ON THE PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY IN EDUCATION

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In the modern world, educational institutions (and in particular universities) have to stand against stiff competition; they have to compete on a global level. The only way for any given institution to meet this challenge is to stand out from the others and prove that it is stronger and more advanced than the rest. From this perspective of global competition, the question of what is "good" and what is "bad" in education can only be answered in view of quality.

To gain a real understanding of the complex nature of excellence in education, one must consider the meaning of "quality" from various viewpoints, including philosophical, historical and management perspectives. Accordingly, this essay will focus on the nature of education and competition, the development of quality, the role of the state in education, the relationship between education and society, and the relationship between education and the industry/business world. In addition, the work and problems of educational institutions will be considered in both local and international contexts.

The methodology applied here is based on building a framework, using a strategic research process and a comparative approach, and examining historical-geographical developments. This study will attempt to create an organic combination of language concepts, policy and management issues, and mechanisms of quality evaluation.

This paper is partly based on lectures delivered to various groups of academics, senior education administrators, and policymakers.

Between Dreams and Reality One Can Either Crawl or Spread One`s Wings

For most of the 20th century, education— particularly higher education—was considered a state responsibility or a service of the state for the public good. Today higher education is both a state responsibility and a private activity. Education catalyzes change and develops both individuals and society, and without a doubt, it has both a social and a personal nature. Accordingly, current global trends reveal that privatization is increasingly tied to the growth of

education. Almost all of the developed and developing countries in the West, the Near East and the Far East have accepted (or have been forced to accept) private higher education. At the same time, in today's age of mass education, it is impossible to achieve success in education without a comprehensive state policy. If the state doesn't offer a positive environment and a supporting framework of laws, then all efforts toward private education will fail to achieve real progress.

Nearly all the developed and developing countries in the world would like to solve three paramount problems of higher education: 1) to make higher education accessible to all, 2) to increase the quality of higher education, and 3) to hold at a minimum (or even decrease) the state expenditure for higher education. Of course, solving all these problems simultaneously seems to be a contradictory or self-defeating task. There is no simple panacea for these issues. Any reasonable solution demands that a state program be carefully worked out and that strict and consistent management be carried out.

It has been stated in political circles that "education is the most important problem of the state." While this statement is generally accepted by the public, in reality the situation is quite different. The priorities of the state are not evidently topped by education. Other problems which arise are social security, the public health insurance system, the struggle against poverty, and national security. Aren't all these also candidates to be among the most important problems of the state?

Today it is not necessary to have deep or visionary analyses to understand that the power of capital and wealth has taken precedence over politics, the armed forces, and the duties of citizenship. However, the strong human desires for dignity, love and freedom create the need for balance between wealth and justice. Among the factors which protect that balance, the most decisive are the state, mass media, and the education system. Mass media undertakes to consider daily events; thus educational institutions, especially universities, must concern themselves with deeper and more long-term issues. Teaching provides the opportunity to pass on the treasures of knowledge collected through the times of entire civilizations to current and future generations. Likewise, research provides the opportunity to enrich this knowledge and to change lives for the better by putting it into practice. Educational institutions have decisive power to cultivate responsibility in society, to instill feelings of citizenship, and to preserve and develop culture.

The duty of the state to improve, renew and strengthen the educational system contains, among others, two important responsibilities. The first is to work out a

reform program in accordance with the current worldwide body of knowledge by carefully investigating the processes and global trends, looking for existing problems, and seeking ways to resolve them. The second responsibility of the state is to methodically put this reform program into practice. In our lifetimes we have all seen plenty of plans, and we have read about more plans which were introduced before we were born. A few parts of those plans have been carried out perfectly as they were intended, but the majority of them remained only on paper or were carried out superficially, not in essence, and life continued as it was or with unnoticeable differences [1].

He who doesn't advance in time will be left behind. Between dreams and reality one can either crawl or spread one's wings.

> *The President of the Azerbaijan Republic signed an order "About some measures associated with the integration of higher education institutions of the Azerbaijan Republic into the European higher education area" (January 31, 2008). The preparation of the project entitled "State Program to Reform the Higher Education System of the Azerbaijan Republic for the period of 2008-2012" is the substantial clause of that order. The author has begun part of this work with the purpose of assisting at least a little in finding a correct and detailed answer to the question of how the aforesaid state program may best be carried out and improved.*

Reforms and Political Will

Development consists of rationally implemented continuous steps toward the future, and reforms are the key for development. Reform as a planned sequence of changes concerns countries, governments, economies, politics, education and other national systems as well as separate organizations. Although national-level reforms derive from the demands of the time, their success depends on political will; all the associated forces of society must be put into action to bring them into being.

Reforms must not only touch surface issues, but must also reach the roots of the system. Independent technical factors don't play a significant role; is it more important that the society be mobilized. Reforms must be directed towards changing roots and putting them in a new order, or a new system.
If any given national-level reform (i.e. education, health, etc.) targets fundamental changes, the best option is for it to start from a pilot project in order to gain experience and to verify the general plan. Then the proposed

reform must be developed gradually until it affects the whole system. In addition, of course, all the antecedent conditions affecting the issue cannot be ignored. Usually the state takes control of the situation, not from a strategic viewpoint, but by applying tactical steps.

All these issues require not only a comprehensive reform plan but also sufficient time to implement the plan. The innovations and the changes introduced in the first stage are just beginning of the work, and they are not enough to justify sweeping statements. Generalizations in the beginning stage may generate incorrect ideas. The beginning is just preparation for more serious steps to come.

