

Trends in quality assurance and accreditation in the Universities of Peru: The case of the faculties of Education

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Abstract

This is the first part of the research about trends in quality assurance and accreditation in the universities of Peru. This part focuses on the different ways that public and private Peruvian universities have to describe quality and the processes they go through to get to. The question was: what quality models underlie in the improvement proposal of the university institution? What are the trends in quality? For that reason we worked with Brazilian, Chilean, Colombian, Mexican and Argentinean proposals related to this topic. We prepared the basic parameters in each country to understand quality and the improvement processes. We found out that quality idea is not clear enough, and that the evaluation idea is also unclear, we continue testing components and products but not the processes.

Keywords: Trends – Education - Quality

1. Introduction

Nowadays universities' quality assurance and its accreditation are very important topics not only in the academic but also in the politics Latin-American fields, due to the different opinions about the meaning of quality, and the traditional responsibilities at universities in the current context and the fulfillment of the National control as the mediator in this assurance.

In Latin America this process is not new; it was in the 20th century that some exchanging experiences started in that region as well as in the world about the responsibilities about Universities in a very changeable setting. So the idea about quality was taken from the company, giving rise to pros and cons, but then we have adopted new logical ones. It is necessary to mention that the reflection about quality in higher education, especially about the role of the new knowledge society, is a new born.

In the higher education internalization process, searching the quality means bigger challenges, considering the social environment demands where they belong to. Our data comes from international meetings and there are just a few researches about it. We count on data about the Latin-American case of universities reports, about the proposal of quality assurance and the information of many countries that have established this process.

In this first part of the study we will mention the results of the paper revision in 5 Latin-American countries. It is very important to understand the trends and what can happen in Peru if we don't understand these processes. We are not out

of this, especially what is related to a quality university culture and the first steps of the government as mediator in this accreditation process.

The main question: What are the quality evaluation trends at Universities in Latin America?

2. Frame of reference

We checked the evaluation and quality definitions, about the reports of quality evaluations in these countries and we built some categories.

When considering definitions about evaluation, we considered common elements to understand what evaluation is: seven dimensions that make evaluation possible and what evaluation is (as a systematic process that collects information; giving value judgment in relation to collected information, and focused in the decision making process)

We also mention the categories⁸ that helped to evaluate the trends:

a. What: What do we evaluate when talking about the quality of the University? We found that we evaluate the quality of: careers or programs; institutions and people, teachers or students

b. Who: Who do they evaluate to? We found the following alternatives: when is the university itself (self-evaluation) all its members (students; professors; authorities, administrative staff, employers or businesspeople); when the government evaluates the institution (external evaluation) is the government or agency with the personal in charge.

c. When to evaluate depends on: If they are ask for 'running approval'; If they ask 'external evaluation' institution policy, or Institution internal decision of self-evaluation.

d. How the process or procedure of the quality evaluation is. It depends on: The permission; is a verification procedure for basic requirements established by the institution in charged or distinguished. Or, for the external evaluation: the regular procedure involves: institution self-evaluation as well as external evaluation with a following report.

e. Using what: We have many instruments, but we generally have self-evaluation: with different qualitative and quantitative tools, and external evaluation: Peer visit and the tools often used are the interview and the observation.

⁸ The contents of each category was drawn from the review of the notions of evaluation (Tyler, Lafourcade, Mager, Srciven, Joint Committee, Alvira, Stufflebeam, Cronbach, Alkin, Ferrandez, De la Orden, Tenbrink, Casanova, Tejada & Dominguez) and the reports of each country.

f. Considering what: Some factors or known variables are necessary to check quality. They can refer to functions; staff; negotiations; building and institutional coherence.

g. What for: what are we looking for, to show the society what their mission is, or continuous improvement.

And we included positive and negatives ideas in these processes⁹.

3. Methodology

We did a qualitative research, to check the project revision presented in the accreditation organisms of the five countries chosen between 2000 and 2006 about quality evaluation or higher education institutions. To do this analysis we created some categories already mentioned in the framework.

4. Results

We found the following trends in relation to quality evaluation in five countries.

What to evaluate in relation to university quality, we found a tendency to evaluate careers or Programs, and the Institution.

