ISSN 2669-0330 (online)
ĮŽVALGOS
2020 Nr. 1, p. 140-153

AN INSIGHT INTO QUALITY EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA ANALYZED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EDUCATION PROCESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Flavius Streianu

Vilniaus kolegija/University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Business Management,
Didlaukio g. 49, Vilnius, Lithuania
Mykolas Romeris University,
Ateities g. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania

Abstract

The study has a broad approach and describes the relation between high-quality education and achieving the sustainable development goals, for positive society change and human evolution. In a narrow approach, the study presents the intrinsic importance of functional clusters in higher education and highlights the advantages of a solid student-teacher academic relationship and their benefits for increased competitiveness. In a specific approach, a bottom-up method is proposed for improving the value proposition, tracking long-term performance, and obtaining a high return on investment in education. Finally, it stresses on the need for more robust education processes, based on proposed hybrid solutions that combines the use of reflexive pedagogy and competence knowledge, with the potential to ensure progress in Lithuanian HEIs.

Keywords: education processes quality, transversal value proposition in higher education, student-centered learning process, performance in academic clusters, academic return on investment, reflexive pedagogy, competence knowledge.

Introduction

Although a high-quality educational process is fundamental for a meaningful students' university experience, other long-term factors like competence, performance, achievement and return on investment are either misinterpreted or their importance is reduced. Little attention given to pedagogical processes, content type and quality, primarily weaken the value proposal of education processes, lower the importance of functional academic clusters, and subsequently disconnect higher education from the realities of the market economy. The investigation of the topic is done in logical stages and includes an introductory phase on the meaning of quality education and a holistic explanation of its descriptors, afterwards, an insight into the Lithuanian higher education system and an analysis based on education processes. In the next step, functional academic clusters are linked to education processes and the strong relationship within the cluster and with other education stakeholders is proposed to be improved by using the HEInnovate self-assessment tool. The next objective requires understanding and rewarding performance in education and brings to light a series of contradicting opinions concerning meritocracy, short and long-term outcomes, the need to account for other factors that might influence achievement and proposes the solution of using grit in education processes. The attention switches to return on investment in education seen through the filter of human capital and labor market demands and presents digital taylorism as an immediate side-effect. The novelty of the topic consists of using the hybrid solutions in a bottom-up approach, based on the concept of competence knowledge and relying on reflexive pedagogy, with the potential of bettering the value proposition of education processes in the HEIs that will implement them.

Problem: Quality education seen only in relation to its ends, in a top-down approach, diminishes the intrinsic value of education and negatively affects the value proposition of education processes.

Object: Education processes in higher education institutions.

Aim: To show that quality in higher education institutions is positively influenced by an improved value proposition of education processes, to highlight long-term achievement and return on investment by providing comparative national and international examples and to propose applicable hybrid solutions, for HEIs, that move beyond the rigid demands of the market economy.

Methods: Theoretical research by gathering knowledge on quality education, synthesizing education processes, analyzing literature by exploring and comparing with elements specific to higher education and other social sciences and conceptualizing new scientific terms.

Acknowledgements: Thank you Aistė Ražinskaitė for the immense support finding Lithuanian literature and providing translations. Thank you Prof. Dr. Vidmantas Tūtlys for the excellent literature, constructive feedback and overall help in understanding specific concepts.

1. Introduction to quality education from a holistic approach

As any other field of activity in the world, education is subject to constant change and development but, seen from the perspective of the individuals directly involved in education, whether we talk about the ones who deliver and facilitate or the ones who receive its fruits, one universal element stands out as a best descriptor: quality. According to the United Nations (2015), the Sustainable Development Goals[1] "provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future" and one of the most important goals is Quality Education. Generally, education is associated with poverty alleviation and the consensus is that it helps reduce inequality around the world – on a 100 points scale, every additional year of education lowers the GINI[2] coefficient by 1.4 points (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2013, p. 186). Furthermore, the association of quality education and lifelong learning is an enabler for positive socioeconomic change, and it is of extreme importance for attaining other SDGs: the sustainable goals in order (Leitner, 2017) is a visual representation of the SDGs, created by 85 experts from around the world, and they have prioritized the SDGs based on the importance and the order of action for problem solving. The specialists positioned quality education reasonably high in the ranking, 6 out of 17, but what is even more interesting is the fact that, according to the United Nations, quality education is directly linked with the top 3 SDGs and is considered a prerequisite for reducing inequality, fighting poverty and reaching gender equality. Thus, it can be concluded, that quality in education is an underlying factor for wellbeing and human evolution.

Until now, quality education was defined mostly in relationship to its ends, but further below a proper description of the terms will be offered based on their intrinsic value and their relationship in a complex socio-cultural, political and economic system. According to the paper "Defining Quality in Education" published by UNICEF (Colby & Witt et al., 2000, p. 3) "programmes must encompass a broader definition involving learners, content, processes, environments and outcomes". This current study will analyze the *processes* factor while future studies will have a bottom-up approach on the learners and content and propose solutions for the changing university environment.

2. Processes and performance in the Lithuanian higher education system

An overview of the Lithuanian higher education system is provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) and one of the best ways to describe higher education is to focus on the year 2000 institutional reform, which essentially transformed the system from a unitary to a binary one: "Universities offer university level degree granting studies and award Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral degrees. Colleges offer college level degree granting studies and award Professional Bachelor's degrees. Both universities and colleges can also offer non-degree granting

[1] Shortened SDGs; the 17 SDGs are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which provides "a key action plan for people, planet and prosperity", adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015.

[2] Measures statistically the distribution of income and wealth across nations and it is a good descriptor for inequality (OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms, 2006).

studies." (SKVC, [s. a.]). Advancing from one cycle to another is linear for university graduates, but college graduates are required to study 2 extra years and obtain 120 ECTS[3] in order to be admitted to master's degree studies from professional bachelor's degree (Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, [s. a.]) – although conflicting information is found on the SKVC website.

