



The Brazilian higher education evaluation model: “SINAES” *sui generis*?

Cleber Augusto Pereira^{a,*}, Joaquim Filipe Ferraz Esteves Araujo^b,
Maria de Lourdes Machado-Taylor^{c,d}

^a Centre for Research in Political Science (CICP), School of Economics and Management, University of Minho, Campus of Gualtar, 4710-057, Braga, Portugal

^b School of Economics and Management, Course Director of Administrative Sciences (Doctoral Program), University of Minho, Campus of Gualtar, Braga, Portugal

^c Center for Researcher in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Portugal

^d Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), Portugal



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Higher education
Evaluation
Accreditation
Evaluation model
Performance indicators

ABSTRACT

A study applied to the context of Higher Education (HE) accreditation and evaluation in Brazil. It discusses recent reforms within the context of the Brazilian evaluation model. The changes brought by the new resolutions published in 2016 have been presented, and a conceptual mapping of the HE evaluation model has been drawn. The objectives were to explain, longitudinally, the ways used by monitoring agencies/bodies to assess performance, and to assure a quality HE. The research methodology used a combination of multiple qualitative methods to present results as conceptual maps. The study may contribute to improving quality, based on best practices in the evaluated model.

1. Introduction

Accreditation and evaluation agencies around the world have discussed and pursued the development of quality HE through initiatives that assess performance of both courses and students. We can see examples of initiatives such as that of the Economic Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which applies an international performance evaluation test to recent graduates (Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014; Richardson and Coates, 2014; Shahjahan and Torres, 2013; Shahjahan, 2013), named *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes* (AHELO), which evaluates the effectiveness of education systems, and prepares audit strategies, in order to legitimize its operation in 27 countries (Barzelay, 2014; Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014; Hanushek et al., 2013; Lenkeit and Caro, 2014; Soh, 2014). Also, in terms of quality assurance in evaluation and accreditation processes by agencies, some recognized international organizations such as the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA), and the *Advancing Quality Management Education Worldwide* (AACSB), have a specific line of specialized accreditation for business and accounting programs. (Blomqvist et al., 2012; Maccari et al., 2014).

Against the backdrop of the main European and American evaluation models used by accreditation agencies; the various educational policies applied to HE; and the different ways of assessing quality in HE, the aim of this study is to assess and explain the role of accreditation and evaluation agencies/bodies in Brazil.

OECD's concern regarding the need to increase the quality of HE has

been discussed since the mid nineteen sixties. The connection between the design of HE, and the issue of quality and internationalization was highlighted in 1999 by David Woodhouse, in a report that questions the training offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

First of all, are HEIs clearly planned and organized to produce the graduates required by society, that is, are their goals appropriate? [...] are HEIs producing the desired graduates? These questions have led to new interpretations of the quality concept [...]. At least this is the theory, but if it is actually achieved or not, also depends on the existing culture. For instance, systems based on the US model tend to be comfortable with different higher education institutions, but systems based on the British model often have policies that tend towards reducing variability. (OECD, 1999, p. 29–30).

Near the year 2000, OECD (1999) mentioned the different cultures between accreditation and evaluation models and, as an example, considered the different quality assurance standards between the US and the UK. In 2009, discussions related to quality and to quality assurance applied to HE kept emphasizing the need to promote a culture of quality. Harvey (2009, p. 1) points out that quality culture tends to be understood as a result of better internal quality assurance processes: “There is increasingly a taken-for-granted view that quality culture is about the development of, and compliance with, processes of internal quality assurance.” Lanares (2008, p. 13) explains that between the two ways in which HEIs can develop quality as a culture, one should prefer the second way, in which the continuity of culture tends to facilitate change:

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: kcleber@gmail.com (C.A. Pereira), jfilipe@eeg.uminho.pt (J.F.F.E. Araujo), lmachado@cipes.up.pt (M. de Lourdes Machado-Taylor).

“In some cases, the institution will introduce quality assurance. This will imply new values, which will have to be integrated in the organizational culture. In other ones, the creation of quality assurance will start from the existing quality culture. Once finalized, quality assurance will in turn influence and modify the quality culture”.

This paper's initial questions adhere to this scenario, and will help develop questions related to HE accreditation, evaluation, and quality in Brazil:

Are there differences in the Brazilian HE accreditation and evaluation model, when assessed in the light of those in developed countries? What indicators are used by accreditation/evaluation agencies/bodies to influence or determine institutional performance, and that of graduate courses?

The main objectives of this study were, to explain, longitudinally, the ways used by the monitoring agency to assess performance, and to assure a quality HE in Brazil. The specific objectives were: a) to review the literature, the approaches that define accountability and the need for quality in HE; b) to explain the main characteristics, and the quality assurance mechanisms and practices in Brazilian HE; c) to compare practices with the legal requirements of accreditation agencies; d) to explain the Brazilian HE model, considering the different dimensions of the accreditation and evaluation processes.

In order to achieve these objectives, it was decided to use the triangulation strategy as research methodology. By providing multiple views and methods for obtaining information, its use might alleviate research credibility issues (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Fielding and Schreier, 2001; Yauch and Steudel, 2003; Hussein, 2009), through the combination of methods and data sources in qualitative aspects.

