

A Coordination Mechanism for Parallel Learning between Higher Educational Institutions in Different Countries Worldwide

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Abstract

Educational institutions are a unique system, much more complex than other areas of economic and social life (security, transportation, communications), as it is closely linked to all industries, as well as spiritual and material aspects of both the past and the present. Each country has its mechanism for organizing its educational system. The most powerful initiators of changes in the education system are not its problems or needs but external factors, primarily priorities and requirements for education and upbringing that arise in connection with the country's inclusion in the common movement of the world community, changes in production, culture, social and security spheres, etc. Therefore, all trends in higher education take into account, on the one hand, the priorities of preserving the cultural diversity of national educational systems and, on the other hand, the tasks of improving international cooperation, student mobility, and employment in the international community. In the course of the research, systemic-structural, comparative, logical, and linguistic methods, analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, abstraction, and idealization in the processing of scientific information were applied to study and process materials on parallel learning between HEIs around the world. During the research, the most important trends in the study of issues related to parallel learning in higher educational institutions around the world have been outlined. Moreover, based on the questionnaire survey results, the standpoint of university heads and teachers, as well as scholars studying the mechanisms of higher education in different countries of the world, on certain practical aspects have been revealed.

Keywords: diversity of national education systems, coordination of parallel studies, inter-university cooperation, competitive environment in education, education abroad, structured higher education systems

1. Introduction

Currently, there are growing trends worldwide to intensify and optimize inter-university cooperation as a means of improving the education quality for the benefit of students and HEIs. Students identify exchange programs as an important element of such inter-university cooperation. The mechanism of mutual acquisition, optimization, and recognition of students' academic achievements and qualifications must be constantly improved to enhance the efficiency of education and improve the quality of the employment process through the recognition of diplomas. This also applies to an effective mechanism for coordinating parallel learning between HEIs around the world.

The theoretical part of the present research determines the prerequisites, components, and main trends in developing parallel learning in the higher education system of different countries of the world.

The practical part of the research includes the identification of the main goals pursued by higher educational institutions offering parallel education or training programs. It identifies the most effective higher education structures in terms of parallel diversification of degrees and qualifications. Moreover, the primary problems of parallel learning in HEIs around the world are outlined in this part. The most noticeable outcomes of using parallel learning are highlighted, along with the tendencies in higher education that have the biggest impact on the growth and effectiveness of both new and existing parallel learning mechanisms in HEIs.

Based on the research results, conclusions have been drawn regarding the issues raised. It has been found that the

main goals pursued by HEIs offering education or vocational training programs in parallel with higher education are: offering advanced forms of education oriented to the labor market's needs and meeting the needs of a growing number of new entrants without significantly increasing public expenditure on higher education. The survey showed that the British-American structure is the most effective structure of higher education in terms of parallel diversification of degrees and qualifications. According to the respondents' viewpoint, the primary problems of parallel learning in higher educational institutions around the world are the development of feedback, mutual exchange of learning achievements that students have received at another university within the framework of mobility programs, and increasing the mobility of students and teachers. At the same time, the most tangible results of using parallel education in higher educational institutions around the world are improving the quality and competitiveness of European education based on the preservation of national educational achievements, the development of a pan-European system of quality assurance of the educational process and deepening international cooperation. According to the survey, the primary tendencies in higher education most contributing to the development of existing and the emergence of new mechanisms of parallel learning in HEIs around the world are the emergence of the latest schemes of mobility of the educational process, pan-European research projects, and new ICT.

Parallel learning in educational institutions around the world is a tool for ensuring transparency, building bridges between educational institutions, and expanding choices for students. Currently, the dual enrollment system facilitates institutional recognition of student achievement through using a commonly understood assessment system - credits and grades - and provides a means of interpreting national higher education systems (Marginson, 2022b).

Parallel learning is based on three key elements: information (regarding study programs and coursework), mutual agreement between partner institutions and the student, and the definition of a descriptive academic workload for students. Usually, these three key elements are realized through using three main documents: an information package, an application/contract for the study, and a subject evaluation list. Naturally, parallel learning does not regulate the content, structure, or equivalence of courses. This quality issue should be determined by the universities themselves when creating the necessary basis for concluding bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements. Full recognition of a degree means that the period of study abroad (including examinations or other forms of assessment) replaces the corresponding period of study at the home university (including examinations or other forms of assessment), and, therefore, the content of the agreed program of study may differ (Barida, Rofiah & Fitriawanati, 2020; Kinard, Pickett & Shchetynska, 2019).

