

37. Schnetker, *Transhumanistische Mythologie*, a. a. O., S. 24.
38. With the spelling Centaur\_essa and Centaur\_essas I want to follow gender equality in the language. This means all genders with their double nature, which was mentioned at the beginning.
39. Sünkel, *Centaurus*, a. a. O., S. 61.

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## **EDUCATIONAL REFORMS VS. EDUCATIONAL REPLICA: AT THE JUNCTURE OF BECOMING A PLACEBO IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ARMENIA**

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**Keywords:** higher education reforms, higher education policy, conceptual framework of higher education, performance measurement system.

**Brief introduction.** The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed arduous efforts of world polities to endure the ups and downs of globalization and has coerced many economies to step into the age of knowledge-based economies, subsequently triggering substantive changes in the domains of national higher education systems. Globalization, geopolitical and socio-cultural provident developments, and economic instable changes have drastically increased international competition, have intensified massification in higher education and rapidly advanced technologies to the level where these veracities necessitated radical and systemic transformations and reforms in higher education systems across the world. One of the significant megatrends in the contemporary societies is the expansion of higher education and the global recognition that this sector is crucial for social, cultural, and economic development (Cantwell et al., 2018). Accordingly, education systems have been mainly embedded with a long-term development of any society, and their efficient application is instrumental to economic growth and social cohesion. Karakhanyan and Stensaker (2020: 11) further posit that “globalization, massification, and the digital revolution have prompted radical change to the higher education environment and opened up opportunities for a wider range of higher education providers, modes of delivery and student cohorts.” Certain national educational systems and educational jurisdictions have not been ready for such a high tide of reforms either at the systemic or institutional levels. Over a very limited span, educational jurisdictions were typically forced to become rigorously evaluated “output-oriented” systems, often assessed by attainment targets stipulated by different supranational bodies to cater to the needs of divergent constituents. Thus, HE systems have confronted legal and domain-specific problems that are diverse in their nature, are convoluted by the presence of conflicting interests and contesting values between global, national, and local educational environments and are further

complicated by the tasks of engaging and retaining human capital within any national or regional boundaries.

**Formulation of the Problem.** Armenia has not been an exception to these global challenges and developmental tendencies. In the realm of higher education, the issue is more complex and typical for Armenia as a society in transition. Since regaining independence in 1991 until joining the Bologna Process in 2005, Armenia ideologically distanced itself from global educational reforms and did not make commitment to the indoctrination of educational reforms. This ideologically might match up with the assertion that educational reforms are as a ‘placebo,’ that is, symbolic actions designed to indicate governmental awareness of problems and sympathetic intentions, rather than serious efforts and stringent policies to achieve social cohesion and become competitive internationally. However, with the exposure to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) integration in 2005 and onwards, Armenia has systematically been financed for the creation of a functional and competitive education system, has formulated, and implemented the strategy of “revitalizing the country through science and education” (RA Government Program 2008), and has put the development of education as a strategic priority in the globalization drive. Armenia has continuously expressed interest in the harmonization of its higher education and research systems, enthused by the developments made in this respect within Europe that has become a common reference point for the Armenian policy makers, rectors, and other parties. In the last two decades, Armenia has strived to build a structure of competitive education with high quality assurance and quality enhancement practices in compliance with the EU standards. In general, Armenia certainly has imitated that it pushes forward the processes of higher education reforms and steady developments of its universities within the European agenda. Overall, these imitative objectives should be harnessed so that the RA education system should be in line with international education systems while maintaining state strategic priorities and organic competitiveness.

**A short analysis of current research and publications related to the problem.** The complexity and large scale of these system-level and institutional reforms mean that improving the quality of higher education and targeting higher education reforms should work both “upwards” and “downwards.” It must work “upwards” by educating policy makers in higher education and education managers to conceptualize and fully understand education paradigms and employ appropriate processes and tools, but also “downwards” from the RA Government and other governmental entities to change regulations and introduce better functioning education management systems. One of these will not work without the other. However, the Armenian case has not ensued in this manner.

In this context, it should be stated there is either limited or non-existent respective expertise to carry out international commitments that the RA Government has undertaken and perform competitive activities in market relations and research-intensive economic activities. Up to now, neither the RA government or any governmental entity, nor universities have initiated a wide-spread discussion on the above-mentioned topics or the configuration of current reforms in higher education management that are still in the formulation process. Currently some changes in socio-economic missions of the Armenian universities have a potential to lead to the changes in education management models, modes of learning, and

practices and mechanisms of conducting research. However, these incremental changes do not turn into capitalized practices and continue to vanish under the influence of several factors. The key factors influencing the impediments of changes in higher education in the RA are as follows: continuing reduction in state funding for higher education and research, decrease of resource availability and high level of brain drain, external environment's changeability, change of university missions with the aim to respectively respond the external challenges and factors, rapid changes in modes of education and learning, and exponential growth of private profit educational sector and the market of other higher education providers. Such changes do not have any capacity to be effectively implemented without proper funding at the initial stage from the RA Government, later by industry or other mechanisms. This should necessarily modify current education funding mechanisms and should further strengthen the link between higher education and industry.