Vocational education and training (VET) in Lithuania underwent a series of reforms and is currently ensured by vocational schools, the supporting institution being the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC). Under the framework of national qualification system its main objectives are to implement policies for VET quality, adult education and development and "strive to ensure the developments of Lithuanian lifelong learning system correspond to the needs of the economy as well as national and international initiatives." (KPMPC, 2020).

A factual description of the Lithuanian higher education system is presented below in order to highlight the current value proposition:[4] according to a recent overview, it is reasonable to say that Lithuanian HEIs have a very diverse educational offer (509 English study programs), but study programs are inefficient (38% running with less than 5 students), although some programs are very effective because they score high in rankings. According to the study conducted by the European Migration Network (2018), even without a clear national strategy, HEI's individual, consortium-based or online platforms and networking internationalization schemes manage to attract more foreign students every year (25% increase from 3000 in 2013 to 4000 in 2017), but on the other hand Lithuania fails to retain foreign graduates (7% retention rate in 2018). Furthermore, the number of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs)[5] is a good descriptor for quality in education especially if seen from the narrow perspective of objectives and outcomes transposed in the market economy. Indeed, in percentage Lithuania scores better than the EU average, but in fact it is positioned 16th out of 36 countries for both tertiary education and overall ISCED[6] NEET rate and even worse for the other two categories (23rd for ISCEED 0-2 and 26th in ISCEED 3-4).

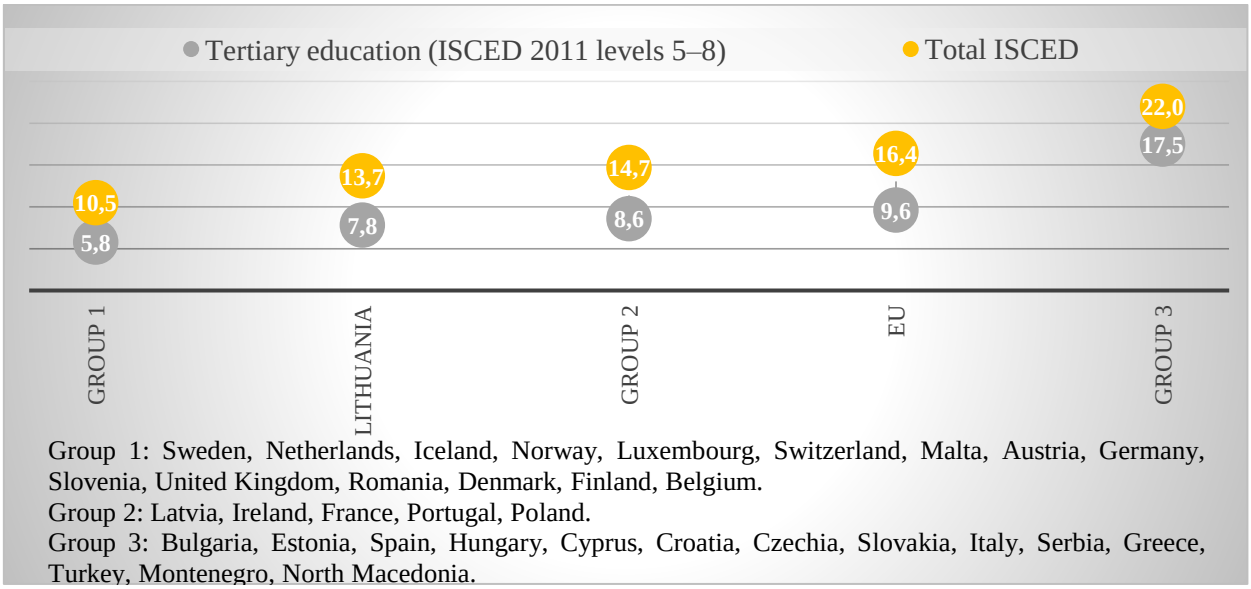

Figure 1. Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by overall tertiary educational attainment rate, 2019 (%) [composed by the author][7]

[3] European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, in Lithuania 1 ECTS = approx. 26.6 work hours.

[4] "A value proposition is a business or marketing statement that summarizes why a consumer should buy a company's product or use its service." See *What is a Value Proposition? - Definition & Examples* [s. a.].

[5] See *Eurostat* (2020).

[6] "The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011) provides a comprehensive framework for organising education programmes and qualification by applying uniform and internationally agreed definitions to facilitate comparisons of education systems across countries." See UNESCO Institute for Statistics [s. a.].

[7] Data source: Eurostat (online data codes: edat_lfse_21).

Having in mind the descriptors mentioned above, particularly the variables of processes and content, the general acceptance for debate on quality in education concerns the following approach: the term of subject-centered is usually opposed to learner-centered curricula and through extension (objectives- and outcomes- based curricula): "Subject-centred approaches have tended to hold stronger ground in senior secondary schools and universities, and particularly in elite education. Learner-centred approaches have been more prominent in adult education as well as lower levels of school systems" (Allais, 2012, 258). The paper will present this opposition from a different perspective further below.

In 2015, an interesting study was conducted by the Spinter company on ECTS implementation in Lithuania: a nation-wide (153 teachers and 1003 students participated) quantitative research method was used, along with 2 focus groups (9 and 7 teachers) and below are some of the [translated] weak points and conclusions of the Lithuanian higher education system, sorted and ranked according to processes quality (Spinter tyrimai, 2015, p. 5; pp. 24-26).

Table 1. Weak points of the education processes [composed by the author]

1.	According to lecturers, they always (28%) or sometimes (69%) take into account students' feedback. College lecturers and women were mostly claiming that they always take into account the feedback.
2.	66% of lecturers stated that students always have a possibility to express their opinion about subject goals, teaching and evaluation methods. 29% claimed that this possibility sometimes exists and 3% said there is no possibility for student to give feedback.
3.	Insufficient, non-motivating and incorrect rotation system (no clear definition of "good learning" student).

Note: from most important (1) to least important (3).

