

# EDUCATIONAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, ACCREDITATION AND LICENSING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Quality management in the licensing process favors functional change in higher education institutions that leads to achieve a systemic management based on processes. This literature review reveals the situation of higher education institutions in the licensing and accreditation process to ensure the achievement of competencies required by the graduate profile and the labor market. The purpose of this research was to learn about the educational quality management models implemented and to analyze the quality standards evaluated. The data collected were consolidated from the bibliometric study, using Scopus, VOSViewer and the analytical reading of the most relevant documents through Atlas.ti. It became evident that not all higher education institutions have a quality management system and that the evaluation indicators cannot be the same in all countries, being necessary to submit to expert judgment the parameters with which the institution will be evaluated in order to be accredited. The laws on licensing and accreditation mark a before and after in the educational context of our country, based on the search for quality to face an increasingly competitive market.

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**KEYWORDS:** Standards, Quality Management, Assessment, Self-regulation, Certification, Licensing.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The challenges of higher education for the 21st century raise the need for a new educational process, based on the principles of excellence, quality and relevance. Quality that is based on the training and improvement of human resources (Salas, 2000) and in compliance with quality standards in internal or external evaluations. The fact of achieving the certification does not mean that the institution is excellent or prepared for everything, if it were, all the institutions of the higher level would have been prepared to face remote work because of covid-19.

This research addresses accreditation and licensing in Higher Education Institutions as part of the assurance of educational quality; This brief analysis allows us to evaluate the accreditation process and the impact on the quality of the service for the training of professionals. It is indisputable that each state proposes public policies that seek to ensure that the training of professionals responds to the complexity and diversity of the country, directing efforts to close the gaps and to consolidate the strategic objectives that lead to sustainable development.

While the Bologna Process attempted to build and coordinate the higher education systems of OECD countries through strategic public investment, the Lisbon Strategy 2000-2010 manifests the harmonious relationship between education and research, based on financing models according to the needs and interests of the market. Until then, accreditations had focused on criteria of relevance to achieve educational quality and to adequately enter the labor market. Consequently, if education is a public good, it is a priority and focuses on the resolution of social problems in general; Therefore, relevance, as a criterion that seeks educational quality in higher education, should not be limited only to employability; but also to the demands that society requires.

Higher education institutions are responsible for the service they offer and not external bodies, which only check the CBCs through systematic evaluation mechanisms. Institutional accreditation is conceived as an academic audit, that is, the evaluation of the institutional capacity for self-regulation, understood as the set of policies, mechanisms, procedures, and actions aimed at determining whether the institution is effectively advancing towards the achievement of its purposes and objectives (Zapata, 2018).

This process, as a form of evaluation, arises due to factors related to the growth and expansion of the educational service from the 1960s onwards; however, it is at the end of the 80s and in the course

of the following decade, when the governments of the countries in the world and especially in Latin America set their sights on the quality of education at the higher level. to render accounts on the exercise of the assigned public expenditure, as well as to verify whether the recognition of the academic offer complies with quality standards. Political, social and economic changes and transformations have generated new challenges such as relevance, equity, quality, use of ICTs and internationalization. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 1998).

One of the objectives of accreditation is the evaluation, promotion and public guarantee of the self-regulation processes of higher education institutions, for which it is necessary to evaluate the formal existence, systematic application and results of policies and mechanisms that aim to fulfill the purposes of an institution, guaranteeing its quality (Guide for Internal Self-Evaluation Institutional Accreditation Universities CNA-Chile, 2016). The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) of the United States proposed that quality assurance reflects diversity and is adopted accordingly, modifying traditional approaches to quality or developing new approaches to quality assurance (Eaton, 2015)

Higher education has undergone considerable changes due to many factors, including demographic changes, declining public support, rapid development of ICTs and the internationalisation of higher education.(Chen & Hou, 2016); However, without even taking these factors into account, international policies emphasize that reforms that involve changes must prioritize aspects such as quality, evaluation, accreditation and certification, depending on the country where they are applied.