Regarding the sustainability assurance of the funding mechanism of the RA higher education system and the RA universities, it should be mentioned that the efficient management of financial flows and diversification of funding are of great significance. However, the opportunities for diversifying financial flows, operating fundraising practices and flexible financial management mechanisms are limited by the deficient mechanisms of the national policies and legal framework in the RA, low level of strategic thinking among the higher education policy makers and university managers, and the insufficiency of state funding allocated to higher education and research under the current socio-economic conditions. Under conditions of scarce of financial resources, the opportunities of additional financial sources directed to the development of the sphere of higher education sector enable universities to overcome a number of problems such as the underdevelopment of efficient strategies, non-flexible mechanisms of management (including financial management), inefficiency of traditional strategic management approaches, poor culture of donation by alumni and other donors and non-targeted use of donated financial resources, absence of startup capital and investments necessary for efficient management of endowment funds, underdeveloped culture of involving stakeholders in university decision-making processes, lack of endowment funds and investments in general, etc.

### **Aim of the publication.**

This article pursues the objective of promoting a superior understanding of imminent need in the transformation of higher education system in Armenia, based on the interests and needs of internal and external stakeholders (e.g., state, society, students, faculty, board of trustees, parents, taxpayers, and other constituencies) fit into that broader picture. The arguments herein may also promote a more holistic picture of the complexity of higher education landscape and the interplay between the economy and society. This article provides a conceptual foundation to further ponder on whether higher education reforms in Armenia for the past two decades have been targeted towards the creation of internationally competitive higher education system in Armenia or were mere replications of pre-defined agenda stemming from global implications in education.

The conceptual framework has been devised from the outputs of rigorous document analysis, literature review, and deep interviews on the topic of the impact of higher education reforms in the Republic of Armenia. A series of in-depth interviews were conducted with a wide range of state education policy makers, university senior managers, institutional

accreditation specialists, quality assurance representatives, as well as various constituencies and stakeholder groups.

**Research novelty.** The current needs of the RA economy, increasing social needs and labor market demands as well as global processes occurring in the field of higher education have necessitated the RA Government to ponder about vision and define a new development strategy in higher education. Currently, the RA state universities are not anyhow incentivized and are not aimed at creating, marketing, monetizing, and disseminating their education and research outputs as added value among for the sustainable development of the knowledge-based economy and knowledge society in Armenia. Respectively, most universities are laid out to function not in competitive processes neither in national nor in international labor markets. The goals of offering competitive educational services, competitive educational innovations and practices should supposedly stem from the state priorities and relevant policies, strategic objectives (state priorities) to raise the quality of educational provisions and to enhance the components of research and creativity in the educational processes. The latter ones are the only means that the RA might utilize to align its education and systems with the European standards and guidelines in the long run. These tools are also of outmost importance to facilitate collaboration and set up a profound base for professional networking between internationally recognized highly ranking educational systems. However, another challenge that impedes the process of inculcating the perception on importance of these changes in the society rests in communicating reforms in education both within the academic community and the society at large.

The higher education system in Armenia should ideally offer the end-product that fuels dynamic competition and supports glonacal (global, national, and local) developments of the economies and societies. The conducted research has provided ample evidence to state that the national agenda of education reforms are not heavily based on the inputs and potential of the higher education institutions in Armenia. This veracity is of high importance to be strategically realized by state higher education policy makers, rectors and the HEIs themselves to cultivate seeds of local and regional competitive practices.

**Presentation of the research.** It should be clearly stated that knowledge economy is an aggregate production and services based on the knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an acceleration pace of technical and scientific advances. The onset of the information age and the knowledge-based economy requires countries to become learning societies. The education and high literacy of the population and the shilling of the workforce are the factors which are going to determine a nation's fortune in the 21st century much more than they used to do in the 20th century. The skills base of a nation and the speed with which skilling can adjust to meet new requirements will be as important in determining economic success than a nation's natural resources and financial capital base. These changes will not be achieved without further significant reform in education and training systems. However, system and institutional level changes should stem from the unified conceptual foundation of establishing and sustaining internationally competitive higher education system in Armenia that encourages excellence in higher education and in the long-term context produces competitive outputs. Thus, state focus should be on geared towards the generation of a new knowledge

society in Armenia based on the stakeholders' perspective, satisfying the equilibrium between national and societal demands of the society.

