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### **УВЕЛИЧЕНИЕ РОЛИ СТЕЙКХОЛДЕРОВ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ПОВЫШЕНИЯ КОНКУРЕНТОСПОСОБНОСТИ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В АРМЕНИИ**

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#### **Аннотация**

Целью данной статьи является изучение роли участия заинтересованных сторон (стейкхолдеров) в повышении конкурентоспособности высшего образования в Армении, включая автономию в принятии решений. В статье подчеркивается важность совместных усилий заинтересованных сторон в повышении глобальной конкурентоспособности системы высшего образования. Рассматривая автономию заинтересованных сторон в принятии решений, автор статьи показывает, как совместные усилия сторон могут быть оптимизированы для повышения конкурентоспособности высшего образования в Армении, что делает его привлекательным и ценным ресурсом для различных заинтересованных сторон. Взаимодействуя с стейкхолдерами, вузы могут гарантировать, что их системы стратегического управления соответствуют государственным стратегическим приоритетам, требованиям рынка, этическим принципам. Это может привести к повышению организационной эффективности, репутации, конкурентоспособности, а также к более устойчивому развитию системы высшего образования.

**Ключевые слова:** стратегическое управление, участие заинтересованных сторон, конкурентоспособность высшего образования, фидуциарные функции органов принятия решений университетов, глобальное высшее образование.

ՇԱՀԱԿԻՑՆԵՐԻ ՆԵՐԳՐԱՎՎԱԾՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՄՐԱՊԵՆՈՒՄԸ՝ ՈՐՊԵՍ ՀՀ ԲԱՐՁՐԱԳՈՒՑՆ  
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**Ամփոփում**

Սույն հոդվածի նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել շահակիցների մասնակցության դերը Հայաստանում բարձրագույն կրթության մրցունակության բարձրացման գործընթացում, ինչպես նաև ուսումնասիրել շահակիցների ինքնավարությունը որոշումների կայացման գործընթացում: Հոդվածում շեշտադրվում է գլոբալ բարձրագույն կրթության մրցունակության բարձրացման գործում շահակիցների համատեղ ջանքերի ներդրման կարևորությունը: Քննելով որոշումների կայացման գործընթացում շահակիցներին տրվող ինքնավարության հիմնախնդիրը՝ հոդվածում պարզաբանվում են այն ուղիները, որոնք մատնանշում են, թե ինչպես կարելի է համատեղ ջանքերը ներդնել Հայաստանում բարձրագույն կրթության մրցունակությունը բարձրացնելու համար՝ այն դարձնելով գրավիչ ու արժեքավոր ռեսուրս տարբեր շահակիցների համար: Հիմնական արտաքին շահակիցների ներգրավմամբ բուհերը կարող են հավաստիանալ, որ իրենց ռազմավարական կառավարման համակարգերը համահունչ են պետական ռազմավարությամբ սահմանված առաջնահերթություններին, շուկայի պահանջներին ու էթիկական սկզբունքներին: Նշվածը կարող է նպաստել բուհերի գործունեության արդյունավետության, հեղինակության ու մրցունակության բարձրացմանը:

**Բանալի բառեր:** Ռազմավարական կառավարում, շահակիցների ներգրավվածություն, բարձրագույն կրթության մրցունակություն, համալսարանական որոշումներ կայացնող մարմինների վստահության վրա հիմնված գործառույթներ, գլոբալ բարձրագույն կրթություն:

**LEVERAGING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FOR ENHANCED HIGHER  
EDUCATION COMPETITIVENESS IN ARMENIA**

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**Summary**

**Brief introduction.** Armenia is facing the challenge of ensuring the competitiveness of its higher education institutions (HEIs) in the rapidly evolving global landscape of higher education. With the rising demands for competitive human capital and the development of knowledge-based economies, the HEIs of the Republic of Armenia (RA) need to be agile and strategic in their decision-making processes and in employing respective mechanisms to meet the demands of the market and global landscape of higher education. In this context, stakeholder engagement should emerge as a powerful tool for driving competitiveness through ethical and efficient decision making in higher education strategic management in Armenia, for it ensures the increase of stakeholders' interest, fiduciary responsibilities, and commitment towards HEIs.