Nowadays, parallel learning is voluntary and based on mutual trust and faith in the quality of educational work of partner institutions. At the same time, transparency of such cooperation is ensured by the following means:

- points, which are the numerical equivalent of a grade, the quality of learning to show the level of student effort required to complete the course;
- an information package that provides students and employees with written information about educational institutions, faculties, organizations, and the structure of educational and training areas;
- a list of subject grades that represents the student's academic achievements in a comprehensive and universally understandable form and can be easily transferred from one educational institution to another;
- a study contract, which refers to the curriculum to be studied and the credits awarded for its successful completion, and is binding on domestic and foreign institutions and students (Cerro Santamaría, 2020; Mittlemeier, Rienties, Gunter & Raghuram, 2021; Bedenlier, Kondakci & Zawacki-Richter, 2018).

Tendencies toward a comprehensive (unified) higher education system, along with the development of a strong non-university higher education sector, have contributed to a broader interpretation of the term "university" that differs from the traditional definition for continental Europe (Barros & Biasin, 2019).

Currently, the tendency to develop parallel learning is visible, especially in universities in those countries that have managed to become deeply involved in the process of creating an information society. Until recently, poorly structured higher education systems performed a relatively limited number of tasks related to preserving and strengthening the country's state structures, conducting scientific and technical research in training scientists, and providing the economy with highly efficient qualified specialists (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Tight, 2022).

The research aims to determine the standpoints of teachers and heads of HEIs and researchers studying the mechanism of higher education in different countries of the world on the features of the process of coordinating parallel learning between HEIs of different countries.

2. Method

A practical study of current trends in the coordination of parallel learning between higher educational institutions around the world was conducted by interviewing 232 professors and university heads. Moreover, 52 scientists who teach and conduct studies in Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, Zhytomyr, and Kyiv regions of Ukraine were interviewed. The research was conducted through the Survey Planet service.

Mathematical statistics methods were used to determine the statistical significance of the obtained results based on quantitative and qualitative processing of experimental data.

3. Results

The survey primarily examined the respondents' standpoint on one of the most important practical aspects of parallel education of students in different countries, namely, the definition of the primary goals pursued by HEIs offering education or training programs parallel to higher education (Figure 1):

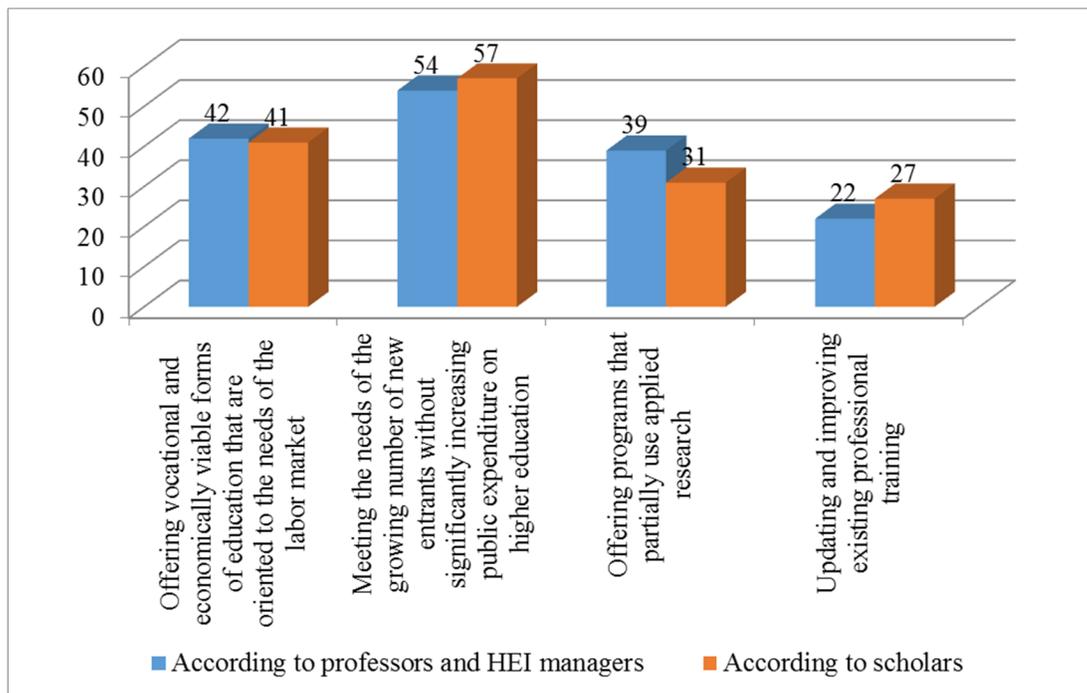


Figure 1. Primary Goals Pursued by HEIs Offering Education or Training Programs Parallel to Higher Education, %

Source: compiled by the authors

According to the survey participants, these goals today are to offer vocational and economically viable forms of education that are oriented toward the labor market's needs and to meet the needs of the growing number of new entrants without significantly increasing public expenditure on higher education.