All of them study the functions (research, teaching and extent) and its elements (components, processes and results) even if the last one represents the results, depending on the factors.

If we refer to the institution, we have a little information; there is data of those that have just started working, especially private institutions. But we only have a little data of the self-evaluation processes of working institutions. That's why there is a strong presence of quality evaluation for undergraduate and graduate programs in the 5 countries mentioned.

Who evaluates the Universities quality? In the external evaluation: Students and the Government take place with the agencies responsible. In this context many selected people also take place. Only in Argentina the Government handles all this process.

When to evaluate universities quality, the trend is to evaluate quality every time that an institution wants to work as a new university, especially if you refer to a private one; timing related to the external evaluation (for accreditation) depends on the institution and if it wants to accredit and continue in the system. It means that have to do the self-evaluation and then the peer visit.

How to evaluate the quality of the universities, the trend is to evaluate the quality through: an official authorization by the institution expressing that it has

⁹ We also compile a table comparing the strengths and weaknesses of country reports.

the basic requirements. This basically happens in private universities. Another is self-evaluation as an element of the internal work of the institution, to better its work, or as a part of the external evaluation. Or, external evaluation, peer visit evaluators, the report and ruling if the accreditation is given or not.

With what evaluate the universities quality, the trend is to evaluate the quality through: the data collection using qualitative and quantitative methods; filling forms with quantitative and qualitative collected during the self-evaluation process by the institution in charge of that process; interview and observation of peer visit evaluators (qualitative data).

Considering what to evaluate the universities quality, the trend is to evaluate quality: considering the common fact in the five countries related to appropriateness and equity, which in some cases is covered by aspects like measurement. It depends on the country where it changes its name, as indicators, elements, items, etc.

If you refer to the measured facts, the tendency is to verify if the institution has: functions as research, extent, teaching (referring to the curriculum or career); staff as academic, students, the authorities and administrative staff are considered in the management; management as organization chart, ruling, government system, planning, control and finances, including authorities and administrative staff, mission and institutional project; infrastructure, resources and services, libraries, buildings, etc.; institutional integrity, advertisement and spreading.

What for to evaluate the universities quality, the tendency is to evaluate quality to accredit, means inform the society about the institution functions; or continuing improvement

When we mention what for it is necessary to mention clearly what we expect when talking about 'quality evaluation': improvement, accredit. When we say 'better' see if what we offer is what we do.

Mentioning the measured aspects, in other words, the factors, here we have the data of academic staff, students, research, curriculum, programs, the building itself, installations and resources. But the management no appears.

We can say that the tendency when we talk about factors is to show data related to the actors, functions, management and infrastructure.

The actors are students, academic staff (we need to consider authorities and administrative staff).

Functions as research and teaching are mentioned (the curriculum or programs - careers). The data related to the social services is not mentioned.

In management, we refer to the rules, autonomy in most of the institutions for its organization or structure. We don't mention a basic structure: vice-chancellor, assembly, deans and faculties.

Infrastructure as buildings and so on, it is not included in the reports

In relation to the perception, what do they say about themselves the accreditation agencies from the five countries as positives experiences: improvement in the evaluation experience; these processes are related to the legal system and strength of the accreditation agencies. Negatives experiences as unclear idea of the quality, and the evaluation criteria; little participation of students and professors, there is not an evaluation culture; and it is said that people from the accreditation committees come from a political party, in some cases from a reduced number of evaluation peer. We can observe a tendency to create corporative groups among evaluation peers.

5. Conclusions

In relation to many experiences about quality evaluation

- a. Quality is related to evaluation. But the definition of evaluation is not clear enough.
- b. This confusion is based on the attribute, as the pertinence and the equity. But there is a misunderstanding because the institutions in charge of that, do not set limits about quality,

In relation to the data found

- c. The five countries have evaluation experience since the nineties.
- d. About quality, there are some relations started in the company, as components, processes and products. But what we evaluate are the components and its results, but no the processes.
- e. The management is little seen, because the outline do not check this aspect, but it helps to know what we have. This is a static analysis method.
- f. With this information we can understand why we prefer to evaluate programs than institutions

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