The conclusions drawn from the Spinter research (Skaburskienė & Zalitis, 2015) were categorized according to the UNICEF five factors defining quality in education and for the purpose of the study only the *processes* factor was selected and then ranked. A detailed analysis is provided below, showcasing both the downstream and upstream processes, describing performance in *academic clusters* and highlighting the importance of academic return on investment (ROI), by using hybrid solutions based on *competence knowledge* with the support of the pedagogical process called *reflexive pedagogy*, all of these in order to improve the *value proposition* of education processes.

3. Intrapreneurial approach to meaningful education processes

In higher education, the processes criterion is represented first and foremost by the teacher who brings individuality and personality in the pedagogical process along with skill and knowledge of the subject. According to the study "Changes in Teacher-Student Relationships" (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, Harris, 2012), it seems the role of the relationship plays an important part in academic life and this link has potential impact in 3 major directions: first, from a qualitative perspective, the nature of the relationship improves gradually, the above mentioned study accounts the change over the course of one academic year; secondly, from a quantitative perspective, the relationship betters the outcome of the students in terms of academic performance and finally, there is also a motivational factor, a positive upstream influence[8] in terms of social perspectives deriving from the relationship.

The main aspects that should be accounted for in a student-centered learning process (SCLP) are attention to the student's motivation and needs, knowledge and skills, perspectives and level of education as detailed in a comparative study presenting student-centered experiences of students from universities in Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia. Various methods were used, and the results are

[8] This notion can be linked to the psychology of conformity, first studies conducted by the American psychologist, professor emeritus Philip George Zimbardo in the controversial *Stanford Prison Experiment*. Later studies suggest "that individuals' willingness to follow authorities is conditional on identification with the authority in question and an associated belief that the authority is right." (Haslam & Reicher, 2012).

similar, consistent and show that "the main advantages of student-centred learning are increased motivation, partnership between teachers and students and that student-centred learning makes students more focused upon learning." (Knyvienė, Perkumienė, Marinko, Gołębiowski, 2017, p. 25). To be noted that both (external) motivation and focus on learning factors are outward driven consequential results of the SCLP, while the partnership factor is actually a prerequisite for SCLP and a descriptor for the quality of the relationship "students were encouraged to be autonomous and that there was a shift in power relationships from teachers to students." (p. 19), which in turn, like in a self-sustaining reaction, improves the relationship – according to an average of 80% of the teachers (p. 25).

It is hypothesized that by highlighting the importance of the process duality in higher education, a meaningful educational process is built on a strong student-teacher academic relationship (one-on-one work rather than just student-centered), as opposed to a traditional top-down education system-students relationship. New functional *academic clusters* of teaching-learning will be created within the higher education institutions (HEIs). It is envisioned that these clusters will be highly autonomous, very personalized, engaging for the students and challenging for the teacher and will be supported by administration staff and institution leadership and by extension stakeholders surrounding the HEIs, NGOs and businesses. Furthermore, by switching from a punctual relationship teacher-course/seminar-students-results (rigid traditional system) to a long-term coach-mentor (flexible style), it should positively influence the dual teaching-learning process, streamline feedback and make it easier to track performance for both student and teacher, as it is presented in the "Differentiated Instruction Model, Developing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports" (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2014).

The work ethic described above is conditioned by certain teachers' knowledge and skills, teamwork between the teachers and the higher education institution culture, as detailed by a study conducted on "The Role of the Teacher Student Oriented Studies" (Baužienė, Perkumienė, Marinko, 2016). Furthermore, given that the teacher spends more time preparing for student-oriented studies and the workload is much greater, one side-effect of the study points out a lack of motivation for teachers to improve and move towards student-oriented teaching methods.

One possible solution to improve the education processes is to focus on the positive recommendations offered on eight specific key areas and use the HEInnovate free self-assessment tool developed for all higher-education institutions: "The European Commission and the OECD have joined forces in the development of HEInnovate […] for HEIs who wish to explore their innovative potential" (HEInnovate [s. a.]) The eight key areas are holistic and can accommodate the views of all stakeholders in education: the internal environment comprised of students and graduates, teaching staff, administrative staff and leadership; the external environment comprised of businesses and business incubators, research networks, social partners, NGOs, policy makers, national and international networks of partner institutions. In an applied manner, by completing an individual self-assessment, the results will present the reviewers view on the institution's internal processes and also the relationship with the stakeholders mentioned above, thus the downstream results will set the ground for changes in the education environment and, if applied systemically, it has the potential of positively impacting the education system in Lithuania.

4. Measuring and rewarding performance

Formal education is considered a long-term process, yet it is very common to track results and provide feedback on a very short term: a student receives a grade for a particular subject or a teacher receives a bonus pay for performance on the short run or as a result of collective or union negotiation, but if lifelong learning is a desiderate, than perhaps a good proposal is to apply the same strategy when it comes to meritocracy and long-term performance for both student and teacher - this assertion is based on a working paper published in the *National Bureau of Economic Research* (Lavy, 2015) where an investigation was conducted on the implications of "The long term effect of teachers' pay for performance (PFP) schemes" (p. 1) on student progress from high school, throughout university

and the effects on employment in adulthood. Although the study was conducted in Israel, the author presents the results as externally valid and transferable to other developed countries, yet, a growing number of similar studies around the world showcase either positive outcomes or no outcomes (p. 4). Three major conclusions are drawn:

a. The obvious immediate effect was a teachers' salaries change, paid based on performance.
b. The second effect was an increase in the students' attainment, tests results and matriculation outcomes (3%) and quality of science study programs (26%) combined with an increase in the likelihood of university enrolment (5%).
c. Perhaps the most interesting long-term effect discovered has a twofold impact: "These high school outcomes are also highly correlated with labor market outcomes at adulthood. These improvements, along with the increase in university schooling, led to a 1.2 percentage point gain in employment rate and to a 6-7 percent increase in earnings at age 28-30" (Lavy, 2015, p. 2). The return-on-investment factor is also accounted for and research indicates grater financial gains compared to initial cost of the study program – a very brief cost-benefit analysis details the following: "The average cost of the program was $170 per student versus a gain of $1,000 in annual earnings starting at about age 28-30." (p. 30).