At this stage, this is very important to state that there are no performance measurement and higher education management information systems in place in Armenia to ensure the live data collection from different HEIs in Armenia. This results in such a situation when HE policy makers currently make their decisions not based on any date or empiric evidence. The absence of the former system and non-existence of system-level KPIs further convolute the alignment of the HEI activities with state priorities and strategic activities in Armenia. Taking into consideration that KPIs are composite metrics tied to strategic objectives and targets, strategic objectives/targets at state level should be devised. The attainment of the latter will be measured by KPIs. The proposed metrics should embed high-level KPIs that are aligned with Armenia's ambitions and strategic drivers. The proposed list should also enable several targeted HEIs in Armenia to strive to ultimately become world-class universities and enlisted in top 500 world universities. Another point to consider will be the frequency of data collection for the KPIs from the HEIs (live data, on monthly basis, on quarterly basis, on annual basis). Moreover, high-level KPIs should be carefully chosen, and the quantity of the former should stem from strategic goals.

### **Conclusions and prospects for further research and propositions.**

Research findings suggest that a conceptual foundation for higher education reforms in Armenia has been not in place for the past two decades. In the absence of state agenda of higher education reforms, different decentralized efforts towards the creation of internationally competitive higher education system in Armenia has been exacerbated. Furthermore, higher reforms in Armenia have resembled educational replica of global developments, rather than glonacal educational reforms that have focused on the production of competitive economy and knowledge society.

Based on the rigorous research, this article proposes a set of recommendations that should be taken into consideration in the process of developing conceptual framework.

- A nation-based and wide agreement should be secured among all constituencies and stakeholders on the future agenda of higher education reforms with long-term prospective implications for the development of economics and society in Armenia. This agreement will provide firm foundation for the development of conceptual framework of higher education in Armenia for mid-term and long-term developments.
- Strategic partnerships should be conceptualized, formed, successfully implemented, and sustained in the long-term. These partnerships should embed state representatives, the HEIs, industry representatives and other constituencies to further equip the system with capacity building potential.
- Performance measurement and higher education management information systems should be discussed with various constituencies and further implemented at the system-level of higher education to ensure data collection and data management across all HEIs in Armenia.

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## ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫЕ РЕФОРМЫ В СРАВНЕНИИ С ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ РЕПЛИКОЙ: НА ЭТАПЕ СТАНОВЛЕНИЯ ПЛАЦЕБО В СИСТЕМЕ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ АРМЕНИИ

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### Аннотация

**Ключевые слова:** реформы высшего образования, политика высшего образования, концептуальные основы высшего образования, система измерения эффективности.

Цель данной статьи состоит в более глубоком изучении насущной потребности в системе высшего образования в Армении, основанной на выявлении и потреблении субъектов (например, государства, общества, студентов, преподавателей, попечительского совета, родителей, налогоплательщиков и других субъектов), вписывающихся в эту более обширную картину. Приведенные факторы включают экологические нормы формирования более целостной картины сложного ландшафта высшего образования и взаимодействия между экономикой и обществом. Эта статья является концептуальной основой для дальнейшего рассмотрения вопроса о том, были ли реформы высшего образования в Армении в течение последних двух десятилетий направлены на создание международной конкурентоспособной системы высшего образования или были постоянными простыми изменениями при различных глобальных последствиях.

Концептуальная основа была разработана на основе результатов тщательного анализа документов, обзора литературы и глубоких интервью на тему влияния реформ высшего образования в Республике Армения. Была проведена серия углубленных интервью с широким кругом политиков в области государственного образования, высших руководителей университетов, специалистов по аккредитации учреждений, представителей по обеспечению качества, а также различных избирательных групп и групп заинтересованных сторон.

С момента обретения независимости в 1991 году до присоединения к Болонскому процессу в 2005 году Армения идеологически дистанцировалась от глобальных образовательных реформ и не брала на себя обязательств по внедрению образовательных реформ. Это идеологически может сравняться с утверждением, что реформы образования являются «плацебо», т.е. символическими действиями, призванными показать осведомленность правительства о проблемах и сочувствующих намерениях, а не серьезными усилиями и строгой политикой для достижения социальной сплоченности и стать конкурентоспособными на международном уровне. Однако с учетом интеграции в Европейское пространство высшего образования (ЕНЕА) в 2005 году и далее, Армения систематически финансировалась для создания функциональной и конкурентоспособной системы образования, сформулировала и реализовала стратегию «оживления страны посредством науки и образования» (RA Government Program 2008), и поставила развитие образования в качестве стратегического приоритета в стремлении к глобализации.

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