**Keywords:** Strategic management, stakeholder engagement, higher education competitiveness, trust-based functions of university decision-making bodies, global higher education.

**Formulation of the problem.** Education should become a critical element of Armenia's economy, contributing to a vital role in contributing to the country's gross domestic production and enhancing the competitiveness of the education system. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Armenia confronts global trends such as globalization and increased connectivity that generally have significant impacts on the construction and sustainability of competitive higher education systems and participatory decision making. In this context, Armenia has streamlined its understanding and relationship between the state, society, and global community. During recent two decades, the country has adopted policies and initiated different activities to promote transparency and accountability in higher education governance and university strategic management, to foster social entrepreneurship and competitiveness, which also assumes the prioritization of stakeholder engagement and empowerment. The higher education sector in Armenia is of utmost importance as it plays a crucial role in developing and preserving the country's intellectual capital and ensuring sustainable socio-economic progress. The RA government recognizes the crucial role of education in maintaining the state's stability, more specifically the resilience of the county's political, economic, and social systems and institutions to internal and external pressures and changing environment. Moreover, Armenia has also committed itself to advancing the field of higher education through international recognition and implementation of high-quality standards. In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on evaluating and enhancing the quality of professional higher education in Armenia to produce highly skilled professionals and maximize the potential of the country's human capital.

In this regard the RA government has established partnerships with other governments, international organizations, and entities to enhance university strategic management processes, research, and innovation, and improve the relevance of higher education to the needs of the economy and society. Additionally, Armenia has implemented measures and strategies aimed at broadening the availability and affordability of higher education to various stakeholders and constituencies. These efforts have contributed to the development of a more engaging and competitive higher education system in Armenia, which is better equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of the globalized world. Through these practices, Armenia aims to strengthen its position in the global higher education landscape, promoting socio-economic development and enhancing its relationship with the state, society, and the global community. In this context, global higher education landscape entails the overall international context in which higher education systems operate, including education policies, the range of HEIs, their strategic malmanagement models and strategies, academic programs, research, and innovative trends that shape higher education on a global scale. The tendency of integrating into the global higher education landscape is conditioned by a wide range of factors, such as the growth and diversification of HEIs around the world, the globalization of research and educational collaborations, the increasing use of disruptive technologies in teaching and learning, and the impact of internationalization on higher education policies and practices. Understanding the global higher education landscape is vital for policymakers, education managers, educators, and all stakeholders seeking to navigate and participate in this complex and rapidly evolving domain of higher education. Armenia must also enhance its competitive practices of education policymaking and leverage the expertise and best practices of efficient stakeholder management from mature systems to advance its human capital and further enhancements to higher education system.

**A short analysis of current research and publications related to the problem.** While previous studies have recognized the importance of stakeholder collaboration in higher education, few have examined the impact of stakeholder autonomy on the effectiveness of collaborative efforts [2]. As such, this article offers a unique perspective on the potential benefits and challenges of stakeholder engagement in higher education in the RA, with a specific focus on the degree of decision-making autonomy and that granted to stakeholders. This research was funded through a Department of State Public Affairs Section grant, and the opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the Author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Department of State.

**Aim of the publication.** The objective of this article is to explore the role and significance of stakeholder engagement in enhancing the competitiveness of higher education in Armenia,

including the autonomy of decision making by stakeholders. Additionally, the article seeks to examine the degree of autonomy that these stakeholders have in decision making, and the potential impact it may have on the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

**Research novelty.** The article highlights the significance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including the RA government, HEIs, industry representatives, professional community, and different constituencies, in improving the RA higher education system in the global field of competitiveness. Through the discussion of the degree of autonomy granted to stakeholders in decision making, this article offers insights into how collaborative efforts should be optimized to enhance the competitiveness of higher education system in Armenia, making it a compelling and valuable input and resource for both HEIs and their different stakeholders. The article's compelling research novelty also lies in its examination of the importance of autonomy granted to stakeholders in decision making, which provides valuable insights into how to effectively leverage stakeholder engagement for the benefit of higher education in Armenia.