For the above written, opposing opinions exist especially against the concept of meritocracy which was satirically presented in the book *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (Young, 1958) as a way for a new meritocratic class of people to create its own rules and preserve its own elite; but the concept found great support in the busines environment where all individuals are encouraged to input ideas, but different than in a democracy, only great ideas with the highest potential are taken into account. In consequence, a performance track is created where "They [people] have built a reputation and history of contributing good ideas, going beyond their day jobs, and achieving stellar results" (Whitehurst, [s. a.]). When the same model is applied to education sciences, scholars are quick to point out the dangers of "qualification inflation" (Allais, 2014, p. 9) because it creates a false impression of meritocracy among graduates that acquire and seek even higher levels of qualifications, on one hand, and the weak connection or mismatch between the ever more qualifications acquired and the labor market, on the other hand. Furthermore, Michael Sandel (2020) in the upcoming book *The Tyranny of Merit* describes the need to develop policies aiming towards the common good because current meritocratic policies divide society into a class of talented hubristic winners and another class of individuals harshly penalize because of their unsuccess in life. In order to describe successful outcomes, the author argues in favor of inclusive social policies that take into account the role of luck, the importance of humility in relationship with others and a stronger and more responsible civic ethic.

At the same time, it should be argued in favor of a broader description of long-term performance that also considers grit[9] as a factor that strongly influences successful outcomes. A compelling study was done at West Point Military Academy that focused on this concept in order to improve its recruiting strategy and raise the number of successful graduates: "In a prospective, longitudinal study of more than 11,000 West Point cadets, the research team discovered that both cognitive and noncognitive factors can predict long-term achievement, with characteristics like intelligence, grit, and physical capacity each influencing a person's ability to succeed in different ways." (Berger, 2019). One possible solution is to integrate in the educational process the use of the grit mindset and characteristics based on the grit scale[10] created by Angela Duckworth (odd numbers highlight passion and even numbers highlight perseverance; the average score is between 1 and 5) as a self-assessment tool and compare the results with long-term achievement in academic clusters.

[9] Grit is a characteristic comprising passion and perseverance for achieving long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016).
[10] See Duckworth (2020).

5. Return on investment in education

In a study on the "Economic Value of Higher Teacher Quality" (Hanushek, 2010), the premise used is to associate teacher demand with the demand for educated students or student outcome and to corroborate the teacher salaries structure with teacher performance expressed in economic value. Current salary structures are based on teachers' skills, experience, class performance and political negotiation, but the author argues that a better solution would be to let the free labor market dictate salaries based on teacher effectiveness in economic output. "The consideration of the impact of the most ineffective teachers suggests substantial economic gains from instituting policies to identify the most ineffective teachers and to move them out of the classroom" (p. 25), this would also reflect in higher salaries for performant teachers and higher returns on investment for the public budget.

Academic ROI is a much debated on topic around the world and various countries scrutinize multiple formulas, struggling to create budget plans, competing views on private or public financing at various education levels, accounting for positive social outcomes and boosting employment, ensuring gender equality and avoiding social disparities and seeking to boost innovation. According to a working paper by Education Global Practice and The World Bank Group, "Returns on investment in education based on human capital theory have been estimated since the late 1950s. Human capital theory puts forward the concept that investments in education increase future productivity." (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018, p. 2). The general acceptance is that the rate of ROI in education is represented by an investment in education expressed in terms of costs and benefits accounted for on a yearly basis, and in order for that investment to be economically viable, the return should be positive. The above study shows that average private return to higher education (12.4%) is higher than average social return to higher education (10.6%) and the difference is even more pronounced when adjusted to economic development and adjusted to income: 15.8% vs. 10.5% (pp. 11-13).

Nevertheless, there is growing disbelief in the human capital theory and its ability to realistically quantify the competencies acquired by an individual and to measure their return on investment effectively: "Nonetheless, this notion has come to dominate educational policy thinking – and can clearly be seen manifested in the logic of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks[11]" (Allais, 2012, p. 262).

The line or argument is formed around the concept of ensuring social justice based on the above-mentioned theory of meritocracy: empowered individuals work hard, find new opportunities to secure a good job and will be rewarded justly. This opens the argument for human capital theory and the connection between outcomes-based qualification frameworks and the knowledge economy: more education generates more income for the productive individuals, which in turn translates into more capital for the nation and grows the economy. But Hugh Lauder states (Brehm, 2016) that there is no empirical evidence that outcomes-based qualifications lead to a win-win scenario portrayed by the knowledge economy and additionally states we are exiting the period of skilled biased theory[12] and entering a period of "digital taylorism" when the majority of people become deskilled by technology, jobs become fairly standardized and routinized and the competitive mechanisms of knowledge capitalism will overall drive the cost of labor down. Consequentially, a global labor market will be created by globalization due to an upstream pull from the international companies and a stratification of labor classes will appear: a narrow upper class, "benefitting only a small minority of knowledge workers" of very talented elites who will be heavily rewarded, a middle class to search for talent and a large class of people "forced into a global labour market for high-skilled low-waged work (and of course those who are not 'knowledge workers' remain in low-skilled low-waged work)" (Allais, 2012, p. 260).

Perhaps now more than ever, the concept of digital taylorism is more relevant because of the global pandemic and competition among EU members is described by using the Digital Economy

[11] Allais uses this construction to encompass other terms like objectives-based and outcomes-based curriculum, competence-based training, and learner-centeredness.

[12] "Skill bias theory makes the universal assumption that the demand for skilled workers will be driven by new technology." (Phillips, 2014, p. 250).

and Society Index (DESI)[13] where Lithuania ranks 14th out of 28 according to 2020 figures. In this sense, education processes have an even greater importance and can offer a strong and transversal value proposition if based on functional academic clusters. In explicit terms, the education processes value proposition should concentrate on bringing together and "create the 'magnetism' to attract the type of people you want associated with your organization. Both are a critical link to the business strategy and key drivers of long-term profitable growth" (Sorensen, [s. a.]), in this case the customer value proposition (CVP for students) aligned with the employee value proposition (EVP for teachers).