One of the standards and the most important is pedagogical management, which involves curricula, pedagogical approaches and above all the suitability of the professional who trains students; Over time, there have been many attempts to improve the quality of education from this standard, without a response because the reforms and attempts have not been sustainable and have not responded to the needs of the population. The Triple Helix model proposed by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1997), from which many development strategies have been derived from understanding academic-industry-government relations, has highlighted the lack of coordination when it comes to developing training models and what is intended with them, and what should become a model of coordination between the state and academia has become, more in some countries than in others, in a model of intervention

and over-regulation in which it is difficult to establish the criteria to define the perfect balance of regulation and control of universities (Collado & Garaycochea, 2020).

To address the concept of educational quality, it is necessary to define quality first; From an etymological point of view, quality comes from the Latin "qualitas" which implies a comparison or contrast of some elements that have been previously defined, depending on a specific field of study (Suárez, 2015); Therefore, quality is associated with satisfaction or conformity with a product, service, process or result. This it is measured when professionals successfully face the challenges of human development, exercise citizenship properly and learn during and for life; Therefore, it is the task of each institution at the higher level to assimilate that the training that is given, as well as the facilities that are given to students, are decisive to achieve an optimal level of training, which responds to diversity.

Several countries have responded to this diversity of situations, some emerging, others programmatic, accidental or unpredictable, as is the case of the covid-19 pandemic; through self-accreditation to increase the flexibility of higher education, especially in the Asia-Pacific region; an action that was first implemented in the United Kingdom and has since been adopted by several countries such as Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia. Similarly, the Taiwanese government also adopted this approach in 2012, with its accreditation system being mandatory, which aims at accountability; in the face of the new system of self-accreditation that aims at institutional improvement.(Chen & Hou, 2016). Attention is being paid to the development of professional educational standards on all continents, ensuring that the professional responds to national and international practice (Schæffergården, 2004). Consequently, we are looking for elements of a system that, guided by policies, hope to achieve objectives through the correct use of processes focused on quality (Collado & Garaycochea, 2020).

ISO 9000, when defining "quality", proposes to speak of levels since, depending on the degree to which some of its requirements are met, they can be more or less complex, or more or less simple to access. At the level of Latin America, institutional licensing and accreditation are levels of institutional evaluation and present multiple problems ranging from accreditation models focused on the administrative and not on performance; accreditation processes that tend to be a simulation; increase in the bureaucratic apparatus; little real participation of the educational community; poor credibility in the accrediting bodies; work by competencies, but educational

practices are content-based; There is little shared vision around accreditation as a process of innovation and transformation of people and communities in accordance with the challenges of the knowledge society. In view of this, the regulatory bodies have established at least two levels of requirements; the first, associated with the necessary requirements to be met for the proper functioning of the university and, the second, indicates a more complex level of requirements as a result of a process of self-evaluation, redesign of processes to improve them and maintain a process of continuous improvement. The first level is known as qualified registration, operating authorization or licensing and, the second, is known as accreditation, either of academic programs or of the entire university, each process meets the requirements corresponding to its categorization.

This article is located in the line of mixed research, since in the first place a search for information is made, followed by a systematic reading of the documents that lead to understand the process of accreditation and educational quality, and then from the bibliometrics and using software and criteria of systematization of information it is possible to evidence the evolution over time of the phenomenon of study, based on research carried out and results of scientific activity.

This research is justified because it allows us to look, interpret and evaluate the quality management systems and the verification processes of the basic quality conditions that Higher Level Institutions must comply with worldwide, to know the methodological approaches of each research, its scope and results that will help in decision-making so that it is the HEIs themselves that self-regulate from a self-evaluation. To achieve quality in the training of professionals, it is required, more than good will, the interrelation of educational management with the quality of teaching processes, the connection with pedagogical theories and human development, the link within the framework of the academic relationship with a community in order to transform society and the achievement of technological and financial resources that improve each of the processes. That is why educational quality is not achieved only with the work of teachers or with a good infrastructure and implementation of equipment, it requires suitable administrators, true managers of quality education, which must be combined with relevance and impact.

