Aspects of the Quality Management
of the LIS Education

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Abstract

Quality and quality management are dominant terms in our society. The aim of this paper is to describe the aspects of quality management, which are necessary to consider and evaluate for providing the LIS education.
The paper is structured into two main parts. The first section looks at the concept of quality in higher education and describes the model for quality management in higher education. The second part analyses the ways of the quality management in the Department of Information and Library Studies of the University of Latvia mainly from the customer approach. The paper ends with main conclusions based on the model for quality management in higher education.

Introduction

Changes in the development of society due advancement of technologies and information accessibility have influenced every field, including higher education. Mizikaci states that "there has been a shift away from traditional models in which most students might have been viewed as passive recipients of teaching, absorbing information in uncritical way, to a growing enthusiasm for active, independent learning, which encourages deep, rather than superficial processing of information" (8, p.37). Higher education changes also in a ways of internationalization and globalization, that offers for students and faculty greater mobility, flexibility and demands from programmes more comparability and transparency. Therefore the issue of quality and quality management in higher education is very important.

Library and information science (LIS) education exposes to both changes in higher education and in the professional field. Due to rapid changes in tools and methods of information accessibility, the content of LIS education is the topic of intensive discussions for more than a decade. Discussions include both pessimistic and optimistic attitude to the issues of the profession. An identity crisis of the profession belongs to the pessimistic part of discussions. Pessimistic part also reflects

the decline in students and teaching staff number in the programmes (4), as well as retreating of LIS departments or being absorbed into other collectivities). (7, p.326).

To the optimistic attitude belong discussions about broadening the curricula from focus on librarians to information specialists and core knowledge and skills of information specialists in the 21st century. There are several approaches to define the professional competencies. Among them are the following approach developed for the Special Libraries Association Board of Directors with main focus on managing: managing information organisations, managing information resources, managing information services, managing information tools and technologies (2). It should be admitted that other approaches are rather similar in conceptions but different in terms and groups. For example, Audunson Ragnars etc. consider that "complete librarian" need to master the following core areas: knowledge organization and retrieval; promotion of culture and knowledge; knowledge of literature; organization and management of libraries; information technology (1, p 198).

How these competencies are covered by LIS schools curricula? There are several studies about the core subject areas in LIS schools curricula. Based on survey of LIS schools in Europe (2005) is found out that the main themes as a core subject areas in LIS schools curricula are: library management and promotion; knowledge organization; information seeking and retrieval, knowledge management, information literacy and learning; the information society: barriers to the free access to information; library and society in a historical perspective, cultural heritage and digitalisation of the cultural heritage; the library in the multi-cultural information society; international and intercultural communication; mediation of culture in a special European context. (3, p. 235).

Hallam etc. based on literature review writes (5) that "LIS educators propose a wide range of competencies, skills, knowledge areas, topics or modules for their courses. Terms include social informatics, knowledge management, information management, information economics, information resources development, IT applications, information systems, networking, Internet, virtual library, management of information organizations, human resource development, information organization, information retrieval, collection and access management, professional ethics etc." It is possible to conclude that in generally curricula cover the main competencies, but the question is open – how updated is the content of subjects and what kind of skills does provide particular LIS school.

There are many challenges for LIS educations. They are concerned both with providing professional competencies as well as personal competencies or life (transferable) skills (e.g. problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication, teamwork and ethical thinking). Changes and challenges are always connected with issues of quality provision.

The two main pragmatic reasons are at the base to choose this topic for the paper:
1) The aim of the Department of Information and Library Studies of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia (*further in the paper - the Department*) is to provide LIS education which meet the expectations of the students and which will provide the workforce for the employers.
2) There are not yet developed systematic and comprehensive quality management system in the Department.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to describe the aspects of quality, which are necessary to consider and evaluate for providing the LIS education.

The theoretical background of the paper is based on the literature review of the quality in the higher education and different aspects of LIS education (core

competencies, changes in LIS education; quality assurance etc.). The empirical experience of the quality management of the Department should be considered as a case study that evaluates the model for quality in higher education developed by Mililani (8).

The paper is structured into two main parts. The first section looks at the concept of quality in higher education and describes the model for quality management in higher education. The second part analyses the ways of the quality management in the Department looking from the customer approach. The paper ends with main conclusions based on the model for quality management in higher education.