**Presentation of the research.** Higher education competitiveness is the degree to which a particular HEI or a country's higher education system is capable to attract and retain high-quality students, faculty, and researchers, secure funding and partnerships with other institutions and organizations, and produce graduates with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to succeed in their chosen careers, contribute to the development of society and knowledge-based economy. Mohsin and Kamal [4] suggest that quality education is a crucial factor that contributes to an HEI's overall competitiveness. By this, the overall competitiveness of an institution entails the representation in various rankings, the status and employability of its graduates, the expertise of its staff, its physical resources, the academic achievements of its students, and the number of its research projects. Therefore, a HEI that prioritizes quality education is likely to be more competitive in these areas. Aurangzeb [1] asserts that a HEI is not limited to being a mere organization for teaching and learning, but rather it also embodies the intellectual and competitive capacity of a particular country or area. Furthermore, higher education also plays a crucial role in driving economic growth and development by producing highly skilled and innovative individuals who can contribute to the workforce and create new industries. There are several factors that contribute to higher education competitiveness and should be considered for the Armenian context. These are as follows:

- **Academic and research excellence:** HEIs should ensure that the quality of academic programs, faculty, research, and infrastructures contribute to the higher education system's or an institution's reputation and competitiveness.

- **Innovation:** HEIs should innovate and actively seek out opportunities to adapt to emerging technologies and changing social trends in order to remain competitive in the long run. This could involve investing in research and development initiatives, fostering partnerships with industry leaders, and encouraging a culture of creativity among faculty and students alike. HEIs should also consider implementing emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning to enhance their teaching and research capabilities.

- **Access and affordability:** HEIs should provide access to higher education for a wide range of students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, are more likely to be competitive.

- **Internationalization:** HEIs should attract and retain students and faculty, should have strong international partnerships and collaborations to strengthen their competitiveness in a globalized world.

- **Reputation and branding:** HEIs should strengthen the reputation and branding that might have a significant impact on their competitiveness, the perceptions of potential students, faculty, and external stakeholders.

- **Social Entrepreneurship:** HEIs should promote social entrepreneurship through programs such as incubators, accelerators, and entrepreneurship courses that can contribute to the creation of new businesses, industries, and jobs, and can have a positive impact on the economy and society.

- **Tangible research outcomes:** HEIs should produce tangible outcomes such as research papers, patents, and other high-quality results that can contribute to their competitiveness and demonstrate the impact and value in the knowledge-based economy and can secure additional funding and partnerships.

Over the past two decades, the RA government has made efforts to create a higher education system that is competitive and prioritizes autonomy and accountability of their HEIs. However, these efforts were driven mainly by the RA government's obligation to comply with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) requirements rather than a profound comprehension of the national and global needs of dynamic higher education landscape. Additionally, the lack of a well-defined higher education strategy of the RA government has impeded progress and competitiveness. There are emergent concerns that the country may struggle to integrate with the EHEA and global education community due to the government's increasing interference in decision-making processes, including control over the Board of Trustees' autonomy. As a result, many institutions have forcefully undergone significant leadership changes. For instance, during recent four years, the RA government has practiced several times the formation of state universities' Board of Trustees composed of only three government representatives, with complete authority to appoint an acting rector favorable for the government. This has significantly restricted the autonomy and has deteriorated fiduciary functions of university decision-making bodies. The recent introduction of a new draft Law on Higher Education and Science has exacerbated these concerns, as it has been criticized for limiting the autonomy of HEIs and granting more power to the government. These transformations could potentially have a negative impact on Armenia's ability to align with its international commitments and best practices in higher education.

