

THE CONCEPT OF FORMING THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS COMPETITIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL COMPETITION

ПОНЯТТЯ ФОРМУВАННЯ КОНКУРЕНТОСПРОМОЖНОСТІ ЗАКЛАДІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ В УМОВАХ ГЛОБАЛЬНОЇ КОНКУРЕНЦІЇ

The article focuses on the development of competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the context of global competition. It has been established that the competitiveness of universities determines their ability to adapt to socio-economic and technological changes in the era of globalization and digitalization. The concept of multi-level competitiveness is proposed, encompassing global, national, regional, and institutional levels. Additionally, the level of educational programs is highlighted, reflecting the increasing competition within the educational sector. The formation of HEI competitiveness should be based on optimizing internal processes, fostering program innovation, improving scientific research, and establishing strategic partnerships with other organizations. Significant attention is paid to the role of stakeholders, the identification of activity priorities, and the strategic directions for development. Universities must ensure their capacity to achieve strategic goals by adapting to changes and attracting external resources.

Key words: competitiveness, higher education, university, digitization, strategic management.

Стаття присвячена поняттю формування конкурентоспроможності закладів вищої освіти (ЗВО) в умовах глобальної конкуренції. Встановлено, що конкурентоспроможність університетів є однією з ключових проблем сучасної трансформації освітніх систем, оскільки саме вона визначає здатність ЗВО адаптуватися до економічних, соціальних та технологічних змін, які відбуваються в умовах глобалізації та цифровізації економіки. У роботі запропоновано концепцію багаторівневої конкурентоспроможності, яка охоплює глобальний, національний, регіональний та індивідуальний рівні. Виділення четвертого рівня конкуренції – на рівні освітніх програм – дозволяє врахувати зростаючу конкуренцію всередині освітньої галузі. У статті зазначено, що формування конкурентоспроможності університетів має ґрунтуватися на двох основних компонентах: сутнісних характеристиках конкурентоспроможності ЗВО та конкретних стратегічних заходах, адаптованих до умов функціонування кожного закладу. Це включає оптимізацію внутрішніх процесів, розвиток інноваційності освітніх програм, удосконалення наукових досліджень та залучення ресурсів із зовнішніх джерел через партнерства з іншими університетами, державними органами та бізнесом. Значна увага приділена ролі стейкхолдерів у забезпеченні конкурентоспроможності ЗВО. Наголошено, що стратегічна співпраця з ключовими зацікавленими сторонами, такими як студенти, роботодавці та державні установи, є необхідною умовою для створення стійкої конкурентної позиції. У статті також акцентується увага на важливості визначення чітких пріоритетів діяльності університетів, зокрема вибору цільових сегментів ринку та фокусування на стратегічних напрямках розвитку. Запропоновано універсальне визначення конкурентоспроможності університету як здатності досягати стратегічних цілей у конкурентному середовищі, адаптуючись до змін і залучаючи ресурси з різних джерел. Водночас підкреслено значення дескриптивних визначень, які дозволяють адаптувати поняття конкурентоспроможності до специфічних умов функціонування конкретного університету. Висновки статті підтверджують необхідність інтеграції різних підходів до формування конкурентоспроможності університетів, які враховують внутрішні особливості навчальних закладів та зовнішні фактори, що визначають їхню позицію на глобальному освітньому ринку.

Ключові слова: конкурентоспроможність, вища освіта, університет, діджиталізація, цифровізація, стратегічне управління.

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Bobro Natalia¹

Ph.D, Doctor of Philosophy,
Director of the Digital Department
Private Higher Education Institution
"International European University";
Director of the "NooLab & AI"
Scientific Laboratory
of the Private Higher Education Institution
"International European University"

Бобро Н.С.

Приватний вищий навчальний заклад
"Європейський університет"

Statement of the problem. The competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) is one of the most actual problems in the context of modern transformation of educational systems, as its level determines the ability of universities to adapt to rapidly changing economic, social and technological conditions. Globalization, digitalization of the economy, and international competition are forcing universities to revise their development strategies and look for new approaches to maintain and increase their competitiveness. While numerous researches are aimed at analyzing various aspects of this problem, the issue of a comprehensive approach to formulating criteria and methods for assessing the competitiveness of higher education institutions that take into account both external factors (global

competition, changes in the labor market) and internal aspects (quality of education, innovation of the educational process) remains unresolved.

An important aspect is to identify the factors that have the greatest impact on the competitiveness of universities. Increasing the level of competitiveness requires not only optimization of internal processes, but also creation of mechanisms that would allow universities to respond quickly to changes in the external environment. The problem is complicated by the absence of a single integrated approach to determining competitiveness that would combine the assessment of material, human and intellectual resources of a university with its ability to innovate and integrate into the international educational and scientific community. This requires the development

¹ ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5316-0809>

of a methodology that would ensure effective forecasting of university competitiveness in the face of constant global challenges.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The problem of competitiveness of higher education institutions is actively studied in the scientific literature, while approaches to its solution are diverse. Ya.O. Kolodinska, O.V. Skliarenko, O.Iu. Nikolaievskiy emphasize the importance of using digital services for the development of innovative business ideas, which directly relates to the competitiveness of education institutions in the context of economy digitalization [1]. In turn, O.V. Skliarenko, S.M. Yahodzinskiy, O.Iu. Nikolaievskiy, and A.V. Nevzorov emphasize the importance of interactive learning technologies that contribute to the modernization of the educational process and thus affect the competitiveness of universities [2].