Accreditation is the product of the interaction between the internal motivations of leadership and responses to external influences. (Barrett et al., 2019).

The research carried out has shown that the

accreditation processes and the evaluation instruments used by various organizations in the Latin American region have focused on evaluating the administrative and documentary functions of HEIs, omitting the evaluation of institutional performance.

In relation to the existence of research instruments with their respective validity and reliability that evaluate the perception of the educational community in accreditation processes, it is worth noting the scarce existence of them in databases such as Google Scholar, SciELO, Scopus and WoS, and others.

The purpose of this article is to explore the current state of higher education accreditation worldwide and to describe the incidence and evolution of these processes. When tracking the publications on this particular phenomenon, it can be seen that they have grown considerably in recent years, since in some countries these processes are mandatory and decisive for the educational offer. Accreditation is not excellence, but rather a level of quality higher than the basic quality conditions required for licensing. (Sirvent, 2015)

The structure of this document presents in the first place the abstract of the article, followed by keywords, abstract, introduction, methodology, research results, where statistical graphs and semantic maps of the evolution of the topic in time and space are presented, followed by discussions on the particular topic to culminate with bibliographic references. In the introduction, the background and evolution of the topic over time is shown, a general approach is made, in the second section the method used for the collection of information is detailed, from the scopus database, to then process and creatively present the semantic map and heat map through the VOSviewer, and finally, results are discussed that allow not only to promote effective assurance of educational quality through institutional culture, but also that this documentary study will allow us to have clear elements that guide new research and encourage the participation of members of the educational community in this process. In conclusion, new studies are suggested that deepen the analysis of these problems and help change the current accreditation and licensing processes, new quality assurance methods are required to make it easier for institutions to respond to diversity.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

From the point of view of the methodological approach, it is noted that the present research is of a documentary type, from a hermeneutical perspective the state of the art on the educational quality

management system and accreditation in higher level institutions has been elaborated. The methodological route that has been followed has basically comprised two moments: it begins with the bibliometric analysis of the educational quality management system and the implications of compliance with the basic conditions to achieve the licensing and accreditation of higher education institutions and the second moment that corresponds to an analytical review of the most relevant literature on the phenomenon, using the Atlas.ti. The units of analysis were all those documents selected on the subject, as search criteria, the following descriptors were included: "accreditation", "licensing", "quality management" and "higher education". These descriptors were combined in various ways at the time of the exploration in order to expand the search criteria.

When exploring the documents in the Scopus database and after a thorough review, 84 articles were selected, of which only 30 were chosen, taking into account inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that did not respond to the thematic core under review were not taken into account, as were those that did not appear in indexed journals. To organize the documents that were subject to reading, an Excel database was created, taking into account the following categories of analysis: article title, author, year, abstract, DOI and link. Once the information was organized, the review was carried out, using Google translate for the translation of the articles in English. Regarding bibliometrics, it is specified that it is the application of mathematical and statistical foundations to written sources that are found in databases that contain metadata and elements such as authors, title of the publication, type of document, language, abstract and keywords or descriptors (López *et al.*, 2009).