Some interest groups who fear that the outcomes of the reforms will challenge their power may be able to hinder reforms for a certain period of time by ignoring open discussions and avoiding transparency in general. They may in fact reverse any progress made by using hidden chains of unwritten relations for decision making processes.

Making reforms is not an easy row to hoe; there will be some mistakes along with successes. These mistakes have to be considered so that, after amendments have been made to the general plan, the reforms can continue. Reform involves thinking about the present and the future simultaneously.

Reforms in Education

Educational reforms are perhaps the most difficult issue for all countries to tackle. In countries that are developing, particularly in those with transition economies, educational reform demands radical changes and innovation in the thinking and the life philosophy of the people and in their society's value system. What should be learned, how should students learn, and what should the relationships between teachers and students be in a new environment? These and similar questions are difficult to answer. However, these very answers must be considered along the path to reform. Obtaining the people's support and involving them in the preparation for the reform implementation mechanism requires the power and will of leaders.

The outcomes of educational reforms and their influence on society are greatly significant, complicated, and decisive. Fundamental changes in education not only cause individuals to change and development to occur, but they also affect the general attitude toward the socio- political environment. In this era, giving a society an opportunity to adapt to international human values strengthens their

national identity and self-understanding. Education brings a human closer to freedom. Higher education engenders critical thinking.

Educational reforms also introduce into the agenda the strengthening and changing of educational institutions. In fact, this issue is more complicated than individual change, and it is incomparably difficult. Institutional change requires more time and is contingent upon the experience and the will of a governing administrator or administrative body. Moreover, most developing and developed countries recently decreased the amount of spending budgeted per student's education. All these issues create problems for the implementation of reforms and the development of educational institutions, especially in countries experiencing a transition period [2], [3].

Higher education is not only for youth; the continuous development of individuals, and of society as a whole, is based on lifelong learning. In countries where the average life expectancy increases, the adult population is also enlarged. As a result, and due to the nature of modern life, the number of people who want to change their profession or learn something new increases year by year. This phenomenon strengthens the concept of lifelong learning and creates a demand for access to quality higher education at any age.

The main purpose of educational reform is to give individuals the opportunity to receive education, and to increase the quality of that education. Open access to quality education takes a high priority among national developments.

Trends in Development and Diversity of Educational Institutions

What is the goal of the higher education institution? What are the objectives? And what are the ways to achieve these goals and objectives? An individual considering the quality of education first has to address these questions, to define the type and nature of the higher education institution under consideration, and to analyze its problems and successes while considering its missions, goals, objectives and activities.

Some universities may work on implementing programs for undergraduate-level education. Others may be interested additionally, or primarily, in master's degree programs. A third group of institutions may focus on masters and doctoral programs with an emphasis on research. Obviously, in the third case, the higher education institution will not be satisfied with maintaining and disseminating existing bodies of knowledge, but will try to develop and produce new knowledge as its most important task. One institution may prefer to

specialize in one or several fields, while another may adopt the strategy of developing multidisciplinary areas with a wide scope of diverse majors. In any case, educational institutions have a special role in preserving the legacy of history and protecting the heritage of the past.

Higher education institutions can also be pertinent to societal needs by serving the community in various ways. In ancient tribes where formal education was not developed, skills and character development were given special attention. In modern times, as formal education and educational training comprise a huge system that engages only in educational activities, the mission of shaping character falls to the individual, the family and to some degree to the primary and secondary schools. However, it seems that higher education institutions can and should make contributions in this area as well.

Higher education institutions can contribute to character by taking pride in their students, successful alumni, standards of excellence in teaching and research, distinguished professors, technical parks, libraries, etc.

The relationship of the university to the job market is a key factor for both partners; any given university is distinguished by its potential and actual capacity for university-industry relations. Certainly all companies and corporations build up their workforce by hiring the professionals produced by tertiary education institutions. It is also favorable to companies when the research results from universities can be applied in industry and business, increasing their work efficiency and capacity as a whole. Simultaneously, large companies and corporations play an important role in the globalized world in all areas of human development, including the development of tertiary, and firstly, higher education institutions. So, to the traditional duties of higher education institutions (i.e. teaching, learning, and research), modern trends add one more vital duty: that is, finding an organic unity of research and practice. The current development strategy of countries has turned more and more towards building an economy based on scientific research and technology, namely, a knowledge economy. That is why the role of universities, the intellectual creators of science and technology, has increased extraordinarily in importance. Only research-oriented universities are able to build real partnerships with the industry/business world as well as compete internationally; they are "the universities in the world and of the world" [4].

The concept of a student studying at a modern education institution has broadened recently. In times past, in order to enter a tertiary education institution, a student generally had to leave his/her place, relocate to a city , go to a campus, and study in physical classrooms (excepting the kind of education

known as correspondence courses, which rouses mainly negative reactions in many countries). Today, on one hand, universities themselves move to the places where there are many students, including foreign countries, so that they can open branches there (this is a primary example of cross-border education). That is to say, institutions can enter places where students live to be near the students. On the other hand, there are now opportunities for students to get long-distance education. Thanks to the great development of modern technologies, especially the internet, a student can enter into the virtual classrooms of institutions he/she chooses while sitting in his/her house and thus read, write and earn a diploma.

Today, the best educational institutions try to be distinguished not only by their teaching and research, but also by contributing to excellent organizations of student life; universities form complete non-academic support systems in order to make themselves attractive to students in this dimension as well [5], [2].

