

Current challenges of quality assessment in higher education For Mexico and Latin America

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¹Miguel Angel Medina Romero

¹*Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo – México, miguel.medina.romero@umich.mx*

Abstract

This research report was carried out based on a documentary review on the production and publication of research papers related to the challenges faced in the evaluation of the quality of Latin American higher education, highlighting the case of the evaluation of educational quality in Mexican institutions, during the period between 2014 and 2019. Therefore, the purpose of the bibliometric analysis proposed in this paper lies in identifying the main characteristics of the volume of publications registered in the Scopus database during the aforementioned period, by Latin American institutions, achieving the identification of 168 publications in total. The information provided by this platform was organized by means of tables and figures, categorizing the information on the basis of the year of publication, country of origin, area of knowledge and type of publication. Once these characteristics were defined, the position of the different authors and specialists with respect to the proposed topic was referenced by means of a qualitative analysis. Among the main findings identified through the ongoing research, it was found that Brazil, with 64 publications, was the country with the highest production. The area of knowledge that made the greatest contribution to the construction of bibliographic material referring to the study of the challenges faced in evaluating quality in higher education in the case under analysis was the social sciences, with 78 published documents; and the most used type of publication during the period under review was the journal article, which accounted for 80% of the total scientific production.

Keywords : Educational quality assessment, educational management, higher education, Latin America, Mexico.

I. INTRODUCTION

It should be referred that one of the main indicators that allow evaluating the quality of education is its accreditation, in the different institutions that offer the fulfillment of this fundamental right. In fact, this has been a global trend within the academic community and one of the aspects most taken into account when it comes to placing institutions among the first places worldwide (Acosta et al., 2014).

Quality accreditation arose thanks to the need to evaluate and record the indicators of compliance in the different mandatory aspects of the training process at different academic levels in the 1960s. However, it was not until the end of the 1980s that Latin American governmental institutions paid special attention to accreditation and began to involve the term

quality in higher education, in response to the great worldwide demand for accreditation (Claverie et al., 2008). The term accreditation, by definition, is a term that refers to the quality of higher education, in response to the great worldwide demand and globalization itself. Accreditation, by definition, is a voluntary process whereby an educational institution submits itself to the opinion of an external body, with the intention of obtaining public recognition of the quality of its educational work (Egidio & Haug, 2006).

This allows inferring that the processes that take place within academic education have been subjected to different levels of evaluation by regulatory bodies, both governmental and non-governmental, in the search for providing quality in academic education to students at all levels. In particular, higher education has faced

challenges in terms of evaluation by peer evaluators, who issue their verdict and this is used for the purpose of continuous quality improvement, understood as the perception of each of the stakeholders around these institutions, from administrative staff, teachers, managers, students, family members, and the community in general. This value is of great help in the search for the fulfillment of goals and objectives, including as an item of great relevance in the added value that universities wish to deliver to their students.

Therefore, it is of great relevance to know the impact of scientific publications in the framework of the study related to the challenges that higher education institutions face within the processes of evaluation of educational quality in Mexico and Latin America., To this end, the study proposes to answer the following question that guides the current exhibition: how were the production and publication of research papers related to the study of the current challenges of the evaluation of the quality of higher education in Mexico and Latin America, during the period 2014-2019?

2. General Objective

To analyze from a bibliometric and bibliographic perspective, the production of

high impact research papers on research published during the period 2014-2019 regarding the study of the current challenges of evaluation and educational quality in higher education institutions in Mexico and Latin America.

3. Methodology

A quantitative analysis of the information provided by Scopus is made under a bibliometric approach on the scientific production related to the study of the current challenges of evaluation and educational quality in higher education institutions in Mexico and Latin America. Likewise, it is analyzed from a qualitative perspective, with examples of some research works published in the area of study mentioned above, from a bibliographic approach to describe the position of different authors on the proposed topic.

The search is performed through the tool provided by Scopus and the parameters referenced in Table 1 are established.

3.1 Methodological design

The methodological design strategy of this study is discussed in Table 1.