Furthermore, the RA government and HEIs have increasingly recognized the importance of engaging stakeholders, particularly in relation to vertical differentiation. However, the current mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in university decision making are severely disrupted and need to be restored. This is crucial because stakeholders need to be involved in evaluating university performance and guiding HEIs in the alignment with the needs of the society and labor market, even comparing them over time and across different systems. Additionally, HEIs are now subject to national and international rankings and external evaluations in which stakeholders play a significant role. This strategy seeks to involve stakeholders in the process of vertical differentiation and foster collaboration between HEIs, the government, society, and the global community.

While Armenia is still designing its own educational system and universities' institutional systems based on unique historical developments and culture, it should also learn from the experiences of other countries. Armenia is seeking not only more efficient, cost-effective, competitive strategic management models and practices for its higher education system, but also more accountable and transparent systems of decision making and governance at all levels of higher education system. Armenia is confronted with the challenging endeavor of constructing administrative and legal capacity and may profit from the valuable knowledge accumulated by other developed systems. Thus, human capacity is the prerequisite for system development. Armenia requires a greater number of skilled professionals and well-educated human capital to deal with its challenges effectively because the country's intellectual potential remains a critical factor that should not be overlooked. The efficient functioning of higher education system, including HEIs, is crucial for human capital development. Thus, the RA education policy makers should prioritize actively involving stakeholders in the process of formulating a wide range of policy reforms that can be effectively communicated and executed at different levels of higher education governance.

#### **Challenges of Stakeholder Engagement and Participation in Socio-Economic Domain**

HEIs also reflect the societal and economic changes by incorporating only minimal changes to their organizational structures and strategic management processes. Considering their functional frameworks, HEIs are significant learning institutions that generate, accumulate, and disseminate

knowledge, promoting its application for the benefit of the country and knowledge-based economy. As scientific research centers, HEIs are also critical sources of technological innovation and serve as forums for proposing and analyzing reforms, safeguarding student rights, promoting social equity, and fostering progress. Honkimäki et al. [3] contend that HEIs have conventionally been described as “loosely coupled organizations” in which the relationships among different professional groups and stakeholders are tenuous and academic personnel have a significant degree of autonomy. Therefore, the conventional concept of university strategic management in Armenia should be reconsidered and transformed into a platform where HEIs base their decisions on empiric evidence, checked and verified by different stakeholder groups. Accordingly, the organizational and economic structures and mechanisms must also be re-evaluated at all levels of higher education management by different stakeholders representing different constituencies. More specifically, Honkimäki et al. [3] mentions that the customary notion of strategic management in universities requires a re-evaluation and a shift towards a framework that relies on empirical evidence, subject to scrutiny and validation by diverse stakeholder groups. Consequently, stakeholders from various constituencies should reassess the organizational and economic structures and mechanisms that operate at every level of higher education management.

Thus, HEIs play a crucial role in developing the national system of higher education and in sharing best practices in the formation of human capital. Achieving sustainable state competitiveness is unlikely without the backing of competitive human capital, the degree of which is directly proportional to the level of competitiveness of the country. It is the responsibility of HEIs to develop and nurture this competitive human capital. Thus, HEIs drive the competitiveness of higher education system and accordingly enhance the competitiveness of their constituencies and global community. They aim to ensure that their activities are efficient, in line with future development requirements, and are evaluated by stakeholders regularly. Thus, higher education stakeholders also share this critical role and play an active participation in embracing diversity and creating a new education paradigm for the future of Armenia, as well as in the development and implementation processes of competitive policies as they represent the interests of those constituencies that they serve. In order to achieve these goals, it is important to broaden and improve the engagement of the scope of stakeholders, including education policy makers, educators, researchers, and practitioners into developing, implementing, and evaluating different aspects of education policy. However, most stakeholders are not actively participating in public policymaking, planning, monitoring, and evaluation of higher education management processes in Armenia. Vast majority of the latter do not have the interest or necessary institutional, technical capacity and social capital for launching endeavors to change education sector policies. Meanwhile, the efficient functioning of higher education system is a collective endeavor and is crucial to ensuring the success of human capital development and the advancement of society as a whole. In this overall process, stakeholder engagement and management are of vital importance.