One of the strongest indicators of the power and influence of the higher education system is probably its diversity. Universities are diverse in terms of their research-teaching nexus, exit-entry policies, target groups and clientele, educational models, output control-process scrutiny, providers, types of financing, student body sizes, egalitarian or elitist types, theoretical-occupational balances, etc. The diversity of the tertiary education system in post-Soviet countries has not been the subject of serious investigation, but some observation has been made in general, particularly for Azerbaijan [6]. The Carnegie Classification of USA higher education institutions is among most developed and more or less accepted in academia; this classification system takes into account the diversity of American universities and colleges [7]. The power and diversity of educational institutions are emphasized in an expression widely cited now: "the power of the American higher education system is that it is not a system" (The Economist, 2005, 10 September). Here not having a system means diversity plus independence (and in this case some would say it means anarchy). Institutional diversity in Europe is also strong based on different traditions, particularly French, German and English practices; case studies on five European countries have been discussed recently [8].

Measuring the reputation of educational institutions is a delicate and complicated undertaking. While public opinion forms an average picture or image about an institution, it is possible for some strong or weak aspects to be kept in the shadows. The experience level of a group of expert inspectors, together with their familiarity of the nuances of the field and their immunity from the influence of others, decreases the possibility that they will be subjective in appraising the prearranged educational institution.

All the aforementioned factors not only show the diverse world of higher education institutions, but also indicate their influence and power as one of the vehicles which can change history.

Finally, we should mention the activities of so-called "diploma mill" educational institutions in both state and private sectors. In some universities, so-called market culture dominates the academic environment and weak organizational structure. Their chief aim is to sell easy diplomas and thus make huge amounts of capital. Alas, they also have their own clients, that is to say, a number of students and parents. Sometimes it is possible to deceive the customers into buying a counterfeit education, especially in countries that are experiencing revolutionary political and economic transition. This unfortunate interest in low quality shows that there are still problems in understanding the goals and objectives of education, and that corruption is strongly rooted in people's minds. Indeed, in the era of a planned economy, it was not difficult to find a good job with any type of higher education diploma. The current conditions indicate that a market economy based on quality and free competition has not yet been fully formed.

The mission and aim of education, that is to say, the desire to train or develop educated specialist-citizens, cannot coexist with the corruption that has spread widely in education. Good education and corruption contradict one another in essence. Whereas education aims at mobilizing and integrating society, and on the whole creating equal opportunities for everyone, corruption does exactly the opposite.

Quality and Standards

What defines quality in education? As in other aspects of human actions, there are different approaches to the perception of quality in education. First, it refers to possessing higher standards; it is a distinguished and exceptional feature, and it means excellence.

Quality also relates to the culture of the education institution. Quality depends on everyone's participation; it is an outcome of teamwork and group efforts. It means that every individual understands his or her responsibility.

Quality means the rule and efficiency of the system and the methods aimed at development and completion of necessary tasks in a timely manner.

Quality and innovation are closely related and interdependent.

Quality is easily explained in general, but difficult to achieve in almost all cases.

In an environment of increasing competition, quality is necessary not only to lead the pack, but also just to withstand the struggle to survive.

In the early 1990s, the concept of total quality management was suggested. This concept refers to developing a quality culture, finding ways to satisfy customers, cost effectiveness, and the quality and efficiency of the managerial service. In this system the key element for functionality and efficiency of the administrative system is continuous improvement; reliance on information technology in particular is a key component of good organization. It seems total quality management is the epitome of the current advance in quality control enhancement. [9]

Educational institutions must be able to combine human, financial and technical/material resources in order to achieve their goals. Reaching these goals requires quality, and the most reliable definition of quality in this case is the achievement of some set of minimum standards in all areas of activities of the institution. Quality means the absence of visible deficiencies. If the institution meets minimum standards, then it must not have any severe inadequacies, and it can solve all visible problems.

Quality is the fundamental change of the existing form; it is the sustainability and the domination of the development process by putting forward higher standards. It is a process that requires continuous internal evaluation and a self-critical approach. In fact, in the higher education system, words such as quality control, measurement of quality, sustainability of quality, quality enhancement or improvement of quality are linked to operation, process, attempt, initiative, and desire.

If values are assigned to predetermined indicators of a student's success in the beginning and at the end of a study period interval (i.e. a semester, a year, the entire bachelor or master's program, etc.), and if the first indicator is subtracted from the second, then the difference may be termed the "value added" to the student. (From another perspective, that value is also equal to the value of the educational institution.) The size of the "value added" factor is important for indicating the power and efficiency of an institution in addition to the diligence, will, and enthusiasm of a student. Using "value added" as a measure rather than using absolute codes places importance on rate of growth and emphasizes the students` or institutions` success as compared to their previous

accomplishments. Quality is the proximity of deeds to rhetoric, or the distance between what is proposed to be and what is the real, current situation, that is to say, how close the requirements are to the results currently attained. Quality is also the degree of proximity between the insider vision and the external outlook.

We often apply the concept of standards or performance indicators while defining and explaining quality. However, the idea of "standard" has two facets. It can refer to ideal form, perfection, and excellence. This is called "high standards." There are also expressions such as "world standards," "international standards" or "European standards." From another viewpoint the word "standard" connotes something common and usual, for example, the standard rules or minimum standards.

A higher education institution increases human power and produces knowledge. That is why its level is defined on the one hand by how exact, smooth, and ordered this process is, and on the other hand, by the outcomes of the process; namely, on the strength of the graduates and by the reputation of the given diploma. An education institution is like a series of filters that turn a student into a graduate, then into a specialist, through the chain of examinations and other requirements during his/her course of study. The quality of study is closely connected to the strictness and objectivity of this filtration [10].