Table 1. *Methodological design.*

	Phase	Description	Ranking
Phase 1	Data collection	Data was collected using the Scopus electronic page search tool, by means of which a total of 168 publications were identified.	Published papers whose study variables are related to the current challenges of evaluation and educational quality in higher education institutions. Research papers published during the period 2014-2019. Limited to Latin American countries. Without distinction of area of knowledge. Without distinction of type of publication.
Phase 2	Construction of analysis material	The information identified in the previous phase is organized. The classification will be made by means of graphs,	Word Co-occurrence. Year of publication. Country of origin of the publication.

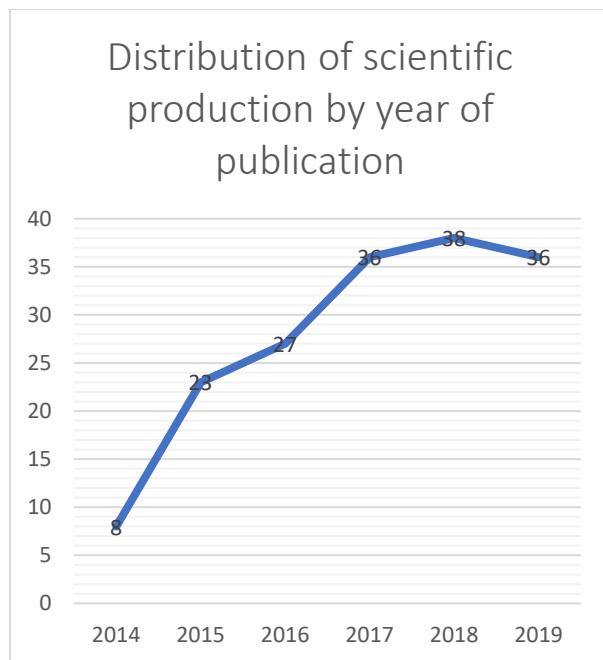


Figure 2. *Distribution of scientific production by year of publication.*

Source: Own elaboration, based on data provided by Scopus.

In order to carry out a concrete analysis of the variables of this study, it is necessary to delimit the time of the search of the scientific production provided by the Scopus database, which in this case covers the period from 2014 to 2019, as shown in Figure 2. Indeed, the record of scientific production had an increase of significant importance, since in 2014 there were 8 publications compared to 38 scientific papers in 2018, as its highest peak; and, finally, resulting in 36 in 2019, so it is necessary to highlight the article of 2014 entitled “Critical Analysis of the Pressure Measures Proposed to Improve Initial Teacher Training in Chile by the Panel of Experts for Quality Education” (Montecinos, 2014). This study focused on the provision of quality education from the initial teacher training; and focused its analysis on the July 9, 2010 report of the Chilean panel of experts, concluding that the training of a suitable staff, prepared and integrated from pedagogy, is the fundamental pillar to trace the path to excellence. Thus, it refers to a professional who not only has the knowledge of the subject, but also has the tools that allow him/her to teach effectively, which is what is really needed in higher education communities. This article established as a measure to optimize the work in teaching, factors such as pressure, through entrance and exit exams for teachers, which

evaluate the fundamental pillars of the school system (standardization, evaluation, competence and accountability); however, the minority of the panel of experts represented by 3 professionals also suggested the application of resources to improve the work of teachers. However, in order to fulfill its objective, state participation and the formulation of policies for the development of sustainable quality schools are needed.

On the other hand, the 2018 article entitled “The lecture as a form of organization of the teaching-learning process in Cuban higher medical education” (Rizo et al., 2018) also stands out, with the purpose of examining the essential elements at the time of using the lecture as a teaching method in Cuban higher education, in this case medicine. The lecture, in accordance with the precepts of the authors of this study, is indispensable for pedagogical developments in higher education institutions, a conclusion that was reached by analyzing the results obtained through the documentary review method for publications related to the subject. And, additionally, it was determined that the lecture as an educational tool represents a great challenge for the teacher, since the aspects covered by its use range from formal, methodological, educational and scientific-technical elements, which should seek in every way to understand the purposes, objectives and vision of the profession to which it is applied. And, it is in this point where the didactic processes by the teacher also enter and play a fundamental role in the teaching process.

4.3 Distribution of scientific production by country of origin

Figure 3 shows the distribution of scientific production according to the nationality of the authors.