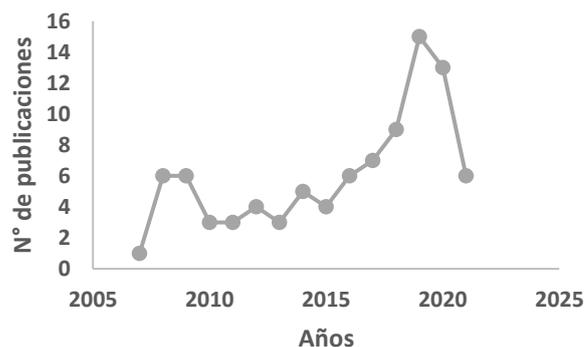
This methodology was used to analyze the state of the art of quality management, accreditation and licensing systems in higher education, thus allowing to know the categories of analysis in which authors abound, the areas of knowledge, relevant authors, countries, types of publication and institutional affiliations of the authors. For the bibliographic exploration on the subject, a search argument was made in the Scopus database. The search protocol was developed in July 2021 with the following structure: (TITLE-ABS-KEY (accreditation) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (licensing) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("quality management") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("higher education")). A total of 101 records were identified, which were submitted to bibliometric analysis, considering the categories of evolution of publications by year, by authors, areas of knowledge and by country. The export of the data in a comma-

separated format has allowed the information to be integrated into the VOS Viewer program with which the analysis of co-occurrences of the key terms was carried out, obtaining the semantic map and heat map to be able to visualize the relationships that exist in the reviewed articles, also using the thesaurus the most relevant information was filtered that was analyzed through Atlas.ti and that has allowed finding points common and divergent on the subject.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the research related to the bibliometric analysis of the systems of management of educational quality, accreditation and licensing of Higher Education Institutions. From the Scopus database, the information was managed and organized in such a way that using the artificial intelligence of the VOSViewer software, it has been possible to capture metadata, which allows the evolution of the topic in question to be visualized in time and space.

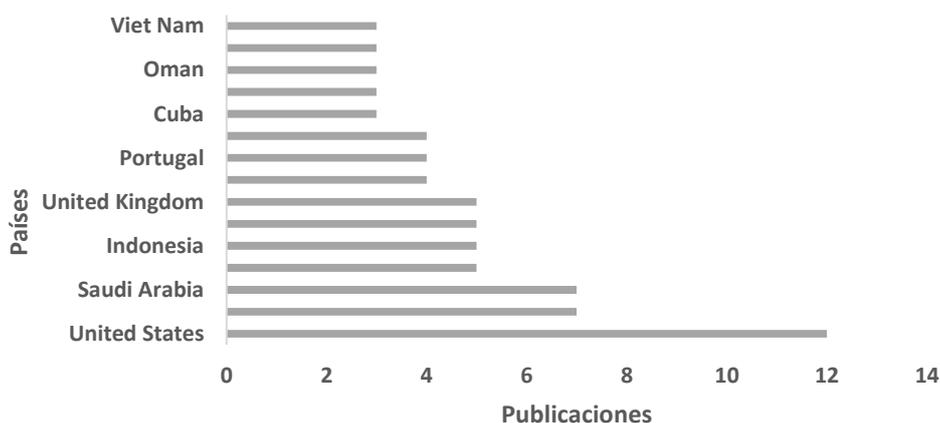
In relation to Figure 1, which corresponds to annual publications on topics related to educational quality management systems, accreditation, and licensing at the higher level, it can be seen that the interest in researching and publishing on this topic has arisen since 2007, remaining stable during the years 2010 to 2015, with an average of four publications per year. It is from 2016 that the number of publications increases, reaching 16 in 2019, a figure that is decreased due to the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, reaching six publications so far in 2021.



*Figure 1: Annual Publications in Scopus 2006 - July 2021-In Original Spanish Language.*

Note: The figure shows annual publications on accreditation and educational quality in the world. Source: Scopus database (2021)

Around the world, higher education has very similar features and challenges; however, the implementation of licensing and accreditation processes changes substantially in each of them. This topic has motivated researchers from various countries to take special interest and research on the subject. Figure 2 shows the United States as the leader in publications, followed by Germany and Saudi Arabia, with the same number of publications, we can note the presence of Latin America (Ecuador) with five publications, followed by Indonesia, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom. The contribution of the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Cuba, among others, is important.