The needs and expectations of a society or an institution are based on and defined in terms of its values. Quality is also a value that stems from the appreciation of professionalism and perfection.

Standards are measurement units, groups of indicators or series of parameters that can be used to determine the degree of proximity to or distance from to the systems of values. They are developed to assess compliance with goals and objectives. Higher education institutions increase human forces and produce knowledge. Therefore, the parameters that show the input, the progress and the output of this process (i.e. the graduates) are indicators of quality. Many of the currently existing quality evaluation systems don't pay sufficient attention to graduates.

In education systems, there are various sets of standards: academic standards which are connected to teaching, research, and curricula; service and support standards; characteristics of the physical facility; moral environment expectations; standards of policy and management, etc.

Standards can be broader or more specific depending on the principal aim, type of institution and areas of study. Only focusing on the satisfaction of customers

as a model is not enough for long-term success and respect, but displaying the character of the institution and attracting students with its majesty and charisma – here is the secret of fame.

In general, there are some difficulties concerning the terminology of standards and quality, but all of the above-mentioned issues, along with general experience and intuition, help to clarify the terms. We will discuss existing or desired standards and quality of education by recalling the lessons of history. We will emphasize the problems, forms, and contexts of educational systems within a large geographical scope. We will also try to understand the concept of quality by defining and analyzing the factors that are preconditions for a good education.

Who measures quality?

One of the most significant questions is-- who is responsible for measuring quality? There are at least three potential candidates who measure the quality of education in a particular educational institution. These are the government, the educational institution itself, and independent groups, such as related professional associations and accreditation agencies.

For quality to be correctly evaluated by the educational institution itself, a serious self-evaluation with the participation of faculty and staff members, administrators, and students must be carried out. The institution must try to critically review all its areas of operation, find strong and weak points, determine targets and the threats against them, compare and contrast itself with its main competitors, find key areas to develop, and create an action plan to overcome observed deficiencies.

> *I have not heard of many Azerbaijani educational institutions engaging in internal evaluation. At the same time, in some private universities (certainly in the case of Qafqaz and Khazar universities), internal evaluation is carried out regularly with the active participation of students, and the results are officially announced (at least in the case of Khazar) in paper and electronic publications. Just two universities, of course, is far too small a number for the whole country. They try to critically review all areas of operation, reveal strong and weak points, determine objectives and the obstacles to them, compare and contrast themselves with their main competitors, find methods for development, and draw up plans of action to overcome deficiencies.*

After the internal evaluation of the educational institution, it is most practical and expedient that the external evaluation be carried out by authoritative independent accreditation organizations. These agencies usually take internal institutional evaluations into account as a starting point. They learn how objectively the evaluation was carried out, clarify depth and breadth of the analysis, and conduct interviews with students, faculty, administrators, and those who work in the service sector. In addition to providing professional insights on the current situation at the education institution under consideration for accreditation, the agency should also give reasonable recommendations about how the institution can enhance its quality. The report prepared by external evaluators can (or must) then be publicized to a certain degree depending on its aims and preliminary agreements.

As general practice shows, even though governments usually interfere with quality evaluation or accreditation of educational institutions, they should be satisfied to define the minimum standards. For instance, the following areas might fall within the scope of influence of the government's education policy: the required duration of primary and secondary education, the list and content of compulsory subjects, the minimum requirements for physical facilities of an educational institution, the language policy, and the non-discrimination policy in gender, race, etc. But this list should be limited and well-defined. Everything absent from the list should be under the power of the school administrations, at least for non-state schools.

In Azerbaijan there are no agencies or associations that measure the quality of education independently. This is probably due to the government policy that "this area is a duty of the government only." At the same time, it is also true that there is no established agency claiming this mission. State monopolies over quality measurement exist in most post-Soviet countries, in countries with transition economies, and in many Asian and African countries.

Quality Assurance Mechanisms and Accreditation

On what and whom depends quality assurance in educational institutions? Without a doubt, those who learn (students) and teach (scholars and specialized experts) are principally important. High-quality student support systems are among the most desired aspects of institutions.

Another key point is the conditions in which the learners and teachers/scholars are working, including the physical environment, resources such as the library

and internet sources, and the moral atmosphere (i.e. protection from corruption, academic freedom, etc.).

The ideas and programs at the foundations of study, specifically modern and dynamic education models with related curriculum, are also very important. Questions like "what do the students learn and accordingly what should teachers teach, and how?" are crucial.

Finally, good higher education institutions must continue to improve quality and management as an ongoing process. They must have an education policy based on a non-stop quality enhancement system and related development and action plans.

> *Which universities in Azerbaijan possess quality assurance mechanisms? Khazar University was the first in the country to establish a Quality Assurance Center with the support of the European Commission`s Tempus program and European partner universities (previously, similar work was done partly with the support of American universities). Two other universities (one private and one state) are currently trying to develop similar quality assurance mechanisms.*

Within these general areas used as descriptions of quality, higher education institutions in Azerbaijan have previously introduced and used about eighty more or less exact indicators for the evaluation of quality and estimation of strength and efficiency [3].

Each time I read and think about these quality indicators, I discover that I want to include some new indicators and exclude or correct some old ones. I expect that the same is true for others who think about quality standards.

Most of the quality indicators considered in the US and Western Europe (see for examples [11], [12], or guidelines of US accreditation agencies) are also valid for use in other regions such as post-socialist countries. However, there are some exceptions and differences as well.