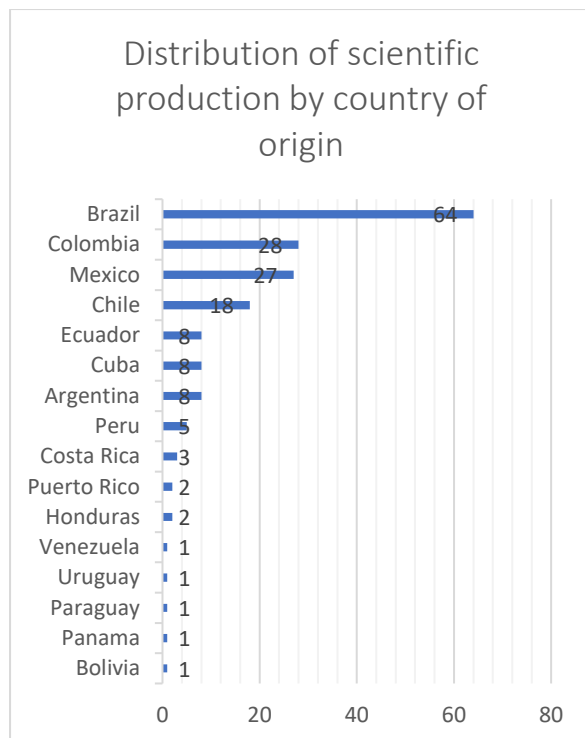


Figure 3. *Distribution of scientific production by country of origin.*

Source: Own elaboration, based on data provided by Scopus.

According to these figure, Brazil was the Latin American country with the highest number of publications registered by Scopus, during the period 2014-2019, with a total of 64 documents, followed by Colombia, with 28; and finally by Mexico, with 27 documents. In this last group of publications, there is an article entitled “The evaluation and accreditation of professional education in Mexico: legitimization and competitiveness as the purpose of the university?” (Moreno, 2019), whose purpose is to analyze the current state of evaluation and accreditation in state public universities (UPES) in order to understand the evaluation and accreditation of university careers in Mexico. To achieve this objective, the authors conducted an analysis on the relationship between current evaluation and accreditation processes and the concept of quality focused on higher education. One of the main findings determined that university institutions pursue within their goals, to increase competitiveness and legitimacy in the training processes.

At this point, it is worth noting that the production of scientific publications, when classified by country of origin, presented a special characteristic and that is the

collaboration between authors with different affiliations to both public and private institutions; and these institutions can be from the same country or from different nationalities, so that the production of an article co-authored by different authors from different countries of origin, allows each of the countries to add up as a unit in the overall publications. This is best explained in Figure 4, which shows the flow of collaborative works from different countries.

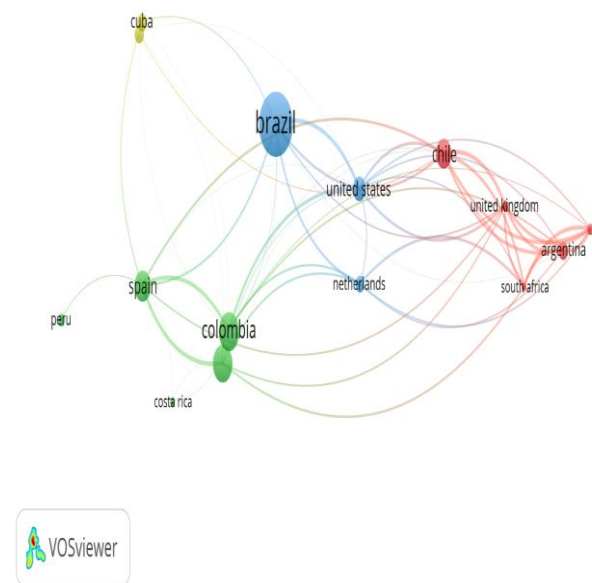


Figure 4. *Co-citations between countries.*

Source: Own elaboration, based on data provided by Scopus.