In the course of the survey, respondents identified the most effective structure of higher education in terms of parallel diversification of degrees and qualifications (Figure 2):

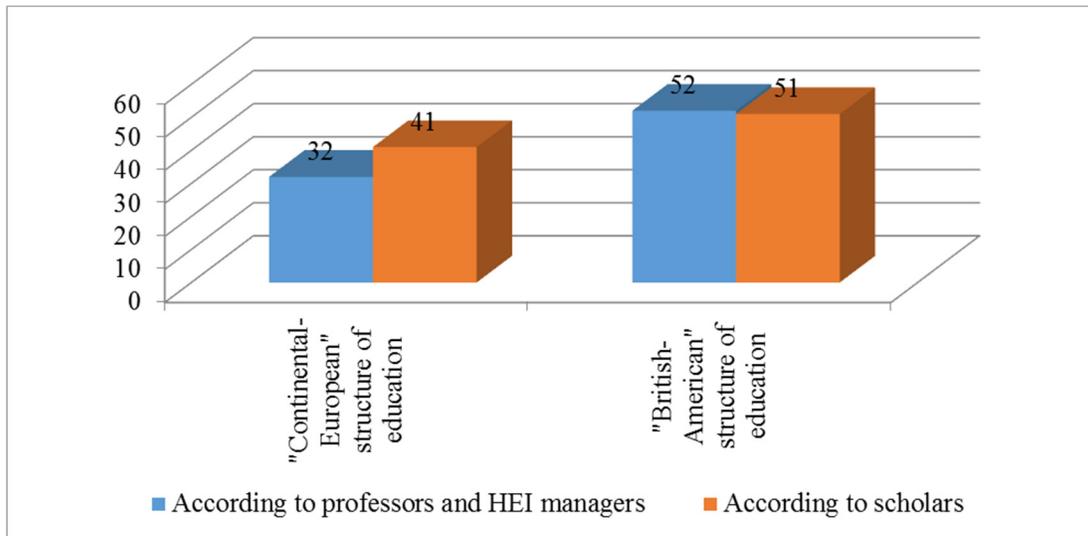


Figure 2. The Most Effective Higher Education Structures in terms of Parallel Diversification of Degrees and Qualifications, %

Source: compiled by the authors

Of all the diversifications of organizational structures of educational institutions, the respondents chose the British-American structure of university education. It is characterized by shorter bachelor’s degree courses and a large number of post-bachelor degree courses, a system of courses partially based on a modular basis.

The survey allowed us to identify the main problems of parallel learning in HEIs around the world that currently should be addressed (Figure 3):

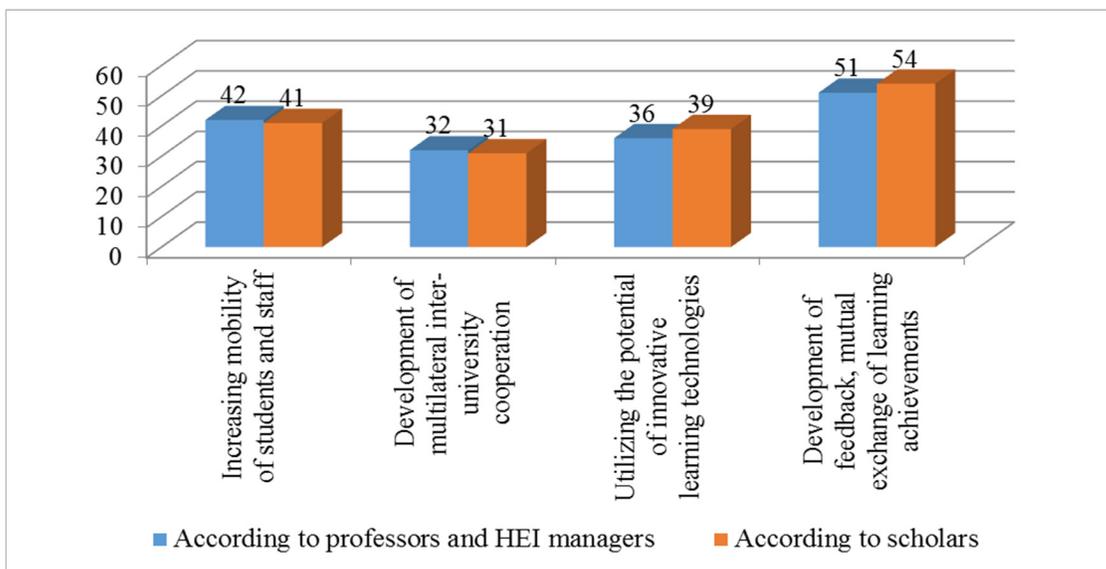


Figure 3. The Main Problems of Parallel Learning in HEIs around the World That Should Be Addressed Urgently, %

