

A Systemic View of Higher Education Quality Assurance Systems (HEQAS) in Latin America

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HEQAS in the specialized literature

The concept of Higher Education Quality Assurance **System** (HEQAS) has been explored extensively.

- **Martin & Stella (2007)** described HEQAS as “a continuum of mechanisms that build on each other” where changes in one part affect the others.
- **Fernández Lamarra (2006)** discussed “systems and processes of assessment and accreditation of quality assurance for higher education” pointing out that the consolidation of QAS for higher education was still “insufficient” and that the possibility of having consolidated assessment and accreditation systems will contribute to overcome the fragmentation and dispersion of information on higher education systems (p. 34).
- **Lemaitre & Mena (2012)** observed that most Latin American countries have developed formal HEQAS and, more recently,
- **Strah (2020)**, conducted comparative study of national quality assurance systems commissioned by CONEAU and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) . The last

HEQAS in Latin American Countries

Different Latin American have established their HEQAS through specific legislation:

- **Chile:** Law 20129 (2018) established the HEQAS
- **Colombia:** Decree 1330 (2019) defined the country’s HEQAS.
- **Panama:** Law 52 (2015) created the National System of Evaluation and Accreditation for the Improvement of the Quality of University Higher Education of Panama.
- **Peru:** Law 28740 (2006) National System for the Evaluation, Accreditation, and Certification of Educational Quality (SINEACE).

Is this a system?

Despite the growing importance of HEQAS in these countries and its inclusion in many regulations, a systemic review is still missing. According to Rob Dekkers (2017, p. 16) “a system consists of elements discernible within the total reality (universe), defined by the aims of the investigator. All these elements have at least one relationship with another element within the system and may have relationships with other elements within total reality.” Many of the previously mentioned definition of HEQAS emphasize the elements of the system, but often overlook these critical relationships.

Our Study

This study focuses on five Latin American countries: **Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Peru.**

Focus on quality assurance processes

Identified 20 relevant process, including ex ante and ex post evaluation for institutions, branch or campus satellites; faculties, schools or units; and programs including undergraduate (ISCED 5 and 6) and graduate (ISCES 7 and 8).

	Ex Ante Evaluation		Ex Post Evaluation	
	First Time	Renewal	Fist Time	Renewal
Institutions	1	6	11	16
Branch / Satellite	2	7	12	17
Faculty / School / Unit	3	8	13	18
Programs ISCED 5 and 6	4	9	14	19
Programs ISCED 7 and 8	5	10	15	20

Institution types

	Public	Private
University	Public University	Private University
Non-University	Public Non-university	Private Non-university

Findings

- **Creation:** Most of the studied systems were created by law or decree.
- **Scope:** The coverage and processes included in each system vary, but there are commonalities.
- **Processes:** The sequence of quality assurance processes and authorities responsible differ across countries.
- **Information Flow:** The degree and nature of information sharing within systems vary. Chile and Colombia have more integrated processes, while Costa Rica and Peru display more isolated processes with less information flow.

Conclusion

This study highlights significant differences between HEQAS across Latin America. Understanding these differences is crucial for fostering mutual understanding between quality assurance agencies in the region. A deeper systemic view is still needed to fully comprehend the relationships and impact of these systems.

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