Figure 4 shows the existing relationship between authors from one country with authors from other countries in the elaboration of one or more research papers. Thus, it is evident that authors affiliated with institutions in Brazil, carry out publications with authors from the United States and the Netherlands, and Latin American countries, such as Cuba and Chile. Likewise, Colombia showed a high participation with Spanish, Peruvian and Costa Rican institutions in the search to generate new knowledge regarding quality assessment processes in higher education. It is important to highlight that the joint work between perspectives of authors affiliated to different

international institutions, allows to know a more general state of the quality of Latin American higher education, and how globalization and the use of technology have facilitated the evaluation and self-evaluation processes in these institutions. As an example of this, the article entitled “Quality in educational processes mediated by technology” (Parra, Espinosa, & Lopez, 2018) was identified, which focuses its efforts on the needs of higher education institutions in Mexico and their intention to offer training programs based on quality principles, finding in the use of technological platforms an important tool in the search to measure the perception of quality among the interest groups that develop around Mexican universities, as well as the performance of teachers who are subjected to constant evaluations through questionnaires applied virtually, which facilitates obtaining concrete and quick data to allow their analysis, thus ensuring that this information is part of a whole material to strengthen weak points and potentiate strong points within the teaching-learning process.

4.4 Distribution of scientific production by area of knowledge

Figure 5 shows the production of scientific publications distributed according to the area of knowledge through which the different research methodologies are executed.

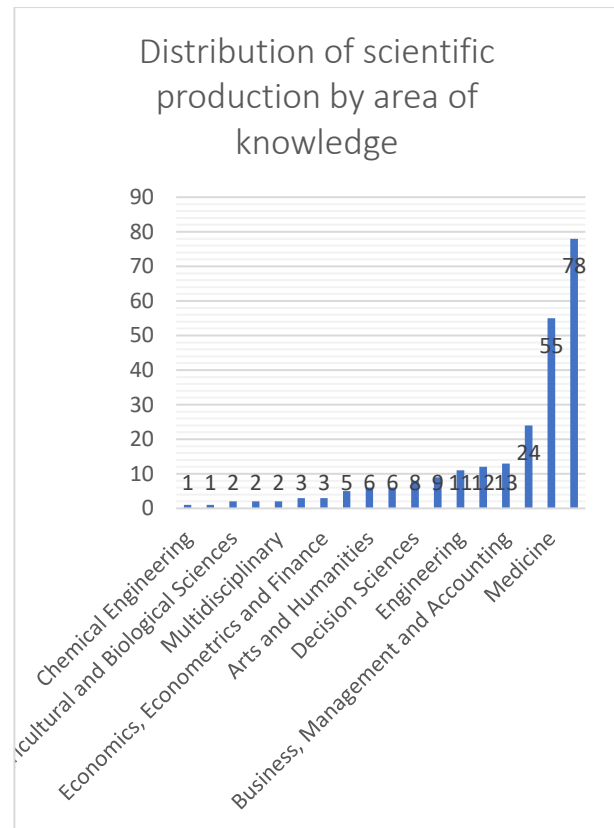


Figure 5. Distribution of scientific production by area of knowledge.

Source: Own elaboration, based on data provided by Scopus.

The challenges faced to obtain a quality education in Latin America are increasingly higher: to interpret, know and analyze the objective of the variables of this debt, require assuming a globalized and integrative approach of all areas of knowledge. It is for this reason that the study of Figure 5 shows the scientific contribution of areas such as social sciences, with 78 publications, being the one with the highest production, followed by medicine with 55 records; and, in third place, by computer sciences, with 24 publications. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the article in the latter area, entitled “Assessment as a systematization tool in the evaluation of competencies in higher education students” (Velarde et al., 2019), a study that analyzed through a quantitative approach and a descriptive scope the measurement of competencies at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Agustín de Arequipa in the second period of 2018. For this, it took into account the entry into force of the University Law No. 30220 of mandatory application in the jurisdiction of Peru, which had the primary

objective of improving the parameters that define a quality education, through the restructuring of academic processes. However, for the definition of new guidelines that allow the achievement of the proposed objectives, it became necessary to evaluate students as a mechanism to determine shortcomings and opportunities for improvement.

In addition, there are also important contributions from areas such as chemistry, arts and humanities and mathematics, in the search for knowledge and finding solutions regarding the study of the challenges faced in evaluating the quality of higher education in Mexico and Latin America.

4.5 Type of publication

Figure 6 shows how the bibliographic production is distributed according to the type of publication chosen by the authors.