1. Quality in higher education

It seems that question about quality of the products and services has been important from times when people start to evaluate what they are doing, why they are doing and what are the effect of it. But special attention to quality or "quality movement" started in the 1970s and 1980s. The main reason was the competition among companies in industry. Many companies started to find solutions how to survive changing focus from quantity to quality and customer satisfaction.

As S. Venkatraman admits similar situation is being faced in higher education in the 1990s "due to rapidly changing technology, increasing costs, accountability by accrediting associations, legislatures, funding agencies, the public" and growing international competition with regard to student enrolments, faculty expertise and research achievements" (10, p. 95). Many higher education institutions started to adapt quality principles and tools developed in the industry sector. Therefore many quality management models consist from the elements typical in the industry organizations: inputs, transformation processes (throughputs) and outputs. "From the work of Juran and Gryna (1980), Stensaasen (1995) states that educational institutions may be considered as industries which provides education as the service with raw materials as incoming students (*inputs*) on whom the processes of teaching are applied (*transformation*) and turned out as a finished products of graduates (*outputs*)" (cited after 10, p. 96) *(Terms in italics– supplementation by authors).*

There are many definitions or characteristics of quality, but depending on the approaches on the focus of the mentioned elements, it is possible to group it in two broad classes:

- Quality definitions that focus on outputs (e.g., institution examines the extent to which set of goals are achieved; for example: *quality as excellence, fitness for purpose; "customer" satisfaction or effectiveness)*);
- Quality definitions that focus on processes (institution examines the activities that lead to the desired outcomes, such as governance structures, decision –making process or administrative process. Quality as a process is thus associated with values, internal processes and effectiveness). (9, p. 10)

Today the dominant quality definition "quality as a customer satisfaction" (focus on outputs) replaces the understanding of quality as a "degree of conformance to a standard" (focus on processes).

1.1. Customer in higher education

Who is the customer in higher education? "Many observers (Owlia and Aspinwall, 1998 and Lawrence and Robert, 1997) have indicated that there are

different customer focuses in higher education."(10, p.99). The answer depends on the identification of users or customers of the definite product or service. According to Venkatraman, customers may be of two types: external and internal (10, p.99)(see Table 1). There are three kinds of external customer in the higher education: a primary customers are students which use courseware as a product, a secondary customers are employers, who is interested in the graduates as qualitative professionals (output) and the tertiary customers are society who uses services and products prepared by educated professionals (outcomes). The internal customers are teaching staff who evaluates the all education and teaching process.

Table 1. Customers in higher education

User / customer		Products / services
External	Students – primary customers	Courses, programmes
	Employers (parents) – secondary customers	Graduates (alumni) / information professionals
	Labour market, government – tertiary customers Information user / society (generally)	Information services and products prepared by information professionals
Internal	Teaching staff	Education and teaching process

Venkatraman states, "Having identified the customers of higher education, we can now state that the main objective of total quality management is to achieve the return of investments of customer satisfaction using continuous improvement strategy." (10, p.99). The customers are also the main estimators of the quality of product or service. "Evaluation is the means of arriving at a value judgment on the bases of measures (qualitative or quantitative) considered to be valid and reliable, which compare the actual results with its anticipated results." (8)

1.2. The model for quality in higher education

The core education process is teaching. Teaching involves many components, which Fatma Mizikaci has joined in his developed model for quality in higher education based on a systems approach. The model consists of the three interrelated subsystems: the social system, the technical system, and the management system (8, p. 46). He characterizes the social system as a system, which includes culture (value, norms, attitudes, role expectations), communications (quality of relationships between individual members, groups, symbols of power), and behavioural patterns of society or community. The technical system includes all the tools and machinery. In higher education it is all what is directly concerned with teaching (students, faculty, programmes, teaching methods, graduates etc.). The management system "provides the framework for the policies, procedures, practices and leadership of the organization"(8, pp. 47 - 48).

Every subsystem can be analysed from the input, transformation and output aspect. Therefore Mizikaci model is possible to combine in the following table (see Table 3 in the Annexes). One dimension of the table shows the systems: the social systems, the technological system, the management systems; and other dimension – the structural elements of the organization: inputs, transformation and outputs. The Table 3 is completed using LIS education as a pattern.