Considering the role of bribery in some educational institutions to artificially increase (and even sometimes decrease) exam results, it would not be correct to take attrition rate of students as an important indicator of quality. I mean to say that if a student's graduation from the same institution where he/she was admitted or his/her choice to transfer to a different higher education institution after a period of time – for example, after one year of study—is among the factors of power or quality in the West, it is not so in the East. As practices show convincingly, it can only be counted as a negative phenomenon for

educational institutions when weak students graduate from them on time. On the contrary, when weak (not hardworking) students leave a serious and uncorrupted institution for another in order to receive a diploma more easily, that should only serve as an indicator that the first institution provided a higher-quality education. By the way, some authors cast doubts on the role of student attrition and graduation rates in the evaluation of higher education institutions in the West as well [13]. In the current situation, it would be more correct to explain a student's departure from one institution for second as a sign of the seriousness of the first institution's role as a filter to weed out weak students in the process of study. The strength of an educational institution is directly connected to the seriousness, objectivity, appropriateness and accuracy of this chain of filters.

The rich practice of the USA, which is considered to be the birthplace of accreditation, shows that there is no need for the state to directly participate in accreditation. State interference may only cause damage, and the worst possible solution to the evaluation problem is that the state strive to set up a monopoly in quality evaluation. The government should be limited to defining minimum standards, and no more.

In countries which are in a transition period, the government-supervised accreditation commissions for quality evaluation of educational institutions are too often assigned to new supervision. From time to time new commissions are organized whose purposes and duties are not clear, and unfortunately, the decisions that they adopt are not long-term. These accreditation commissions do not act as their counterparts do in developed countries. Usually they have no power and there is no potential for them to implement normal decisions when they find something they dislike while evaluating. Their job doesn't include showing assessed institutions new ways to improve their weak areas and giving them a timeline to fix these discrepancies. The goal of these accreditations is not to prepare recommendations regarding the financing of an institution, but rather to ask the question "to be or not to be?" regarding it. In other words, the result of the assessment is either to immediately close down or not to close down the educational institution, or some of its schools or departments. More precisely, a government-led accreditation commission is a tool in the hand of some executive power to justify halting the activity of this or that educational institution in this or that field.

Though the following illustration is somewhat out of context, it does make a point: in a real war the enemy isn't killed immediately when he is cornered, but is given a warning: "stop, and raise your hands!" The first warning is an attempt to take the enemy prisoner. The sudden annihilation of some field of study that

has been developed for years in a university is one of the fundamental problems of private universities and colleges, and in many cases, this destruction is groundless. Simply put, it is the result of a predetermined, absolute order from certain (or sometimes uncertain and quite out of reach for an educational institution) "powers that be." Such "meddling from outside" and the real possibility of corruption in the accreditation process further complicate the problem.

> *The first accreditation process in independent Azerbaijan began in 1993 under the Ministry of Education. Its only purpose was to examine private HEIs, which were increasing in number. Almost all candidate institutions were approved. The next step, in 1995, was larger: the State Accreditation Commission, affiliated with the Council of Ministers, came onstage. Many candidate institutions were approved, and during the process even a number of new institutions appeared. Most regional branches and a few capital-based institutions were rejected. In 1998, this Commission was closed down. As a result, the country acquired 15 private HEIs. At that time our neighbors' private sectors were much larger – more than 200 HEIs in Georgia and more than 60 in Armenia. [6]*

> *There is now an Accreditation Commission of the Ministry of Education. Participation with it is voluntary, and its inability to guarantee the inviolability of existing and newly-approved majors essentially diminishes its significance.*

> *The dangerous lack of independent accreditation agencies is compelling higher education institutions to look for international quality evaluation institutes in spite of the absence of any legal authority of these evaluations in the country. Examples of external (or international) evaluators include the Salzburg Seminar - Visiting Advisors Program (Baku State University and Khazar University), the Turkish Higher Education Commission (several state universities, Qafqaz and Khazar), and the Iranian Ministry of Research and Education (several state universities and Khazar).*

Better results would be attained by the joint work of independent accreditation agencies not controlled by the government and various professional associations of different science/ art/ technology fields. Certainly the participation of international experts and scholars who have returned from study abroad programs can play a positive role, as can the associations of the same types of people with accreditation commissions. On the other hand, it is also possible to

use the services of regional accreditation agencies that operate based on joint activity with neighboring countries as well as European accreditation organizations. The Bologna Process has proposed the establishment of pan-European accreditation agencies (beginning from April 2008).

In measuring and appraising quality, it is necessary and essential that there is cooperation between the state, the intermediate regulating bodies (such as research and development foundations, think tanks, the accreditation agencies, etc.), and the educational institution. Unfortunately, in highly centralized education systems there are no genuine intermediates, that is to say, expert bodies, between the state and educational institutions (such as the Rectors` Conference, National Council, Higher Education Funding Council, and independently acting associations) aside from those within the governmental sector.

Accreditation is important to institutions as they take into consideration the purpose of its diagnosis -- it shows that quality and standards should not be stagnant, it shows their dynamics, and it acknowledges the function of an educational institution as a process and helps indicate means for development. In addition, accreditation is a judgment of an institution's quality for the purpose of official recognition and has the function of regulating the recognition process. In this process, the accreditation agency cannot ignore the special characteristics of institutions, derived from their nature and objectives, and their willingness to be distinct; on the contrary, the accreditation agency should support such desires of institutions to maintain their own distinguishing features.