O.O. Khomenko, M.V. Paustovska and I.A. Onyshchuk study the impact of interactive technologies on the development of higher education applicants, which contributes to their competitiveness in the labor market [3]. However, despite a significant number of publications, the problem of developing universal approaches to assessing the competitiveness of HEIs, taking into account the specifics and current challenges in the field of higher education, remains unresolved.

Objectives of the article. The aim of this article is to develop a theoretical and methodological framework for enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions in the context of global competition and digital transformation. The task is to identify the main characteristics of the competitiveness of HEIs in the current socio-economic environment, analyze existing approaches to assessing the competitiveness of universities and identify their limitations and disadvantages.

Summary of the main research material.

The concept of competitiveness is one of the most controversial in modern economic theory. Despite the large number of studies devoted to this issue, there is still no single, comprehensive definition of competitiveness. Most researchers view competitiveness as a multifaceted phenomenon that depends on a wide range of factors, including internal and external conditions of a business entity's activity [4; 5]. However, this very diversity complicates the operationalization of the concept of competitiveness and its empirical measurement. This problem is especially acute in the context of assessing the competitiveness of organizations, in particular, higher education institutions.

As we have already noted, there is no consensus among modern researchers, who often rely on the classical categories of strategic management, in formulating the concept of "university competitiveness". Many works on the competitiveness of HEIs use

methodological approaches that are usually applied to traditional markets for goods and services [6, p. 30].

For our research, it is advisable to divide the existing approaches into universal-essential, which describe a general approach and apply to different situations, and descriptive-sectoral, which define a specific description of a competitive university (or other form of HEI organization) that is valid in a specific socio-economic and time context and does not apply to other sectors.

Another important distinction between approaches is the level of the system with which the scope of the "competitiveness" concept is correlated. Researchers identify different variants of distinguishing three levels of competition and competitiveness: global (economy), sectoral (HEI systems) and micro-level (university) [7; 8].

In our research we distinguish:

- national level of the system (competitiveness of the country's HEIs), where only global competition (of the economy and national HEI systems) takes place;
- regional system;
- individual level (specific university).

The analysis of competitiveness as a multilevel phenomenon opens up new perspectives for the research of cooperative aspects of its formation. In particular, the allocation of the fourth level of competition – at the level of educational programs – indicates the deepening of competition in higher education. In our research, we aim to develop a universal approach to the formation of a strategy for increasing the competitiveness of the university, which would simultaneously take into account the specifics of a particular institution and respond to the challenges of the modern educational environment. To do this, it is necessary to operate simultaneously at two levels of analysis: first, to determine the essential characteristics of the competitiveness of HEIs, and second, to develop specific strategic measures adapted to the conditions of a particular university.

The advantage of universal approaches is that they leave room for finding non-standard solutions, taking into account the context of a particular university or regional network as much as possible. Moreover, universal approaches make it possible to achieve joint work and exchange of views despite different theoretical platforms and views on socio-economic processes. The advantage of universal formulations is also their conciseness: "the ability of actors to carry out effective competitive actions" [9, p. 6]. However, such a concise formulation does not allow to take into account the criticism from stakeholders and partners of the HEI.

An important characteristic of competitiveness is its complexity. Researchers describe competitiveness as "a set of properties, features of an object that determine its ability to satisfy a certain need of an

individual, group or society as a whole in the best possible way" [10, p. 65]. The target nature of the competitiveness property, its focus on the needs and interests are emphasized.

We have grouped approaches to the concept of competitiveness into three areas, depending on the view of competition:

- "competition is a struggle for resources", in which case competitiveness is the ability of a HEI to gain access to limited resources;

- "competition is a struggle for consumers", then competitiveness is a set of characteristics of an educational product (service) that satisfies consumers better than competitors; -

- "competition is a struggle for evaluation and status" in the process of comparing universities with each other, then competitiveness is a set of characteristics that allow a university to be more advantageous than others.

Within this approach, competitiveness can be defined as the ability to demonstrate higher performance, positions in rankings and prepare more market competitive graduates.

Very often, they talk about competition in the field of HEIs as a struggle for limited resources, less often as the ability to create products, and almost never as the ability to change processes. This is not accidental, because most often the short- and medium-term perspective is considered, in which it is impossible to change university processes. At the same time, the widespread approach of focusing on the struggle for resources makes it difficult to work out the idea of competitive cooperation, which is the most effective way to interact in quasi-markets, such as the HEI markets. On the other hand, even the resource-based approach underestimates the need to attract resources from all sources, i.e. from the entire list of key stakeholders. In this regard, the university is in a situation where ignoring influential stakeholders reduces its competitiveness, but fulfilling their demands without resources also inevitably reduces the ability to compete. The only way out is to form alliances with stakeholders willing to back up their demands with resources. Below, we will take this into account in the descriptive-industry version of the definition.