*Figure 2: Country Publications 2006 - 2021-In Original Spanish Language.*

Note: The 15 most relevant countries are presented in publications from a list of 48. Source: Scopus database (2021)

To examine the scope and provenance of research, we focus on publications by institutional affiliation. The findings are summarized in Figure 3, which contrasts the number of publications on educational

quality management and accreditation systems in higher education institutions. King Saud University (Saudi Arabia) has three publications, followed by the Juan de Velasco Technological Institute

(Ecuador), Aegean University (Greece), University of Kassel (Germany), Fontys University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), University of Aveiro (Portugal), University of Havana (Cuba), Bucarets

University of Economic Studies (Romania), with two publications respectively; compared to other institutions that have only submitted one publication.

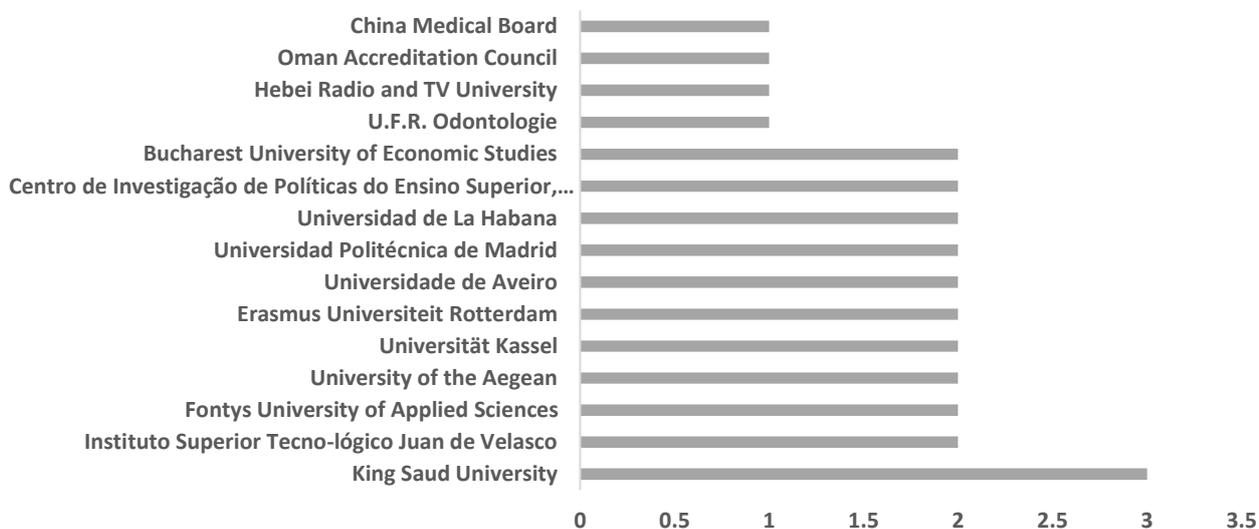


Figure 3: Publications by Institutional Affiliation of the Authors 2006 - 2021-In Original Spanish Language.

Note: 15 affiliation institutions of the most relevant authors are shown in publications from a list of 168. Source: Scopus database (2021)

The publication of scientific documents allows the results of research to be presented to contribute to the generation of knowledge, as well as contributing to other researchers advancing in a specific field of research. In the search carried out, it can be seen that 62.4%, which is equivalent to 63 publications,

correspond to articles, compared to 21.8%, which make a total of 22 session papers and 7.9% that correspond to eight review publications; in a smaller proportion are book, editorial and note chapters, with one publication respectively.