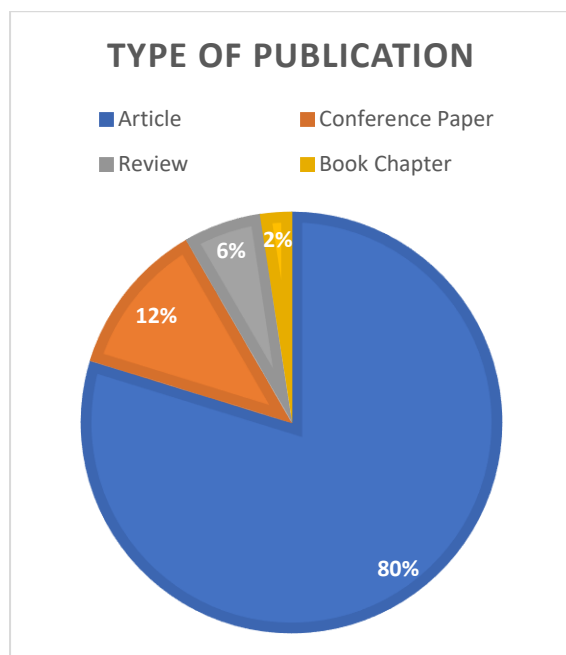


Figure 6. *Type of publication*

Source: Own elaboration, based on data provided by Scopus.

As shown in Figure 6, 80% of the publications identified through the execution of Phase 1 of the methodological design correspond to journal articles, followed by conference articles with 12%; reviews in third place, with 6%; and, finally, 2% corresponded to book chapters. Among the reviews, the work entitled "Evaluation in institutions of higher education: an analysis from the theory of agency and the theory of resources and capabilities"

(Vargas-Hernández & Barraza, 2016) stood out, whose objective was to explain, through the theory of agency and the theory of resources and capabilities, the evaluation process in higher education institutions. The study applied as methodology, a bibliographic review referring to the study of the aforementioned topics, presenting an overview of the evaluation process, the actors involved and the conflicts that may arise as a result of it. In this way, it was possible to establish a comparison between the current reality of the quality evaluation processes in higher education institutions, in harmony with the published theory regarding resources and capacities, which undoubtedly allows to broaden the perspective on the evaluations applied with the purpose of measuring quality in the professional training processes.

Conclusions

To conclude this presentation, it should be noted that due to the documentary review proposed in this document, it was possible to identify that Brazil, with 64 publications, was the Latin American country with the largest number of documents registered by Scopus during the period 2014-2019, as proposed in Phase 1 of the methodological design proposed in this research. Of that period, the year in which the largest volume of publications was registered in the aforementioned database was 2018. In that year, a total of 38 documents related to the study of the current challenges of the evaluation and quality of higher education in Mexico and other Latin American countries were published in journals indexed in Scopus. It should also be noted that within the areas of knowledge that had the greatest participation through their theories in the construction of the bibliographic material analyzed in this article, the social sciences were the ones that, for the most part, supported the development of new knowledge on the aforementioned topic, given its scope and impact involving a topic of vital importance such as education, for social development in the different countries, not only in the Latin American community but also globally.

During the development of the bibliographic analysis, it was possible to document the position of the most relevant authors in the study of the challenges faced by

higher education institutions through the processes of quality assessment in university education; and there is a predominant need for continuous improvement based on the information collected through different techniques such as questionnaires, interviews, conferences, among others, which seek to know the current state of quality in the education provided by teachers in Latin American universities, especially in Mexico, where the authors have shown a strong tendency to rely on technological tools to carry out this task.

The latter have proven to be of great help when analyzing the conglomerate of data that the evaluations yield about the different actors that are part of the professional training of thousands of Mexican students; and how the feedback derived from the analysis of such information is a key element in the search for the fulfillment of quality objectives in higher education institutions. It is important to highlight the work of those who seek the fulfillment of basic requirements to ensure quality education within the student community, since in this way the processes that are submitted to accreditation as voluntary certification are standardized, but in many cases prove to be a useful tool when institutionalizing legitimacy and competitiveness policies within educational institutions.

Therefore, this paper concludes by highlighting the importance of knowing the current literature published on the study of the current challenges faced by higher education institutions in the application of tools for the evaluation of quality in academic training processes; since by means of documents such as the one presented, it is currently possible to generate new and better techniques for the evaluation of processes under the quality parameters established by the competent evaluating authorities in compliance with the basic concepts of quality, the latter understood as the perception of the different interest groups around these institutions, as well as the satisfaction of the needs of students, teachers, administrators and other actors involved in the processes of higher education.

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