Source: compiled by the authors

As can be seen from Figure 3, these problems are the development of feedback, mutual exchange of learning achievements that a student has gained at another university within the framework of mobility programs, and increased mobility of students and teachers.

In the course of the research, respondents were asked to name the main, most tangible results of using parallel

learning in HEIs around the world, which are the most effective and in demand in practice. These results are as follows (Figure 4):

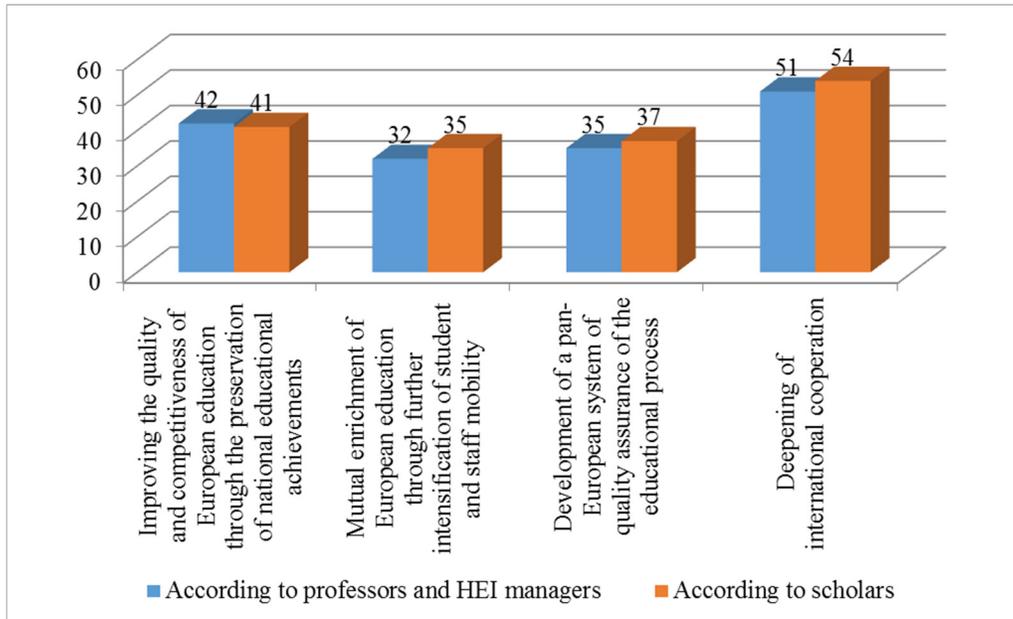


Figure 4. The Most Tangible Results of Using Parallel Learning in HEIs Around the World, %

Source: compiled by the authors

- improving the quality and competitiveness of European education through the preservation of national educational achievements;
- development of a pan-European system of quality assurance of the educational process;
- deepening international cooperation.

The identification of higher education trends most contributing to the development and efficiency of existing and new mechanisms of parallel learning in HEIs around the world is also a significant outcome of the survey (Figure 5):