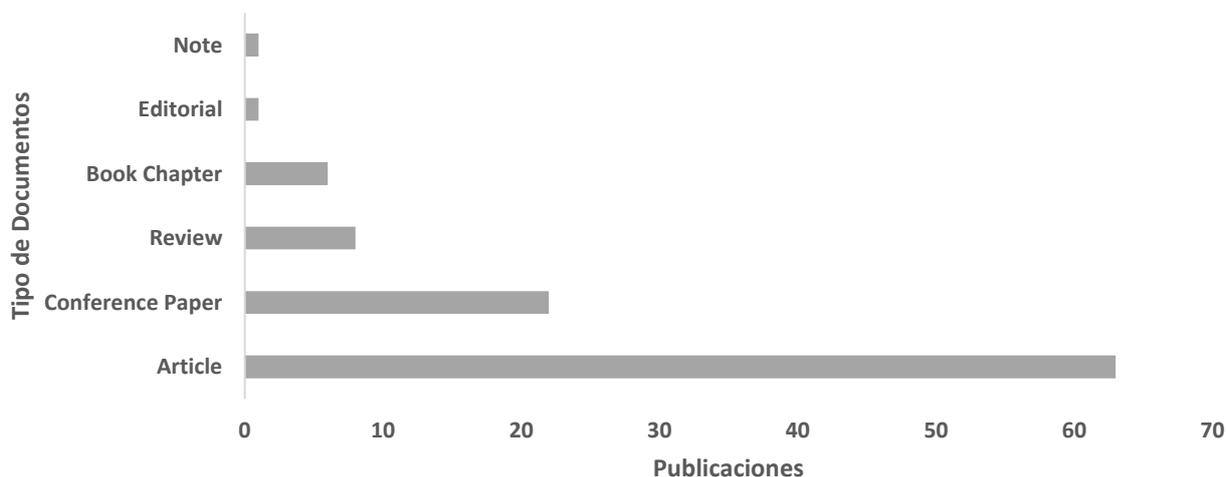


Figure 4: Publications by Document Type 1992 - 2021-In Original Spanish Language.

Note: Six types of scientific documents are presented, with the prevailing articles with 63 publications. Source: Scopus database (2021)

From the literature search, it can be seen that the area of knowledge that has the most publications is the social sciences, with 36.3%, which is equivalent to

58 publications; compared to the area of engineering with 18 publications that make 11.3%; followed by the areas of business, management and accounting,

which add up to sixteen publications, as well as computer science, which is equivalent to 10%. It is concluded that it is from the social sciences that the

behavior of the members of a society, the evolution over time and the changes that occur in space are known.

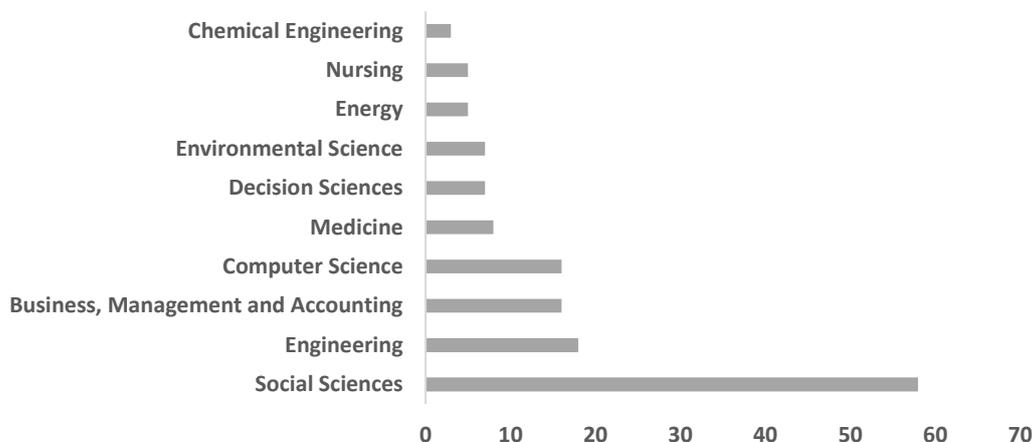
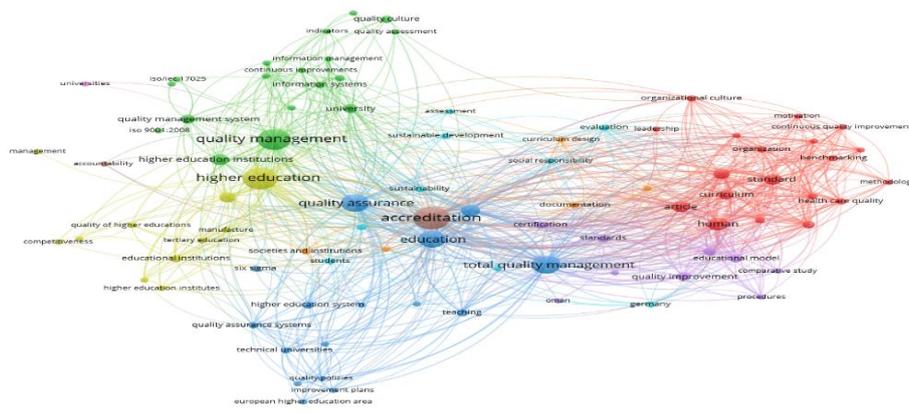