6. Improving the value proposition of education processes

Unfortunately, Lithuania is not present in the above mentioned survey on ROI in education, but perhaps a hypothetical idea is to use a bottom-up approach and link performance inhibitors with ROI in education, based on previous examples of student-teacher long-term performance. This proposal is coherent with improving the value proposition in academic clusters from the perspective of bettering the employee value proposition (EVP), in this case specifically focusing on the teacher. Having in mind EVP "constitutes the most compelling reasons an employee would choose to join an organization and choose to stay" (Sorensen, [s. a.]) the example below presents how university teachers perceive job satisfaction.

A quantitative research is not available at the moment, thus the negative factors' degree of impact on the ROI in Lithuanian education should not be speculated, although the following qualitative conclusions can be extracted from a study conducted in Lithuania at Klaipėda University on the "Attitudes of university teachers towards the factors affecting their job satisfaction" (Jovarauskaitė & Tolutienė, 2010, p. 101):

Table 2. Main aspects affecting lecturers' job satisfaction [translated by the author]

Rank	Aspects affecting lecturer's job satisfaction
1	Psychological climate
2	Working conditions
3	Work relations
4	Collaboration
5	Salary[a]
6	Improvement opportunities
7	Recognition
8	Self-realization opportunities
9	Career opportunities
10	Calling
11	University's reputation
12	Participation in university's activities

Note: Ranked by Jovarauskaitė and Tolutienė from the most important (1) to the least important (12).
[a] Salary influences job satisfaction for the majority (81%) of respondents.

According to the study, more experience seems to play a key role for higher job satisfaction and work relations, while recognition and career opportunities are more important for the less experienced teachers, thus it can be concluded that experience relevance in education increases gradually and benefits the job holistically, as time passes. At the same time, it can be hypothesized that factors beneficial to acquiring experience are less important for teachers at the beginning of their career, thus possibly undermining their personal management and career perspective, for example focusing on a short-term higher pay rather than deeper integration with the academic community.

[13] "a composite index that summarises relevant indicators on Europe's digital performance and tracks the evolution of EU Member States in digital competitiveness." (European Commission, 2020). Five key elements are measured: connectivity, human capital, use of internet services, integration of digital technology, and digital public services.

Recent developments in Lithuania present a top-down approach, where The Government of the Republic of Lithuania decided to increase lecturers' and scientists' salaries by 8,125% starting September 1st, 2020 in order to make these professions more attractive, increase motivation, productivity and achieve competitive advantage. This increase is a part of education and science system reform of 2018 that tries to ensure a stable salary growth of researchers. Salaries increased in total by 40% between 2017-2019 (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020). It can be concluded that these measures are specific to improving EVP in Lithuanian HEIs and according to the theoretical background EVP should align with the customer value proposition (CVP) for achieving, in this case, excellence in higher education.

CVP is seen as "Your advantage in the market is the sum of which internal capabilities, which allow you to deliver what[14] value to your customers that your competitors can't [offer]." (Tennø, 2019) and in the case of higher education, the center of attention is on the student. It is important to note a growing number of divergent opinions pointing out that focusing solely on objectives and outcomes to measure and reward performance is erroneous because it heavily relies on methodological individualism (classical liberal theory points out that in natural law it is the individual rather than the group that has rights and can assert them) to explain good or bad outcomes (Lauder, 2015). The stem of methodological individualism connects in practical terms with nineteenth and twentieth-century American context when rugged individualism dominated the landscape (independent families living far away from each other and relying on self-sufficiency) as an overreaction to socialist ideology (McMaken, 2017). A "new learner-centered approach"[15] (where knowledge is constructed based on the needs, wants and experiences of the student) is commonly associated with a new learning paradigm and it is explained by and connected with neoliberal economic theories where the role of the individual is highly praised for empowering his human capital, for being aware of the market and its imperfections and rationally constructing his own destiny (Allais, 2012, pp. 263-266). Learner-centered education has a background in the homeschooling educational model developed by John Holt in the USA: a process where the child is moved from formal education, through deschooling, then homeschooled by using specific standards (similar to the ones in school, but in a different environment and with parents in the role of teachers) or unschooled, by using no formal criteria, curricula or standards (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, [s. a.]). Homeschooling up to the age of 18 was recently approved in Lithuania, and starting the school year 2020-2021, upon signing a contract, parents will be allowed to school their children at home, but only by using approved curricula, materials and books (Seimas [Parliament] of the Republic of Lithuania, initiated 2019). Having in mind the fact that external performance evaluation will be carried about by professional teachers, it will be particularly interesting to see if parents will raise to the expectations of positive upbringing by being good pedagogues and also competent in knowledge.

Furthermore, critics point out that practical individualism fails to recognize the complex historical context and structures in society and downplays the value of knowledge as a central part of education institutions. Simultaneously, it is highlighted the importance to follow a subject-centered approach to education, to treat knowledge as a standalone entity that will place education above the narrow relationship with the labor market and disassociate education policies from the "place of experience" (where, by using constructivism, new experiences are created for the student in relationship with the environment and the market economy) (Charlot, 2009, as cited in Allais, 2012, p. 267).

A compromise solution proposed by Young (2011, p. 269) is to consider the objectivity of knowledge for the future of schooling (future 3) as an alternative to the subject-centered curriculum characterized by the givenness of knowledge (future 1) and to the learner-centered curriculum characterized by the openness and construction of knowledge (future 2). The term used by Young to

[14] Which capabilities and what value are the elements that the CVP should provide the best answers to, in order to be persuasive and attract the buyer.