To denote the set of properties necessary to ensure competitiveness, an additional essence –potential or capabilities – is often used [4; 9]. In our opinion, it is clearer and more transparent to use the terminological concepts of resource and competence.

One of the most actual issues of strategic development of higher education institutions is the identification of priority areas of activity. The vagueness in defining the contours of the competitive field, namely, the lack of clear criteria for identifying target segments, research topics and other focuses, complicates the process of forming a competitive

position of the university. The academic culture focused on finding new problems and their detailing prevents focusing efforts on solving specific tasks of strategic importance for the university's development.

Therefore, we believe it is important to reinforce the above approaches with a universal key component of competitiveness, the ability to choose priority areas of activity and target markets, i.e. to focus on goals and competitive advantages. Moreover, it is necessary to systematically define the roles of internal and external stakeholders who are ready to directly participate in activities and support joint projects with resources.

Accordingly, the competitiveness of the university (regional and national system) is the ability to focus on strategic goals and competitive advantages, attract resources and develop competencies necessary to achieve the goals in a competitive environment, taking into account the interests of key stakeholders and consumers.

The advantage of descriptive definitions is their significant practical value, which ensures clarity and accessibility for a wide range of stakeholders. In our opinion, descriptive definitions differ primarily in the level of coverage of activities, in particular, whether the focus is on the education market or whether the markets for scientific and technical development and other sectors are included.

Among the descriptive definitions that describe the image of a competitive university, there is a clear correlation between the competitiveness of the university, its graduates and performance. This includes:

- ability to train specialists who successfully compete in specific external and internal labor markets;

- ability to develop competitive innovations in their field;

- effective management of reproduction policy in all areas of the university's activity [1; 3].

At the same time, it should be noted that such an assessment is of a delayed nature and is mostly used in setting long-term goals.

The focus on both the present and the future of the competitiveness concept is emphasized by researchers when describing the main components: "current and potential abilities (capabilities) to provide an appropriate level of educational services that meet the needs of society in training highly qualified specialists, as well as the needs for the development, creation and sale of scientific and methodological, scientific and technical products both in the present and in the future" [3, p. 1226].

In addition to covering the three main areas of university activity, this descriptive definition reflects two time periods out of three potentially possible and emphasizes that the success of a higher education institution lies in meeting the needs of society external to it.

From the perspective of the logic of university activities, the potential of competitiveness is primary to competition, since in order to enter the competition, it is advisable for a higher education institution to first form the potential, including the resource potential. When competing for state funding or for participation in tenders for a number of services, the availability of resource and competence stock is a prerequisite. When competing for the household market, the existing reputation, human resources, and infrastructure stock also comes to the fore.

Taking into account the above, while remaining within the framework of educational services and the research and development market, we can define university competitiveness as the ability to identify target market segments and prepare successful graduates for them, implement scientific, technological and social projects, building and maintaining the necessary competencies, optimizing processes, attracting talents and resources from various sources. The formulation is not fixed, it can be detailed and supplemented or, conversely, adjusted depending on the research or project task.

The descriptive definition of university competitiveness cannot be the only correct one and depends on many factors. The consensus is that university competitiveness is based on its ability to find and implement solutions to a wide range of challenges and tasks, and is significantly influenced by several groups of active stakeholders. At the same time, the authors emphasize those elements that are considered critical for competitiveness and focus on HEIs [2; 3].

Therefore, to effectively ensure the university competitiveness, it is necessary to integrate various approaches and strategies that take into account both the internal features of the education institution and external factors that determine its position in the education market, in particular in the context of global and regional trends. Only through systematic analysis and interaction with all stakeholders can a sustainable competitive position be created that can adapt to changes in the socio-economic environment and maintain a high level of quality of educational services.

Conclusions. The research on the competitiveness of higher education institutions in the context of global competition shows that this concept is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive approach. The university competitiveness depends on the interaction of internal and external factors, including strategic management, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructure development. Determining and assessing university competitiveness requires the use of both universal approaches that allow to take into account the specifics of each institution, as well as descriptive-industry approaches for a more

accurate description of situations at different levels of competition.

To effectively increase competitiveness, universities need not only to improve internal processes but also to actively attract external resources, in particular through partnerships with other education institutions, government authorities and businesses. Setting clear strategic goals and the ability to quickly adapt to changes are key elements that allow a university to remain competitive in a dynamic socio-economic environment. In addition, it is important to systematically take into account the interests of various stakeholders and determine priority areas of development based on current trends in the education market.

Further research should be aimed at developing a comprehensive approach to assessing the competitiveness of higher education institutions that would take into account not only traditional indicators but also factors such as the level of digital transformation, the innovativeness of educational programs, the effectiveness of research and international cooperation. This approach will allow to get a more objective picture of the competitiveness of higher education institutions and develop effective strategies for their development.

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