

**METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.**

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**Annotation:** The competitiveness of educational services has become a decisive factor in the sustainable development of higher education institutions within an increasingly globalized and market-oriented educational environment. This article examines the methodological foundations for assessing the competitiveness of educational services in higher education, emphasizing the integration of qualitative and quantitative analytical approaches. The study conceptualizes competitiveness as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by educational quality, market demand, institutional resources, and strategic positioning. Special attention is paid to service quality assessment models, rating systems, institutional and market factors, and the growing role of digital and artificial intelligence-based tools in evaluation processes. The article argues that a comprehensive and systematic assessment methodology enables universities to strengthen their market position, improve educational outcomes, and respond effectively to dynamic external challenges.

**Keywords:** competitiveness of higher education, educational services, service quality, university rankings, student satisfaction, strategic management.

The methodology for assessing the competitiveness of educational services in higher education institutions represents a complex and multifaceted analytical process aimed at evaluating an institution's ability to succeed in the educational market. In contemporary conditions, universities operate in an environment characterized by intensified competition for students, financial resources, academic reputation, and international recognition. As a result, competitiveness assessment has evolved from a purely descriptive exercise into a strategic management tool that supports evidence-based decision-making and long-term institutional development.

At the core of competitiveness assessment lies the relationship between the quality of educational services and the competitive position of a university. While these concepts are distinct, they are closely interconnected, as the quality of education largely determines an institution's attractiveness and sustainability. Modern methodological approaches increasingly emphasize integrated models that combine economic analysis, statistical methods, and management theory to capture the multidimensional nature of competitiveness. Such integration allows for a holistic understanding of how educational outcomes, resource efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction jointly influence institutional performance.

Key determinants of the competitiveness of educational services include the quality of academic programs, alignment with labor market needs, cost-effectiveness, infrastructure, faculty qualifications, student satisfaction, and graduate employability. These components are evaluated through both quantitative indicators, such as employment rates or funding efficiency, and qualitative assessments, including perceptions of teaching quality and institutional reputation. The balance between these approaches is essential, as competitiveness cannot be fully explained by numerical indicators alone.

Among the most widely applied methodologies for assessing service quality in higher education is the SERVQUAL model, which evaluates the gap between student expectations and their perceptions of actual educational services. Adapted versions of this model have proven effective in capturing the specific characteristics of higher education, including teaching methods, academic

support, and social interaction within universities. By focusing on student satisfaction as a proxy for service quality, SERVQUAL-based approaches provide valuable insights into areas requiring improvement and their direct impact on competitiveness.

Rating and ranking systems also play a central role in assessing the competitiveness of higher education institutions. These systems offer standardized and comparable evaluations based on selected indicators, contributing to transparency, public accountability, and institutional visibility. University rankings not only influence student choice but also shape perceptions among employers, policymakers, and international partners. Consequently, participation in rating systems has become an important strategic instrument for strengthening competitiveness in both national and global educational markets.

Beyond internal performance metrics, external factors significantly affect competitiveness assessment. These include market conditions, demographic trends, internationalization opportunities, and the institutional environment in which universities operate. The availability of additional educational services, student exchange programs, practical orientation of curricula, and employment support mechanisms enhances institutional attractiveness. Furthermore, the capacity to attract international students and engage in cross-border educational activities increasingly defines competitive success in the global higher education market.

The institutional environment forms another critical dimension of competitiveness assessment. Regulatory frameworks, governance structures, and state support mechanisms shape the operational flexibility and strategic choices of higher education institutions. A value-oriented approach to competitiveness assessment considers not only economic efficiency but also the social and developmental role of universities within society. This perspective highlights the importance of aligning institutional missions with broader educational and socioeconomic objectives.

Recent methodological innovations have introduced artificial intelligence tools, such as neural networks and adaptive neuro-fuzzy inference systems, into the assessment of educational quality and competitiveness. These technologies enable more objective and data-driven evaluations by analyzing large volumes of student feedback, performance indicators, and institutional data. Their application supports early identification of weaknesses in educational programs and enhances the reliability of self-assessment processes, particularly in preparation for accreditation and quality assurance procedures.

Competitiveness assessment methodologies can be broadly categorized into international and national rating-based approaches, comparative positioning analyses relative to key competitors, market analyses of educational services, and internal evaluations of academic staff and structural units. Each approach provides a different analytical perspective, and their combined use strengthens the overall reliability of assessment outcomes. The concept of competitiveness in higher education is thus characterized by comparability, openness, dynamism, systematicity, and objectivity, reflecting the complex nature of educational markets.

In conclusion, the dynamic and competitive environment of higher education necessitates continuous and methodologically sound assessment of educational service competitiveness. A comprehensive approach that integrates quality evaluation models, rating systems, institutional analysis, and advanced digital tools enables universities to enhance strategic planning, optimize resource utilization, and improve educational outcomes. Such an approach not only strengthens institutional competitiveness but also contributes to the broader development and modernization of higher education systems in a global context.

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