[15] "The 'new' learner-centredness goes beyond curriculum and pedagogy, and extends to the organization of education: national qualifications frameworks present 'ladders' of qualifications described in terms of learning outcomes […]" (Allais, 2012, p. 255).

describe future 3 is *powerful knowledge* where "knowledge is not 'powerful' just because it is 'defined by the powerful'; it is 'powerful' because of the understanding it offers to those who have access to it" (Young, 2011, p. 269). A second solution, this time based on a practical approach, is to analyze the work process in relation with the tasks required to fulfill in the business environment and the individual to utilize the relevant knowledge for that particular task. The term used by Tūtlys and Spöttl is w*ork-process knowledge* and it "creates the coherence [between] the knowledge of corporate work organization, shop-floor requirements and specialized theoretical knowledge." (Tūtlys & Spöttl, 2017, p. 53).

One possible interpretation is to see learner-centeredness "not inherently incompatible with the idea of subjects or a knowledge-based curriculum. Some advocates of learner-centredness see it as a primarily pedagogical notion: that the knowledge which is in the curriculum must be presented in ways that resonate with children's [student, in this context] interests and existing knowledge" (Allais, 2014, p. 40). Viewing learning-centeredness from two separate angles, as a pedagogical concept on one hand, and antagonistic to subject-centeredness on the other hand, and preferring the former over the latter, sets the ground for applying the pedagogical process called *reflexive pedagogy* emphasizes "the role of the student as an active agent in relation to content knowledge and in relation to peers" (DoE Curriculum, 2018). Reflexive pedagogy as a process positions itself on middle-ground between the subject-centered approach specific to traditional or elitist curriculum and new knowledge driven by economic demand derived from a social construct. It is not excluding classic didactic pedagogy but instead builds a repertoire of reflexive moves like learning and discovery that can sometimes include traditional elements like understanding and memorizing of notions and concepts.

In a complex interpretation it is important to describe the connection between reflexive pedagogy and a new concept called *competence knowledge*. First of all, competence should not be a concept limited to objectives and outcomes, quite on the contrary it should be viewed holistically and in relation to oneself strengths and weaknesses, who begins a process of self-development; it is best presented through the following description: "competence is not an object that can be transferred from one person to another, but a deeply personal characteristic or attribute. Competence indicates the totality of personal qualities that are recognized and attributed to individuals when they demonstrate capacity to mobilize their own internal resources […] and external resources […] to address tasks and problems of professional activity and life in general." (Tūtlys, Winterton, Tacconi, 2018, p. 14). Secondly, the concept competence knowledge should be viewed as a quality that encompasses a series of stages in the educational process where the relation between the (competent) student and knowledge is very dynamic. Competence knowledge is not a student-centered process of constructing knowledge, but a reflexive pedagogy educational process combined with the following steps: creating the premises for knowledge, exposing the student to knowledge, nurturing it and growing, broadening it and deepening it, and eventually mastering competence knowledge. Thirdly, competence knowledge should not be assessed strictly from the point of view of one-time outcomes and results dictated by the relationship between education and the labor market, but rather tracked by using various self-assessment tools in academic clusters and across disciplines, making incremental steps in knowledge acquisition and long-term achievement. Finally, the concepts presented before, and the steps proposed, should improve the value proposition of the education processes and better the higher education institutions which will implement them.

7. Conclusions

This study reflects on the value of education in modern society and relates quality education with a series of sustainable development goals for human evolution – this argument is the most common if education is pursued for its ends and not for its means. But education has a deeper, intrinsic value, that departs from outcomes and should focus on the learners, content and teachers in a balanced manner. Having this in mind, the study focuses on the intrinsic value of education from the perspective of improving the value proposition of education processes and pursues long-term performance and achievement within functional academic clusters, in order to obtain both a high

return on investment and better the higher education institutions which will implement the proposed solutions.

Specifically, the value proposition of education processes stresses the importance of functional academic clusters, where both the customer value proposition for the students and the employee value proposition for the teachers are equally relevant. In order to develop the academic relationship within the cluster, a bottom-up method is proposed by using the HEInnovate self-assessment tool – personalized solutions for the members will help them identify key areas that should be improved and apply corrections that, throughout time, will improve the relationship with stakeholders in education and consequentially, positively shape the Lithuanian education system. Furthermore, the concepts of meritocracy and positive result-based return on investment in education are presented in relation with the side-effects of digital taylorism and the solution proposed is to use the grit scale and the actual mindset and characteristic of grit in studies, as a way to better measure, track and reward long-term performance.

The particular quality features of the above hybrid solutions are underpinned by competence knowledge based on the process of reflexive pedagogy - these will positively impact the value proposition of education processes, and the result of the processes will reflect in environments, which in turn will generate performant outcomes both in academic clusters and in the education system. Good education processes not only describe a good value proposition but also ensure long-term balance for both the downstream and the upstream of this complex system, but one might be quick to conclude that by pursuing quick outcomes and working top-down it is the right way. Yet education is like a mirror, it provides a reflection of the bottom in the up and like every reflection it is the other way around: maybe it is time to design education processes that start by asking what do its academic clusters want and not what its masters command.