The model developed based on systems approach is a general view on higher education aspects. Therefore we are going to use it as a model for evaluation of comprehensibility of aspects of quality management in the Department.

2. Quality management in the Department

The Department is the only institution in Latvia offering academic level education for librarians and information professionals since 1947. The college level education is offered by Latvian Culture College.

The Department has three programmes: academic Bachelor degree programme in Library Science and Information, academic Master degree programme in Library Science and Information, and professional Master degree programme in Information and Librarianship. During the last decade the Department systematic updates curricula of all the programmes.

The number of students is similar in the all programmes of the Department during last five years (~200). There is decrease in the number of part-time students due to increase of tuition fee. There is still rather stable interest to the programmes offered by the Department. It can be confirmed by the number of the entrance competition to the states covered students' places (20 places) in the bachelor degree programme – during the last five years it is on the average 4.

There are 8 full-time teaching staff (7 of them have doctoral degree) and several guest lecturers in the Department.

Up to now quality management in the Department has organized as the course and study process evaluation, and the programme evaluation. There are several evaluation methods. Some of them are organized with strong regularity but in different periods (accreditation, course evaluation by students, programme evaluation by students, self-evaluation), some are more occasional (course and programme evaluation by employers, teaching staff). Polls (questionnaires), self-assurance, "brain storm", SWOT, discussions are the methods used for evaluation. Evaluation is done both by external and internal customers.

2.1. Course and study process evaluation

There are several ways to evaluate the course and study process. The more important estimators are students who evaluate every course at the end of semester both in teacher's and in the Department's organized polls. Teacher's obtained data are mainly used by his/her own to improve the delivery methods of the course. The data obtained by Departments' organized poll shows the strongest and weakest places in the programme. The Department's teaching staff evaluates every course content before including it in the programme. This evaluation comparing with students evaluation is based on the description of the course, but not on "live" course.

As students' evaluation is one of the most important indicators for programme quality in our quality management system, the Department gives a full attention to it. The following sections in detail describe the experience of the poll organization and the main conclusions from the first semester of this academic year.

An electronic poll at the end of each academic year where students answered questions about all study courses was conducted in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia until academic year 2006/07. In 2006/07 this poll was interrupted as ineffective tool for study process evaluation because responsiveness of students was very little. Many study courses remained not evaluated at all, because

total count of respondents was less than ten. This made to focus seriously on matter of study process evaluation, on faculty level it was discussed how to do it better, a conclusion was received that it should be done within the framework of every department.

Decision was made in the Department to develop united poll questionnaire which would help to evaluate quality of study process, get to know students evaluation and opinion about every course held during term and quality of study process in general. Also questions about supply of necessary for studies information sources in the Library of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia central library and National Library of Latvia Library science and Information Science literature reading-room were included in questionnaire.

For evaluation of every course closed question was made with agreement evaluation scale for statements about the place of course in study programme, relationship with previous study courses, contents, usage of education methods, competence of lecturer and ability to rouse interest, level of requirements, evaluation system – if it facilitates acquisition of the subject (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Closed question for evaluation of every study course

		SA	A	PA	D	SD	NA
1.	Course has logical relationship with previous courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	Course contents does not double with previous courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	Course is taught in most relevant term	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	Lecturer is competent and is able to rouse interest	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	Lecturer has high requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	Various education forms are used in education process	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	Presentations and handouts are prepared for lectures	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	At the beginning of course lecturer introduces to the evaluation system	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	Evaluation system and forms of examination encourages acquisition of the subject	1	2	3	4	5	6

SA – strongly agree, A – agree, PA – partially agree, D – disagree, SD – totally disagree, NA – no answer.

Students had opportunity also to evaluate each study course in 10 grade scale and in the open question write their evaluation and suggestions for improving course quality in next term.

Answers to questions about course relationship with previous courses and their place in study programme allowed to conclude:
- subjects of some courses should be harmonized so that they do not repeat and overlap;
- should think about improving some study courses and moving to other term;
- unfortunately turned out that for one course lecturer must be changed, because evaluation both from bachelor and master programme students was very negative.

General description of lecturers' competency and requirements level was quite high. As well usage of different education forms, presentations and handouts were evaluated mostly positive.