The challenge of combining data in a qualitative way, with different presentation methods and techniques, using conceptual diagrams and maps, allows one to provide more accurate results, and allows the analysis of multiple perspectives. There is also a classical trend in the literature regarding research methods in social sciences by using multiple methods (Hussein, 2009; Webb et al., 1966). By using the triangulation strategy one can enrich the analysis, favouring the visualization of multiple possible perspectives, while at the same time facilitate the understanding and perception of phenomena. Secondary data have been used, including official reports and statistics provided by the evaluation and accreditation agency.

2. Accountability and pressure for quality in HE models

Harvey and Askling (2003) said that in the 1990s, the search for quality emerged within the scenario of HE. Once the search for efficiency and effectiveness in public services was started – arising from the ideals of *New Public Management* (NPM) (Hood, 1989; Pollitt, 1993), it was not possible to exempt HEIs from this new requirement of producing more with less costs (Bleiklie, 1998). HEIs started to incorporate these changes (Askling and Henkel, 1988) in an effort to follow the rise of “*The Evaluative State*” (Neave, 1988), cultivating quality, efficiency, and an entrepreneurial culture within HE.

Following this *status quo*, Santos (2011) positions HE as a public responsibility, and emphasizes the importance of governments and society assuring a quality HE. This followed from the need to ensure the quality of HEIs through public authorities, and can be evidenced by various accreditation models based on self-regulation. The approach of making governments accountable for the quality of HE, its accreditation and evaluation, has been highlighted in various academic communities (Bleiklie, 1998; Cret, 2011; Deem, 1998; Neave, 1998; Stensaker et al., 2011).

We have witnessed the evolution of evaluation and quality assurance models and systems in a global way. Governments in each country have adapted their rules, improvements, and monitoring agencies differentially. As for example, the use of evaluation procedures in the European Community (ENQA, 2005, 2007, 2009; Rosa et al., 2011), the

accreditation procedures in the United States (Eaton, 2009, 2012; Harvey, 1995, 2002; Massy, 2005), and hybrid evaluation systems or those used interchangeably in Latin America (Lamarra, 2006, 2007; Santos, 2011; Law No. 10 861, 2004),¹ and Eastern European countries.

2.1. The evolution of accountability and quality within the Brazilian HE context

Polidori (2009, p. 440–441) points out that the reforms that took place during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2003), culminated in privatization or in granting to the private sector the implementation of public functions and services, including higher education. From this landmark, which Felix (2008) named as “construction of emancipatory evaluation,” the implementation of the National Higher Education Evaluation System (SINAES) began to have the goal of developing, within the country, an evaluation policy consistent with its own reality.

In a way, these changes have tried to adjust the scenario of the country to the suggestions of the report published by the *Observatory on borderless higher education: prioritizing knowledge for the development of a nation*; including rational changes to HE; reducing unequal relations between developing countries; implementing democratization policies of access to and quality of HE; combating the erroneous view of prioritizing basic education at the expense of HE (Naidoo, 2007, p.2–9).

Lamarra and Centeno (2016, p. 138), claim that the quality assurance processes in Latin America have been strongly influenced by the standards in North America – primarily in the United States and in Canada –, and in Europe. As for the rampant growth of HE in Latin America, Lamarra and Cópola (2007, p. 18), and Lamarra and Centeno (2016, p. 137), say that various types of university and non-university HEIs have been established,² mostly private ones, in an attempt to meet the growing market demand, and, in such a context, quality and institutional relevance criteria were not previously thought of. The statement reinforces the need to establish a HE evaluation model able to provide response to emerging demands, without losing focus on quality.

These initiatives have consolidated a proposal for deployment of a quality model in the Brazilian HE that meets the state-monitoring model, which, according to Neave and Van Vught (1994), recognizes that the state has difficulties with, and is inefficient in monitoring a mass, dynamic, higher education system that is complex and constantly changing.

In summary, the proposal followed the international trend of turning the government into a regulator of HE, not worrying about occasional entropies, but rather concerned in maintaining the homeostasis of the whole, for which it has designed the implementation of SINAES. For Amaral and Magalhães (2001), this HE model allows very few interventions in the daily decisions of HEIs, due to their autonomy,³ for which the government is just limited to the subsequent task of directing, monitoring, and evaluating performance.

Durham (2003, p. 276–277) states that Universities enjoy autonomy to perform those activities which are their own, and that are not conducted for their exclusive interest, but are a service they provide to Society. As a result, acknowledging autonomy does not relieve the broader public authorities from the actual provision of these services. This prerogative of autonomy is not easily found in other contexts. One can cite, for instance, the case of The Encyclopedia of Higher Education (Schwartzman et al., 1992), which does not show any chapter discussing autonomy of universities.

As a highlight of the Brazilian model for the biennium 2015 and 2017, it began to play an important role in the HE quality assessment

¹ Law No. 10 861 of April 14 2004, by the Ministry of Education. Presidency of Brazil, which established the National Higher Education Evaluation System (SINAES).

² In Brazil, non-university institutions are represented by Federal Institutes.

³ In Brazil, universities have the autonomy to create, modify and extinguish HE courses, among other powers.

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