mode (e-mail, correspondence software, social networks, etc.)	0,72	0,72
There is a possibility to use electronic sources (data bases, articles, etc.)	0,39	0,79

Obtained differences of assessments enable to notice that respondents favourably assessed manifestation of e-teaching/learning ideas in the study process; i.e., differences between manifestation of the current and desirable feature are not particularly big. Students of both countries equally evaluated possibilities to get support in the distance mode, applying modern information and communication technologies. The obtained difference demonstrates that, in their opinion, existing possibilities are insufficient. Respondents of Šiauliai University mostly missed manifestation of distance teaching/learning in the study process, namely, possibilities provided by it were assessed as particularly desirable. Meanwhile students of "Ukraine" University mostly wished improvement of existing facilities and learning resources: improvement of conditions to use technical equipment and electronic resources. This way they accentuated the necessity to improve university teachers' competencies of applying information and communication technologies.

The other field of study process organisation assessed in this research is internationality of studies and mobility of academic community at the inter-institutional and international level. The results of assessing peculiarities of the study process in the aspect of internationality are presented in Table 6.

The results of the conducted research enable to state that internationality of the study process is assessed similarly by both "Ukraine" and Šiauliai university students. The obtained percentage estimators indicate that, assessing all statements, not more than 63 per cent assess them favourably. Students' opinions differed mostly with regard to possibilities to take part in student exchange programmes ($p = 0{,}001$). Over 60 per cent of Šiauliai University students noted that they had studying experience in another country's higher education institution and had favourable conditions to get involved in such activities. This can be determined by differences of countries due to the geopolitical issues: Lithuania as a member state of the European Union has a developed network of mobility of academic community. It is also significant to emphasise

Table 6
Assessment of Internationality of the Study Process in the Aspect of the Country

Statements	ŠU (per cent)	UU (per cent)	M-U	P
I have experience of studying in a higher education institution abroad	63,41	36,59	6526,50	0,14
Students who wish are provided with possibilities to take part in students exchange programmes	60,3	39,7	4902,00	0,001
Lectures are often delivered by teachers from foreign countries	41,9	58,1	6426,00	0,22
The university provides with possibilities to take part in international seminars and conferences	54,5	45,5	6014,50	0,14
Students are provided with possibilities to take part in the lectures of teachers from other higher education institutions	57,00	43,00	6599,00	0,20

that students' opinion regarding teachers from other foreign countries differed. More than a half of Ukraine University students and less than a half of Šiauliai University students indicated that teachers from foreign countries often delivered lectures at their universities. Such results enable to notice that it is important for higher education institutions to take part both in academic mobility programmes and other programmes enhancing internationality (e.g., creating joint study programmes with foreign countries' higher education institutions). Assessing mobility of academic communities, Šiauliai University students more favourably assessed the process at the international level rather than at inter-institutional level, whilst "Ukraine" University respondents, vice versa. The latter indicate that conditions to take part in students' mobility programmes at the international level in the higher education institution were insufficient.

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Conclusions

1. Students of both countries similarly assess peculiarities of the study process. The majority pointed out that studies were organised applying "traditional" methods and forms: a more active teacher, the teacher chooses and tells topics and terms for accounting, there is a lack of innovative study methods which would encourage students' activeness. Such study methods as problem-based, active teaching, e-learning are assessed as desirable by students of both higher education institutions.
2. Assessing organisation of the study process in the aspect of e-teaching/learning technologies, it was noticed that the respondents (both of Šiauliai University and "Ukraine" University) favourably assessed their manifestation in the study process but the obtained statistically significant differences demonstrate different levels of preparation of universities for such organisation of the study process. Students of Šiauliai University, who have more favourably assessed provided possibilities to use technical equipment, electronic resources (scientific data bases, publications, etc.), put more emphasis on the development of distance teaching/learning possibilities. Students of "Ukraine" University mostly highlighted improvement of conditions to use technical equipment and electronic sources and the necessity to improve competencies of applying information and communication technologies in the study process.
3. Respondents similarly assess internationality of the study process and mobility of the academic community. It must be noted that students of Šiauliai University favourably assessed on-going mobility processes of academic community (have both possibilities and experience of studying in higher education institutions of foreign countries) but unfavourably assessed their possibilities to participate in academic activities of teachers/scientists from other foreign countries (whilst students of "Ukraine" University assessed these possibilities more favourably). Such results enable to notice that improving the quality of studies, it is also necessary to implement other programmes promoting internationality (e.g., implementation of joint study programmes with higher education institutions of foreign countries, invitations of teachers/scientists from foreign countries, etc.)

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