Average grade in ten-grade system for all courses in total was – 8. Although appeared course with very low average evaluation – 4,55. This course had also low evaluation of lecturer's competency level, usage of education methods and evaluation system.

More than half of the questioned students had used opportunity to express their evaluation and suggestions for improving the course in the open question. To perform content analysis they were divided to 24 categories. Analysing these texts the following major conclusions can be made:

1. Evaluating courses which were taught together for all faculties departments students (work was done with big student groups), students often were writing that they were not able to get to know grades of independent works, evaluation criteria, they were also not satisfied with education forms – mostly lectures.
   Would be nice if lecturer would also read our papers, because the grades were totally not relevant to the work done.
2. Not always it is enough that the lecturer is very competent in his area, he must be able also to use different education methods. Students need not listen to 90 minutes long monologue. In evaluation of many courses appeared suggestion to organize more practical classes.
   Lecturer is really very competent, but he could think of how to present his lectures more interesting, because it is quite difficult to receive narration by the end of second lecture.
3. In evaluations for individual courses an opinion appeared that lecturer almost all the studies of course „delegates" to students themselves.
4. Quite often also lecturer's attitude to students was evaluated, their 'strictness' or 'lack of strictness', style of presentation. Unfortunately in evaluations of some courses appear also such conclusions that lecturer does not listen to students' opinions, 'sorts' students, is too strict and demanding. There are cases when study case is evaluated with high grade mostly because lecturer is very attractive, is able to fascinate.
   Course acquisition is facilitated not by evaluation system and examination forms, but attractivity of lecturer. So to continue!
5. Students are interested that their work is evaluated during all term, not only just to listen lectures and in the end have a massive exam.
   There could be examinations in test form during term not only in the end of term.

2.2. Programme evaluation

There are also several ways to evaluate the programmes in the Department. Estimators are all customer groups. The primary group is alumni (graduates), as well as students at the end of every semester (described in the previous section).

Graduate polls are held regularly from academic year 2004/05 to find out the following main questions:

1. motivation to study in this department;
2. programme quality evaluation;
3. future plans (if they are related with the obtained specialty).

According to data of poll conducted in 2006, most often mentioned reason to choose studies in this department is 'this is interesting programme'. Next reason by mentioning frequency – „advised by some acquainted person'.

Question if they would advise others to study in this programme was answered in affirmative by most part of respondents (see Figure 1).
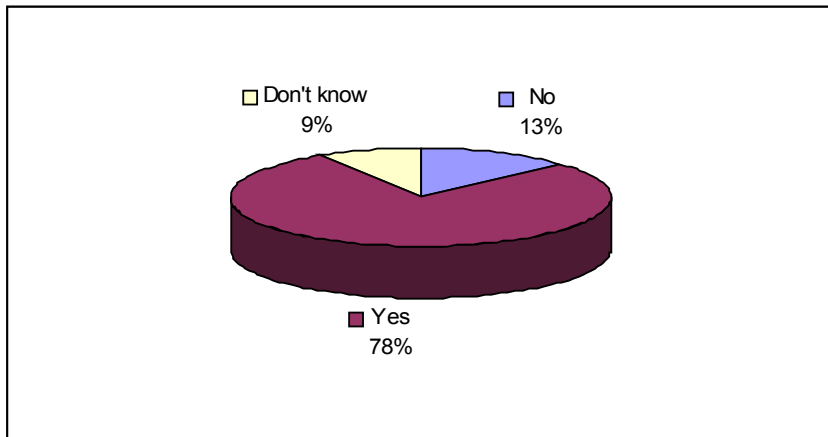

Figure 1. Would you advise acquainted persons to study in this study programme?