Theoretically the main result of the accreditation should be a decision on the state level regarding how much assistance (high, average, below average, or nothing) should be given to this or that field of study, primarily including financial assistance. Such is not yet the case in many post-socialist countries. As a principal result of successful accreditation in a private institution, the state can also reimburse the tuition fees of accomplished students and give low-interest loans to the rest of the student body. If weaknesses in some fields of the institution are discovered during the accreditation process, then that institution should lose the right to demand anything from the government for the development of those specific programs, and perhaps the students studying there should not receive financial allowances.

In some post-Soviet nations, the government-run accreditation of the state education institutions is formalistic; to tell the truth, there is no serious accreditation. In reality, the state should first of all be interested in whether the

money from the state budget that was given to a given state institution was used expediently and effectively.

In places without authentic accreditation commissions, life is not easy for private educational institutions. In Azerbaijan, for example, there is no an official means by which private institutions can apply for external evaluation which would allow them to launch new majors or to increase student enroll-ment. Some monopolistic trends have also appeared favoring state universities; student admissions to some prestigious majors are being denied in most private universities. It seems some positive changes are due in the near future.

Governance and Management, and Quality in Education Systems

Tight regulation and centralized management are ubiquitous in the education systems of most post-Soviet, Asian and African countries. At the same time, there is an extreme lack of deep planning within the system as a whole and within separate institutions. Institutions in the state sector of education have weak autonomy, and in the private sector there is no real independence. As a matter of fact, in Azerbaijan all so-called private universities are not private at all in the real meaning of the word; probably the word semi-private is more appropriate here. They are totally dependent on the government in a very negative sense. To be precise, they have no right to develop their own admission rules and admit students, grant their own diplomas, or start new programs without government permission. For all of these everyday jobs, private universities have to apply to government bodies, although no written rules exist to tell them clearly how to go about this process. The state decision that has been most harmful to the quality of higher education is the creation of an artificial monopoly on student admissions for some of the "expensive" majors (law, medicine, and international relations), allowing those admissions to be dominated by state universities or certain other patronized institutions All higher education institutions, whether state or private, regional or urban, should be given the opportunity to educate students in diverse majors, taking advantage of competition to achieve quality.

The problem isn't as simple as it seems on the outside. Many higher education institutions lack transparency, neglect quality control, and are corrupted; they are not able to take the necessary steps toward independence and autonomy. Thus, each institution should earn its autonomy by means of its quality work and reputation. The government in its turn is unable to implement correct policies; instead, it puts tight restraints on all state and private universities (and, in doing so, it has seen no real success proportionate to this excessive degree of control).

The independence of an institution must be considered side by side with its responsibility, with the transparency of its actions, and with institutional quality in general. If the state does not acknowledge the serious differences between weaker and stronger educational institutions while it is searching for and applying common measures and regulations across the board, it will in reality greatly damage the whole education system. The policy of equalizing all institutions creates great obstacles to progress; it doesn't stimulate those that are advanced, and it doesn't allow for any friendly rivalry, which is the cornerstone of development.

In the state's higher education policy, the formula "give to each educational institution the independence and assistance of which it is worthy" should play the principal guiding role. This will contribute much toward the rivalry within the education system as well toward those institutions that would like to venture into the international arena. Autonomy affords one the opportunity to follow positive and dynamic global trends, the chance to use completely creative thoughts and power, and the facility to maneuver in order to achieve new content, form and quality through international cooperation. It would be foolish to expect someone to dance well and to win an international dance competition while his feet and/or arms are tied.

States and societies need to consider ways to overcome the barriers to higher education that their citizens encounter. In Azerbaijan, such barriers have created severe problems. There is a significant gap between the numbers of students in secondary and higher education. At the present time, the number of Azeri citizens completing higher education is far behind not only those in developed countries, but also most of its post-Soviet neighbors.

The number of tertiary students worldwide increased by more than 50% in the seven years from 2000-2007 and around 2.5 times from 1991-2008, rising from 58 million to 144 million (The UNESCO Institute for Statistics). Gross enrollment ratios cover a wide range in developed and developing countries, from near-total enrollment (Republic of Korea, Finland) to just 15% in Azerbaijan. While in 1991 there were 227 students per 10,000 inhabitants in Azerbaijan, this number has fallen dramatically to 153.5 in 2009 [6].

To increase the level of gross enrolment in higher education is one of the principal problems that developing countries strive to solve. Some countries have achieved dramatic improvements in this area, indicative of people's development. The year 2002 was declared the beginning of mass popularization of higher education in China; student admissions increased 226.6% from 1999 to 2004 [14], [1]. As a result, by 2007 the USA no longer held first place for the

number of graduates from all HEIs in all three cycles; China took over at the top.

What has been done worldwide in order to increase access to higher education? In many countries with high rates of participation in tertiary education, more and more students study at private universities.

What are the reasons for the obvious backwardness in access to higher education in Azerbaijan? Is it because the government isn't satisfied with the quality of higher education institutions? If this is really a government idea, then it is only partly correct. There are also some exemplary institutions which have earned good reputations in this country and beyond. One of the biggest paradoxes of our time is that the government (or people representing the government), instead of incentivizing better institutions to admit more students, chose to cap and even to decrease their admissions. If private universities admit more students, the state need not fear that its expenses will increase. On the contrary, it would be helpful to the state to plan its financing in a more effective and optimal way.

Massification of higher education increases the diversity of the system, and it is also one of the devices of democratization of society.