References

1. Allais, S. (2012). 'Economics imperialism', education policy and educational theory. *Journal of Education Policy, 27:2*, 253-274, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2011.602428
2. Allais, S. (2014) *Selling out education. National Qualifications Frameworks and the Neglect of Knowledge.* Sense Publishers.
3. Baužienė, Z., Perkumienė, D., Marinko, I. (2016). Dėstytojo vaidmuo į studentą orientuotose studijose. *Laisvalaikio tyrimai.* Vol. 1 (No. 7). https://doi.org/10.33607/elt.v1i7.226
4. Berger, M. W. (2019). *What factors predict success?* Penn Today. https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/Penn-Angela-Duckworth-looks-beyond-grit-predict-success
5. Brehm, W. (Executive Producer). (2015-present). *Lauder, Hugh, interview with Will Brehm.* [Audio podcast]. FreshEd, 29, 2016. https://www.freshedpodcast.com/hughlauder/
6. Coalition for Responsible Home Education, [s. a.]). *A Brief History of Homeschooling*, Responsible Homeschooling. https://responsiblehomeschooling.org/research/summaries/a-brief-history-of-homeschooling/
7. Colby, J. & Witt, M. et al. (2000). Defining quality in education. *UNICEF Working Paper Series*. (Working paper UNICEF/PD/ED/00/02). https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNICEF_Defining_Quality_Education_2000.PDF
8. DoE Curriculum (2018, June 5). *Didactic and Reflexive Pedagogy* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6ZGNQ_efsc
9. Duckworth, A. [s. a.]. *Grit Scale*. Angela Duckworth. https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/
10. Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.* Collins.
11. European Commission (2020). *The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)*, European Commission. Retrieved June 14, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/desi
12. European Migration Network (2018). *Attracting and retaining international students in Lithuania. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/17a_lithuania_attracting_retaining_international_students_en.pdf*
13. Eurostat (2020). *Statistics Explained,* European Commission. Retrieved June 10, 2020, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-

explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#NEETs:_analysis_by_educational_attainment_level
14. Gehlbach, H., Brinkworth, M. E. & Harris, A. D. (2012) Changes in teacher-student relationships. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.2011.02058.x
15. George Lucas Educational Foundation (2014). *Developing a multi-tiered system of supports*. Edutopia. https://www.edutopia.org/practice/improving-learning-all-students-multi-tiered-approach
16. Government of the Republic of Lithuania. (2020, April 15). *Nuo 2020 m. rugsėjo 1 d. augs dėstytojų ir mokslininkų atlyginimai.* Mano vyriausybė. *http://lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/nuo-2020-m-rugsejo-1-d-augs-destytoju-ir-mokslininku-atlyginimai*
17. Hanushek, E. A. (2010). Economic value of higher teacher quality. *NBER Working Paper Series*. (Working paper 16606). http://www.nber.org/papers/w16606
18. Haslam, S. A., Reicher S. D. (2012). Contesting the "nature" of conformity: What Milgram and Zimbardo's studies really show. *PLOS Biology* 10(11): e1001426. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1001426
19. HEInnovate [s. a.]. *Is your Higher Education Institution prepared for future challenges?,* HEInnovate. https://heinnovate.eu/en
20. Jovarauskaitė, A. & Tolutienė, G. (2010). Universiteto dėstytojų pasitenkinimui darbu įtakos turintys veiksniai. *Jaunųjų Mokslininkų Darbai*. *Nr. 1* (26). pp. 95-103. ISSN 1648-8776
21. Knyvienė, I., Perkumienė, D., Marinko, I. & Gołębiowski, A. (2017). Lithuanian, Polish and Slovenian Case in experience of different methods using in a student-centred process. *Social Education / Social Clustering in Sustainable Society, Vol. 45* (No. 1,) pp. 14–28. http://dx.doi.org/10.15823/su.2017.2
22. Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras (2020). *About us*. KPMPC. https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/en/
23. Lauder, H. (2015, February 5). *The death of human capital: why there are no exceptions* [Video]. University of Oxford. http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/death-human-capital-why-there-are-no-exceptions
24. Lavy, V. (2015). Teachers' pay for performance in the long-run: Effects on students' educational and labor market outcomes in adulthood. *NBER Working Paper Series (*Working Paper 20983). http://www.nber.org/papers/w20983
25. Leitner, J., New America and OECD (2017). *SDGs in order: The first ever sequence for tackling the most important problems in the world*. SDGs in order. https://www.sdgsinorder.org/goals
26. McMaken, R. (2017). *Must Libertarians Be Individualists?,* Mises Wire. https://mises.org/wire/must-libertarians-be-individualists
27. OECD (2002). GINI Index. In *OECD Glossary of statistical terms*. Retrieved April 20, 2020, from https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=4842
28. Phillips, D. C. (Ed.). (2014) *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*. SAGE Publications.
29. Psacharopoulos, G. & Patrinos, H. A. (2013). Education: The income and equity loss of not having a faster rate of human capital accumulation. In Lomborg, B. (Ed.), *How much have global problems cost the world? A scorecard from 1900 to 2050.* (Chapter 5). Cambridge University Press.
30. Psacharopoulos, G. & Patrinos, H. A. (2018). Returns to investment in education: A decennial review of the global literature. *Policy Research Working Paper. World Bank*. (No. 8402). https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29672
31. Sandel, M. (2020). *An Animated Michael Sandel Explains How Meritocracy Degrades Our Democracy*, Open Culture. http://www.openculture.com/2019/09/an-animated-michael-sandel-explains-how-meritocracy-degrades-our-democracy.html
32. Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (2019, December 3) Seimas įstatyme įteisino ugdymą namuose. Visuomenei ir Žiniasklaidai. https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35403&p_k=1&p_t=269133
33. Skaburskienė, N., Zalitis, A. (2015). *Europinės kreditų perkėlimo ir kaupimo sistemos įgyvendinimas Lietuvoje: Studentų ir dėstytojų supratimas. https://www.skvc.lt/uploads/documents/files/ECTS%20tyrimas.pdf*
34. SKVC. [s. a.]. *Aukštasis mokslas.* SKVC. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from https://www.skvc.lt/default/lt/lietuvos-svietimo-sistema/aukstasis-mokslas
35. Sorensen, A. [s. a.]. *Are Your CVP and EVP Aligned with Your Business Strategy?,* Axiom. https://www.axiomcp.com/idea/are-your-customer-and-employee-value-propositions-aligned-with-your-business-strategy/
36. Spinter tyrimai. (2015). *Sociologinis aukštųjų mokyklų dėstytojų tyrimas*. http://smpf.lt/uploads/dokumentai/Ataskaita_apr_ECTS_Destytojai_201506.pdf