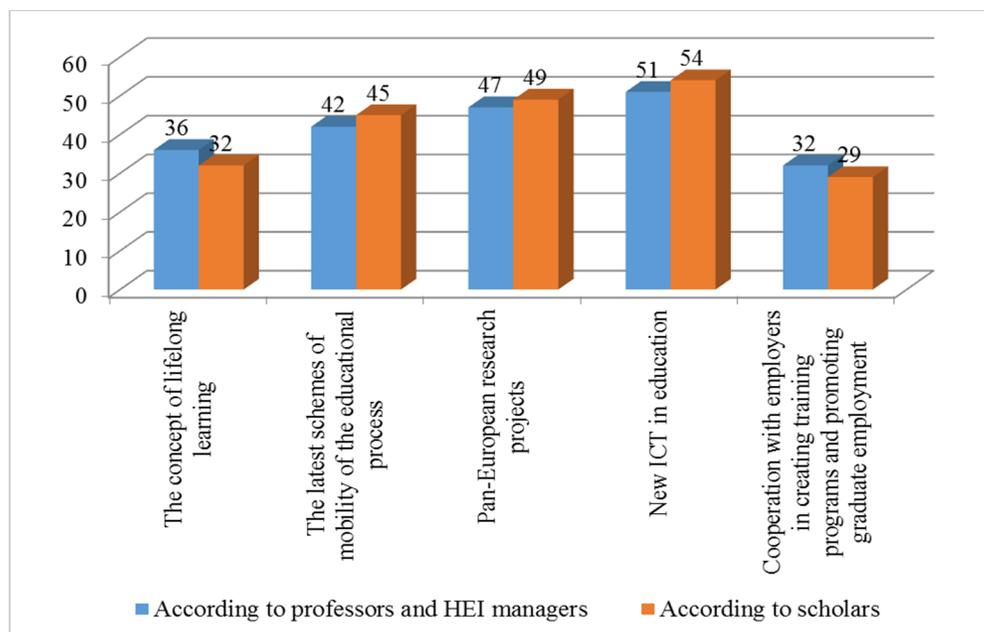


Figure 5. Trends in Higher Education Most Contributing to the Development and Efficiency of Existing and New Mechanisms of Parallel Learning in HEIs Around the World, % Source: compiled by the authors

- the latest schemes of mobility in the educational process;
- pan-European research projects;
- new ICT of education.

In general, after analyzing the answers of teachers and students, it has been revealed that there is a connection between the answers. It is expressed precisely in a positive attitude towards coordinating training mechanisms with other countries.

4. Discussion

The previous experience of developed European countries shows that higher education alone does not guarantee future success in employment and further professional activity. Therefore, the trend of cooperation between higher education institutions based on parallel education has become intensively developed to meet the requirements of the modern, rapidly changing labor market (Marginson & Yang, 2022; Barros & Biasin, 2019).

The abolition of borders between the EU countries and the unification of production quality standards did not significantly impact the formation of a common standard model of vocational education for the European Union. Each country improves its version, periodically using foreign experience (Alexiadou, & Rönnberg, 2021).

Communication and flexibility of educational institutions are necessary for the recognition of studies ongoing or completed abroad. At the same time, pedagogical and administrative aspects of coordination are significant and crucial (Essop, 2020; Tanhueco-Nepomuceno, 2019).

Usually, educational institutions decide on the possibility of parallel education based on the declared academic achievements of students in the form of a list of grades in individual subjects. Parallel learning can only be successful if it is voluntary, transparent, flexible, and based on an atmosphere of mutual trust between HEIs (Brett & Pitman, 2018).

The trend toward improving and expanding “short and vocational” higher education is very effective for European higher education. This is not about analogs of our technical schools, but about intensive training at a university (often a special department of universities), but for a short time (up to 3 years) (Marginson, 2022).

Besides the increasing diversification of higher education structures, there is now a parallel diversification of degrees and qualifications awarded by different institutions. Traditionally, a distinction is made between a “continental European” structure with rather long, academically integrated courses and a British-American university structure with shorter bachelor’s degree courses and a large number of post-bachelor courses, partly based on a modular basis (Bamberger, Morris & Yemini, 2019; Jacobs, 2020).

Nowadays, at a new stage of developing cooperation between the world’s higher educational institutions within the framework of parallel learning, the goal is to ensure a high degree of mutual openness of national higher education systems and an easy transition of students from one educational institution to another. Mobility is expected to develop further (Berti, 2018; Fumasoli & Rossi, 2021; Lo, 2018).

Acknowledging that it is the duty of local governments to ensure that the requirements for implementing the right to higher education are met and that, in the majority of nations, vocationally oriented study programs parallel to higher education are nearly equivalent. It is customary to offer vocationally oriented and economically viable forms of education to meet the labor market’s needs; to meet the needs of the growing number of new entrants without significantly increasing public spending on higher education; to offer teaching-oriented programs that partially use applied research (Craciun, 2018; Khare, 2020).

5. Conclusions

Thus, the analysis of the scientific literature on the research topic and the questionnaire survey results showed that the primary issue arising from the intensification of processes related to parallel learning is to increase the mobility of teachers and other pedagogical staff to mutually enrich their work experience. Joint diplomas and programs, policy initiatives to financially support mobility, mutual recognition of visas and work permits, and incentives for graduate employment should be widely recognized around the world.

Establishing partnerships between educational institutions, public authorities, and social partners will help increase global employment and stimulate the development of the global economy.

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