Specialists in public policy and education maintain that there is a close relationship between the attitude of a government toward free thought in general and the willingness of that government to grant autonomy to higher education institutions.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, developed states have highly increased the autonomy of their universities and colleges (there is no direct connection between the wall's fall and this autonomy; this example is given only as a measure of a fixed period of time). These states are trying to raise the capacity and quality of their higher learning institutions in order to create an atmosphere of competition inside each country to take steps that will lead to success in worldwide competition. Nevertheless, there is no end to dreams; even in Western Europe, universities are still not satisfied with their current level of autonomy. Jan Figel, the European Commissioner on Education and Culture, profoundly stated at Oxford University in 2006, "I do not believe that we shall ever get the best from our universities if Ministries keep control and spend their time trying to guess better than academics what is the right area to invest in." [15]

Of course, if the autonomy of the institution conflicts with community interests, the problem must be approached with caution. For example, sometimes the state might act with other motives than just on the basis of merit in order to ensure the development of weaker groups (i.e. affirmative action).

The Ministry of Education is the main body managing higher education institutions. At the same time, many educational institutions (mainly specialized ones) are affiliated with other ministries and state agencies. Some tertiary education institutions are affiliated with non-state unions and agencies. The existence of all such agencies, in addition to private, semi-private and cross-border or transnational institutions, reveals the diversity of governance in tertiary education systems.

It seems that in some cases, the involvement of state and close-to-state agencies in addition to the Ministry of Education creates the risk that the management of the tertiary education system will lose its focus on quality control and development trends.

In principle, setting up broad networks of cooperating universities and colleges within a country or a larger region is a favorable way to gain power and recognition, as well as to improve the quality of research and education. At the same time, it can create the opportunity to increase autonomy through the joint efforts of network members in decision making processes. A significant example of successful networking is the Bologna Process, at present being put into effect in most of Europe. Unfortunately, almost all associations of higher learning institutions within countries and regions are still weak and consist only of occasional paperwork and general meetings [6].

Institutional or internal management is similar to self-development, self-education and self-training of individuals. It is one of the main components of institutional or university culture. In post-Soviet and many other developing countries, the internal management structure of universities in general is far from perfect. The rector of a higher education institution is like a master with full supremacy, because s/he is the only ruler, and there is no authentic body of governors to share the power. The power of a university council is limited; in many cases its role is rather formal. The appointment and firing of rectors usually happens very quickly, and there is no formal tenure time for a rector`s job. There exists no board of governors and/or trustees responsible for strategic development of the institution. Such a board in particular should be prepared to announce the search for a rector, and try to solve the problem carefully, not hurriedly.

In the USA, for instance, the search for a new president of a university or a college can last a year or more. The day-to-day administration and management responsibilities of the institution are entrusted to the rector/ president and other high university officials around him. This method of pairing a board of governance with a rector who acts as a CEO makes it unlikely that the rector will take irresponsible steps; his or her duties and rights are made clear and common interests will prevail over personal ones.

Legislation Policy in Higher Education

For various reasons, education policy in some post-Soviet countries is based more on lobbyism, human relations, and sometimes corruption than on established policies.

It is imperative to prepare and adopt a Law of Education that can comprehensively take into account the changing world with its modern trends in education and research, as well as deep analyses of the current situation and needs. Unfortunately, in some countries misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and the struggle for power hinder the system. In Azerbaijan, after years of waiting, only a mediocre Law of Education has been adopted. It is not free from bureaucratic elements, expressions and articles impeding the real mission and purposes of education, and there are number of articles with no clear meanings. The new (2009) Education Law of Azerbaijan does not adequately reflect modern financing mechanisms, autonomy and accountability of educational institutions, the possibility of tax exemption for educational institutions as well as for companies, corporations and other organizations who want to sponsor educational institutions, or other pertinent problems. In many developed and developing countries, tax reductions play a decisive role in the development of universities and colleges.

Ambiguity in legislation complicates the strategic development and activity plans of educational institutions to an extraordinary degree.

Quality of Near-Academic and Non-Academic Services

A higher education institution is unable to develop well without setting up near-academic and non-academic service sectors. A broad service segment includes quality assurance in higher education; preparing and assisting curriculum and program development; evaluation of the knowledge of the students; teaching courses of modern computer/internet technology; and fostering lifelong

learning, etc. The participation of students in the management of their institution directly and ultimately influences the quality of classes, programs, teachers, and human and physical environments. Students will ensure that principles are not just discussed, but put into action.

A university or college campus is a living settlement, a small city, where people unite around the purpose of teaching and learning. The main population of the education institution is the students. Depending on the type of institution, the country it is situated in, and its size, the number of students can be 8-15 times greater than the number of administrators, faculty and service employees put together. The education institution is ever young, though it may be old, since its inhabitants are primarily youth without much life experience. These students need various types of care and assistance, motivation, and entertainment in addition to those directly associated with their studies.

The best educational institutions are distinguished not only by scientific research or modern and competent education but also by their student support systems, defined by their ability to assist students in each relevant field. Today's higher education is much more broad and diverse than it was in the past; now there are many more elective subjects, more majors, new teaching models and methods that take individual demands of students into consideration, a more international body of students, wide-spread use of information-communication technologies, etc. The modern student support system must embrace these modern turns; a dynamic support system requires the engagement of an appropriate panel of experts.

The student-centered education model demands the establishment of active relationships with students. Each student has his/her own trajectory of progression while accumulating credits, so the interests of each individual student must be considered. The teacher is no longer a chief, a dictator, or the owner of the last word. Instead, he is an experienced master and trainer.