Students are given opportunity to evaluate as well different aspects of study programme as quality in general, offering following answer options for closed question:
1 Very high
2 High
3 Average high
4 Low
5 Very low
More than half of respondents (52%) had chosen evaluation 'high', 48% - average high.
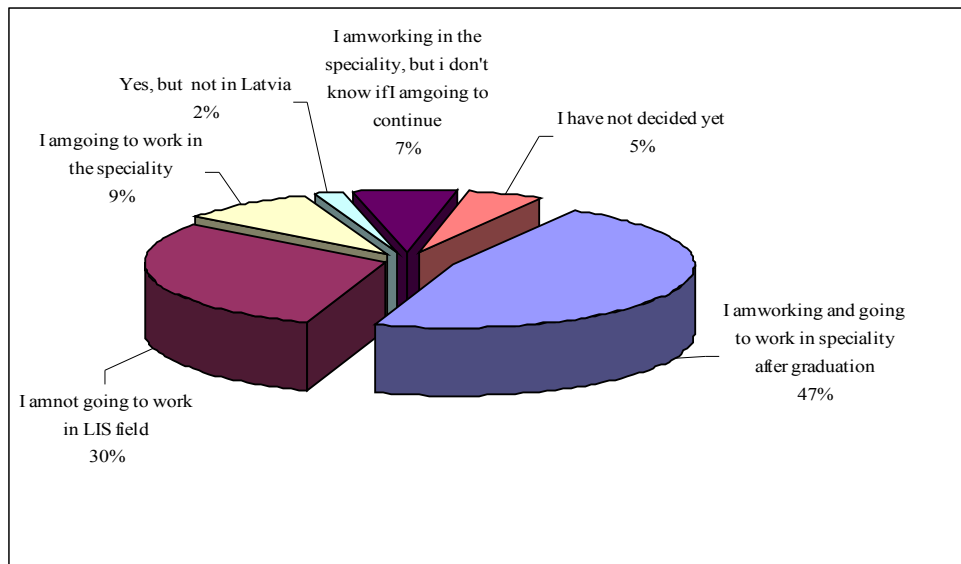The Figure 2 shows the situation about graduates future plans.

Figure 2. Have you decided to work in the obtained specialty after completing studies?

As reasons for not work most often is mentioned better paid job found already during studies and the low salaries in libraries.

The secondary group of external customers is employers who do evaluation both formally and informally in meetings, conferences, and discussions. Last year the Department organized discussion with employers to improve the content of programmes and to organize common research themes. Discussion was fruitful in the context of the programme improvement but not so effective regards to the common research themes. There is necessary to find more effective evaluation forms of employers to identify gaps in the programmes and to find out required employability skills, especially in a situation there is no standards of LIS education developed by professional associations in Latvia.

The tertiary group of external customers who does the programme evaluation is different institutions of the Faculty (Study Council, Council of the Faculty), of the University (Senate of UL) and of the Ministry of Education and Science of Republic of Latvia (the Commission of Accreditation). They all are responsible to provide that programmes are qualitative and in line with the Law of Higher Education of Latvia and with the regulations of programme accreditation. This group of customers evaluates programmes with different regularity. The most complete evaluation in both terms of methods and customers is the accreditation of the programme organized either once in two years, or once in six years. The all programmes of the Department are accredited till either 2009 or 2010.

The important customer for programme evaluation is internal customer – teaching staff. Regularly – once in a year teaching staff does self-evaluation for the programme self-evaluation report, which is organized by the Academic Department of the UL. It includes both quantitative and qualitative data about academic achievement (number of publications, participation in the conferences, evaluation of teaching methods etc.). Last academic year the Department has organized brainstorm for teaching staff to find out new ways of developments and to discuss the weak points. This event helped to do SWOT analyses of the Department and to divide responsibilities for improvement activities.

Conclusions

Based on the model for quality in higher education it is possible to notice which aspects are evaluated and which are not or evaluated incompletely in the Department.

The main attention of the Department is devoted to quality evaluation of the technical system, especially – the evaluation of the transformation (throughputs) - teaching. Annually self-evaluation reports includes also data, which characterize both the input (resources) and output (numbers of graduates, number of publications by teaching staff etc.) of the technical systems.

Less attention is devoted to the evaluation of the social system and the management system. Some of the data of these systems are analysed during accreditation process of the programme (aims, visions, goals of the programme, global and local tendencies of higher education and LIS education, expectations of employers). But there are data, which are not collected and analysed in a systematic way (e.g. data characterizing the input and output of the social system: expectations about skills and knowledge of information professionals, the impact of the programme on society, reputation of institution, achievements of graduates, impact of ICT on LIS domain and education; new theoretical trends in LIS and it implementation in education etc.).

It means that there are aspects, which should be considered and evaluated to improve quality of LIS education programmes in the Department.

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