37. Tennø, H. (2019). *Finding your Customer Value Proposition*, Medium. https://medium.com/everything-new-is-dangerous/finding-your-customer-value-proposition-c91584649937
38. Tūtlys, V., Spöttl, G. (2017). From the analysis of work-processes to designing competence-based occupational standards and vocational curricula. *European Journal of Training and Development, Vol. 41* Issue: 1, pp.50-66, https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-10-2015-0078
39. Tūtlys, V., Winterton, J., Tacconi, G. (2018). Competency Proficiency Scaling. In: McGrath S., Mulder M., Papier J., Suart R. (Eds.) *Handbook of Vocational Education and Training*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49789-1_67-1
40. UNESCO Institute for Statistics [s. a.]. *International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED),* UNESCO. http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced
41. United Nations (2015). *Sustainable development goals.* UN. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300
42. United Nations (2015). *Quality education: Why it matters.* UN. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/4.pdf
43. Vilniaus Gedimino technikos universitetas [s. a.]. *Kolegijų absolventams*. VGTU. https://www.vgtu.lt/stojantiesiems/kolegiju-absolventams/416?lang=1
44. *What is a Value Proposition? - Definition & Examples,* [s. a.], Study.com. Retrieved June 16, 2020, from https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-a-value-proposition-definition-examples.html
45. Whitehurst, J. [s. a.]. *Meritocracy: The Workplace Culture That Breeds Success*, Wired. https://www.wired.com/insights/2014/10/meritocracy/
46. Young, M. (1958). *The Rise of the Meritocracy.* Transaction Publishers.
47. Young, M. (2011). The return to subjects: a sociological perspective on the UK Coalition government's approach to the 14–19 curriculum. *The Curriculum Jou*rnal, 22:2, pp. 265-278, DOI: 10.1080/09585176.2011.574994

KOKYBĖS UGDYMO LIETUVOJE ĮŽANGA, ANALIZUOJAMA AUKŠTOJO MOKSLO INSTITUCIJOSE UGDYMO PROCESŲ PERSPEKTYVA

Flavius Streianu

Vilniaus kolegija, Verslo vadybos fakultetas,
Didlaukio g. 49, Vilnius, Lithuania
Mykolo Romerio universitetas,
Ateities g. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania

Santrauka

Straipsnio pradžioje holistiniu būdu aprašomas ryšys tarp aukštos kokybės švietimo ir tvaraus vystymosi tikslų įgyvendinimo, siekiant teigiamų visuomenės pokyčių ir žmogaus evoliucijos. Pereinant nuo santykio su rezultatais prie santykio su priemonėmis, dėmesys sutelkiamas į esminius švietimo kokybės deskriptorius, konkrečiai – besimokančiuosius, turinį, procesus, aplinką ir rezultatus bei jų sąsajas kompleksinėje sociokultūrinėje, politinėje ir ekonominėje sistemoje. Toliau straipsnyje pristatoma Lietuvos aukštojo mokslo sistema, atsižvelgiant į valstybės institucijų vaidmenį ir jų raidą pastaraisiais metais, ir pabrėžiamas sistemos veikimas remiantis įvairiais daugiausia su rinkos ekonomika susijusiais veiksniais, tokiais kaip užsienio studentų pritraukimas ir išlaikymo lygis bei bendras absolventų užimtumo lygis. Remiantis šiais faktiniais įrodymais kaip pagrindinis kintamasis pasirenkama procesų sąvoka ir, remiantis trečiosios šalies tyrimo išvadomis toliau tiriami ir klasifikuojami švietimo procesai Lietuvos aukštajame moksle.

Darbe dar kartą patvirtinama prasmingų procesų svarba ugdyme ir pateikiami pavyzdžiai, kai funkciniuose akademiniuose klasteriuose buvo laikomasi stiprios studijų etikos, kai, siekiant ilgalaikio efektyvumo, vietoje įprasto „iš viršaus į apačią“ metodo buvo palaikomi studentų ir dėstytojų akademiniai santykiai „iš apačios į viršų“. Vienas iš siūlomų sprendimų, skirtų pagerinti akademinių klasterių funkcionavimą didinant klasterio narių vidinį verslumą yra HEIinnovate įrankio, skirto savęs vertinimui, naudojimas. Taip pat aprašoma, kaip buvo stebima ir vertinama rezultatų raida ilgame laikotarpyje naudojant meritokratinę sistemą atlyginti už pažangą, tačiau išsakoma ir kritinė nuomonė dėl meritokratijos nepatikimumo ir netikslumo. Kitas pasiūlytas sprendimas – kaip savęs įsivertinimo įrankį naudoti GRIT skalę, kuri parodo tikimybę pasiekti vertinamojo ilgalaikius tikslus atsižvelgiant į jo asmeninę aistrą ir atkaklumą kaip įtaką darančius veiksnius. Straipsnyje

toliau aprašomi investicijų į švietimą grąžos rezultatai ir jo individuali bei sisteminė nauda, tačiau, kita vertus, pateikiami prieštaravimai dėl žmogiškojo kapitalo modelio pasenimo ir riboto ryšio tarp švietimo ir darbo ekonomikos, pristatant skaitmeninio teilorizmo sąvoką.

Galiausiai straipsnyje pabrėžiama vidinė švietimo vertė, paremta patobulintu švietimo procesų vertės pasiūlymu. Pabrėžiami akademiniai klasteriai ir sutelkiamas dėmesys į darbuotojų vertės pasiūlymo dėstytojams gerinimą, grindžiamą didėjančiu pasitenkinimu darbu, ir kliento vertės pasiūlymo studentams tobulinimą, paremtą tvirtesniais švietimo procesais. Atsižvelgiant į diskusiją apie žinias, įgautas į dalyką koncentruotose studijų programose prieš žinias, įgautas į besimokantįjį orentuotose studijų programose, išvadose siūloma įgyvendinti hibridinius sprendimus, kurie apjungia kompetencinių žinių panaudojimą, paremtą refleksiniu pedagoginiu procesu, ir, kaip šalutinį poveikį, pagerinti vertės didinimą aukštojo mokslo įstaigose ir nacionaliniu lygmeniu.