The first real connection that a tertiary education institution makes with the students happens upon admission. Not every student who applies will be admitted; even in highly developed countries there are those who desire to be students but cannot. The number one obstacle to attaining higher education is financial difficulty. In the majority of developing countries the poverty level is high, so there are many students who can't find funding for their education. The main reason for this is the lack of a favorable loan system to support the students. But even of those who do have the means to pay for their education, many can't enter their desired institution due to paradoxical government policies prohibiting free access to tertiary education in the country.

Universities should be prepared to provide prospective students with necessary information about various scholarships and local and international foundations.

The first important affair for the freshman students is the orientation day(s). The student's bond with the institution that he/she entered must be cemented within a short period of time; each student must consider his/her institution as his/her own home and alma mater. When classes begin, the students must be made familiar with the syllabus of each subject in advance; the syllabus is the contract between the student and the teacher regarding the content of the subject and methods of evaluation of the student's knowledge of said content.

Students also need counseling support in psychological, medical, and legal fields; these are usually provided by specialized centers.

Students' engagement with sports or arts makes their lives interesting, bringing together both the student body and the institution. The student union and other student organizations on campus play an important role in organizing student life. In the Western world, hundreds of registered student unions, clubs, and associations may act within each institution. Any reasonable idea can form the basis of a student organization, such as excellence in education, citizenship, associations of students from certain countries or regions, religion, or interest in the different areas of science and technology, sports, culture, or fine arts. Student organizations play positive roles in the development of features like leadership, self-government, and work habits. Student associations are also the best defenders of students' rights, including first of all the right to free expression, and they can, in principle, provide a first line of defense against academic negligence, particularly against corruption in education.

It is clear that students with physical and mental deficiencies need real care and service. This aspect of student service, unfortunately, has been neglected in the universities of many post-Soviet, Asian and African countries.

One of the most important support services for students and new graduates a career center which familiarizes students with jobs, hiring procedures, and employment psychology and methods. It matches students to potential employers by working closely with a network of companies.

Another serious task to be undertaken by universities and colleges is the development of an alumni association. Alumni may influence the process of quality enhancement and the management of their alma maters; their role in fund-raising is vital. Post-Soviet countries do not yet boast any alumni relations;

this is an important culture that has not yet been developed in most non-Western countries.

Having well-organized services for international students helps smooth their entrance to an institution, protects them from the threat of isolation, and at the same time helps turn the institution into a place of diverse cultures, races, religions and languages which enrich each other. Having an international atmosphere in an institution plays a large role in the removal of prejudices, in developing tolerance, and in fostering more accurate perceptions of "others." Allowing foreign students to study at an educational institution increases the responsibility that teachers have and causes the institution to be careful in hiring teachers and scholars. Of course, turning foreign students into goodwill messengers of their country of study is also important from the government/ political viewpoint.

Internationalization is already underway and includes post-Soviet countries. Crossing borders has become simple, for people and for ideas, in spite of xenophobia and prejudice.

Size and Capacity of Educational Institutions and Quality

As was mentioned above, by the very nature of its physical setup, a higher education institution is a village or city with its own rules; the majority of its population is youth. The name of this village or city, "campus," means "region" in Latin. Unfortunately, Soviet universities did not have large centralized campuses (with few exceptions). It frequently occurred that the buildings of one institution were located in different parts of a city, in many cases scattered far from one another. In the post-Soviet area, including Azerbaijan, the situation remains the same (or has been modified very little).

A university or college's true measure of strength and one of its main features, or even its essence, is the level and capacity of its modern library and information system and teaching/ research laboratories. The comparative poverty of library-information systems and poverty or complete lack of modern laboratories is one of the weakest aspects of universities in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and some other non-Western regions. But the worst offense is the lack of reasonable short-, middle- and long-term state programs for research and development and capacity-building in higher education.

Instead of merging state higher education institutions and making them stronger and more effective, various small state institutions have been established from

1999 to 2009 in Azerbaijan. The saying "private universities and colleges have grown like mushrooms after rain" was already in vogue from 1990-97, and now this expression aptly describes the situation in the state sector.

Each educational institution, regardless of its size, must have a library and laboratories, research capabilities, and good management. It is also necessary to teach general education requirements as well as a certain number of subjects, both required and elective courses, within each major. To have the real capacity to accomplish all these tasks while maintaining quality is the very essence of an educational institution. There is a need to merge some of the existing state tertiary education institutions in a natural way; at that time those institutions would be able to propose major challenges and meet them. A merge would bring increased opportunities to develop campuses, large modern libraries, laboratories, and probably student residences and technological parks. It would allow to institutions to broaden their research activities, engage in international relations, make more effective usage of human resources, develop clear planning and financial policies, and set up more constructive partnerships between the institution and the corporate world.

In large countries, increasing the size of the GDP and state budgets provides new opportunities for large projects, even if the GDP per capita is not high. The same is true in large state universities and colleges. If an institution is specialized has a limited number of majors, then it is not well-suited to a large student population; this only complicates its quality control and may create certain monopolistic inclinations.

This idea of capacity optimization is current to the process taking place in developed and developing countries. In Japan, Russia, the USA, Turkey, Georgia, and in some Asian and African countries, governments are preparing and carrying out merges of small state higher education institutions. In Russia, Federal South University and Federal Siberia University were established due to the merging policy concerning state universities; then the objective was set before them to become quality research and educational establishments, and to gain international recognition. In 2001 there were 99 national public universities in Japan, but this number has decreased to 87 in 2005 as a result of merging; the government announced that this enlargement process through mergers will continue until there are only 65 such universities [16].

(To be continued)

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