Stakeholder engagement embeds the process of involving internal and external key stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, employers, donors, government officials, and the wider community, in the decision-making processes of HEIs. This approach recognizes that the success of HEIs not only depends on their internal resources and capabilities, but also on the engagement of external stakeholders that bring their expertise from external environment in which they operate. By engaging with key external stakeholders, universities can ensure that their strategic management practices are aligned with state strategic priorities, market requirements, conform to ethical principles, and receive backing from broader constituencies. This can lead to improved organizational performance, enhanced reputation, increased competitiveness, and a more sustainable future for higher education system.

In the context of RA educational reforms, the non-efficient participation of stakeholders in the formation of a knowledge-based society and their low level of engagement should become a priority issue for education policy makers and higher education managers. Emergent higher education quality assurance and enhancement trends stipulate those stakeholders should be as a key area of priority in university decision making, and new actions should be taken to improve

engagement practices. However, there is currently no systematic accumulation of data on stakeholder engagement and comprehensive analyses of their engagement are not being carried out.

This problem is partly also due to the fact that RA higher education systems and practices are highly bureaucratic and predominantly state controlled, which make it difficult to diversify decision making processes and funding mechanisms, and the rigid requirements for university managers and lack of flexibility also hinder the implementation of educational reforms. State HEIs are expected to address these issues by fulfilling their goals relating to educational and international developments and innovations through autonomous decision making and flexible organizational structures. However, this expectation has not been met at a larger scale due to the intense control by the state of boards and respective decisions. Although stakeholders receive legal stipulations autonomy to act, their involvement is still limited, and fiduciary functions are rigorously controlled.

In this regard, the RA HEIs currently face various internal and external factors that hinder the full and efficient implementation of strategic management. Thus, competitive university management systems should incorporate various educational and scientific-methodological models that transfer specialized types of scientific and professional knowledge necessary for effective communication skills, networking, and professional activity in a multicultural environment. Stakeholder engagement and participation should be improved at various levels, including involvement in governing bodies related to quality assurance (not only at a system level (ANQA) but also at the institutional levels), active participation of stakeholders in external evaluation processes, and targeted participation of internal stakeholders in internal evaluation processes of the university.

Thus, it should be mentioned that enhancing competitiveness in Armenia's higher education system requires a growing emphasis on stakeholder engagement. However, recent years have not seen significant progress in this area. To address this, several key factors should be considered. Firstly, the widespread use of technology can greatly enhance the ability of HEIs to connect with stakeholders regardless of location, improving communication and collaboration. Secondly, stakeholder engagement initiatives should involve increased collaboration with external stakeholders, particularly those who actively participate in university decision-making and offer valuable insights. Finally, stakeholder engagement processes must become more flexible and adaptable to accommodate the needs of diverse constituencies and the ever-changing external environment. By implementing these strategies, higher education institutions can improve their competitiveness and better meet the needs of their stakeholders and constituencies. More specifically, the following factors and actions can be considered:

**Competitive strategy and targeted activities:**

- HEIs should develop stakeholder engagement plans: utilizing stakeholder management abilities can aid in creating a stakeholder engagement strategy that considers the needs, requirements, and anticipations of stakeholders, and secures their backing for the HEIs' undertakings and initiatives.
- HEIs should further build relationships and establish rapport with stakeholders: making use of stakeholder management abilities can facilitate the establishment of solid connections with stakeholders, encompassing methods to communicate proficiently, regulate expectations, and manage outcomes positively.
- HEIs should proactively and efficiently manage stakeholder engagement: using stakeholder management abilities can facilitate the effective management of stakeholder engagement by selecting targeted relevant methodology, handling feedback, and monitoring stakeholder satisfaction.

**Increased utilization of technology:**

- HEIs should leverage various communication technologies such as social media, webinars, and online surveys to engage with stakeholders in a more agile and efficient manner. These technologies provide greater accessibility to stakeholders, enabling them to participate actively in the decision-making process without needing to be physically present. By utilizing

these technologies, HEIs can make more informed and effective decisions that reflect the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

- HEIs should develop and implement a robust Customer relationship management (CRM) system that might bring added value to stakeholder engagement more effectively by tracking and analyzing data on stakeholder engagement and overall performance.

**Increased collaboration with external stakeholders:**

- HEIs should revise and activate their boards or councils consisting of external stakeholders, including industry representatives, alumni, and community leaders to ensure that their perspectives are considered in the decision-making process.

- HEIs should establish partnerships with businesses and other organizations to further boost competitiveness and entrepreneurship, offer experiential learning opportunities to students and research opportunities for faculty.

- HEIs should create programs that promote mentorship and networking opportunities between students and industry professionals to foster long-term relationships between the two groups.

**Greater flexibility:**

- HEIs should design multiple engagement options tailored to the unique needs of different stakeholders, including online surveys, focus groups, regular meetings, and workshops.

- HEIs should adopt an agile approach to its decision-making processes that will allow for adjustments to be made based on stakeholder feedback or changes in the external environment.

- HEIs should establish a transparent and inclusive process for stakeholder engagement, allowing stakeholders to provide feedback on the engagement process itself and make suggestions for improvement.

To ensure effective stakeholder engagement and successful higher education reforms in Armenia, it is crucial to maintain and increase autonomy, transparency, and efficiency in decision-making. The following recommendations can be further implemented to drive competitiveness in higher education and further enhance university performance:

- Foster fiduciary responsibilities, ethical values, and stakeholder behavior in the higher education sector by emphasizing their importance by incorporating these topics into public debate and awareness.

- Strengthen the legal framework to secure fiduciary responsibilities of stakeholders and ensure that ethical decision-making mechanisms are incorporated into higher education policy making and governance, creating and further cultivating a culture of integrity and trust towards the HEIs in Armenia.

- Further refine and systematically implement mechanisms for stakeholder engagement in higher education reform discussions, strategy formation and higher education management to ensure that all parties have a voice in university decision-making processes.

- Create a code of conduct for decision-makers in higher education institutions to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure fiduciary responsibilities for stakeholders on boards.

- Establish strong whistleblower protection policies to encourage the reporting of unethical behavior in the governing bodies, including Boards of Trustees, and safeguard the rights of those who come forward.

- Enhance self-governance, autonomy, and responsibility of the HEIs, curtail the authority and control of the RA government over internal decision-making processes the HEIs (including rector's elections), and amplify civil monitoring by other stakeholders to foster openness and effective governance of the higher education system.

- Provide capacity building support to education policymakers and decision-makers on potential challenges, with assistance from civil society organizations.

- Create a sustainable and competitive university-based entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes graduate employability by attracting business investors, partners, and community



members to participate in the ecosystem. This will enhance the competitiveness of the HEIs and improve the overall quality of education in Armenia.

**Conclusions.** In conclusion, higher education competitiveness is an important factor for the success and sustainability of the higher education system and HEIs in Armenia. Armenia's progress in enhancing higher education competitiveness requires the involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, led by competent university leadership that values their tangible contributions. However, current malpractices, state control, and inefficient management are hindering the development of higher education in Armenia. Addressing these challenges by policy makers and state regulators is critical for advancing Armenia's future through higher education institutions, which play a key role in the formation of human capital and the promotion of competitive practices. By leveraging stakeholder engagement and addressing these issues, Armenia can unlock the full potential of its higher education system and pave the way for a brighter and more competitive future.

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### CHRONOTOPOLINGUISTIC (CTL) APPROACH TO RESEARCH IN EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

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#### Summary

One of the leading theoretical and methodological problems of the modern educational situation is the uncertainty of the value and ontological status of the changes taking place in education. Over the past three decades, the categories of "development", "modernization" have been the most general categorical framework, but in modern conditions the category of "transformation" should be recognized as more meaningful. The purpose of the article is to develop a theoretical and methodological apparatus for