Figure 5: Publications by Area of Knowledge 2006 – 2021.

Note: The ten most relevant areas in publications are presented in a list of 22 areas of knowledge. Source: Scopus database (2021)

Education is today a topic of interest for research, studies are being carried out with a view to understanding the conceptualization itself, as well as the evaluation and measurement of quality based on the verification of the basic quality conditions that ensure institutional functioning and optimally train professionals to face the challenges that society demands. Carrying out the conceptual theoretical approach to educational quality, it has been possible to evidence a certain relationship of the topic in question with categories and subcategories that are part of the scientific research that has been analyzed

for the particular study. Topics such as organization and management, educational models, quality improvement, comparative evaluation, sustainable development, total quality management, standard, quality assurance, among others, stand out. The articles reviewed mostly correspond to researchers from the United States, followed by Germany and Saudi Arabia, it is important to note that Latin America appears with the Juan Velasco Technological Institute (Ecuador), as well as the presence of Indonesia, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom, among others.



VOSviewer

Figure 6: Semantic Map on the Study of Accreditation and Educational Quality in Higher Education Institutions.

Note: The relationships between the most relevant words that respond to the topic of study are presented. Source: Scopus database processed with free software VOSViewer

Visualization is a task of the communicative process where abstract data and complex phenomena



quality educational service, with qualified teachers, optimal infrastructure, efficient institutional and academic management in which research is privileged and that has sufficient financial resources to be able to implement institutional plans. Some universities, such as the one in the Philippines, consider reducing the student-to-faculty ratio to improve performance and performance (Bautista et al., 2019).

Accreditation processes must be aligned with the changes and eventualities that arise; the Covid-19 pandemic has led to sudden changes in the educational process, going from classroom work to online learning process, then, neither teachers nor evaluators had time to adapt didactic materials, or documents for accreditation. (Abdelhadi, 2020), postponing verification actions and creating a dilemma among the members involved in the certification, since no actions have been planned to be taken into account for an online verification, both of environments (infrastructure), as well as of the evidence of the academic processes.

All over the world, these processes have been stopped, there is no accreditation model for any quality management and continuous improvement system that has been prepared for it nor can it be evaluated at this juncture; But it cannot be denied that there are universities that have developed digital skills, that have adapted to changes and that have responded correctly to the current crisis. This is achieved when the format is changed From the accreditation audit of the degree to the online audit in such cases allow the agencies not to violate the approved schedule(Shaposhnikov, 2020) Quality assessment, ensuring achievement of established standards, and review cannot be stopped due to the pandemic, programs must take into account planning and implementing virtual visits(Cobourne & Shellenbarger, 2021).

Another consideration that must be taken into account is that as knowledge evolves, skills and attitudes adapt to its demands, so today the use of ICTs is a necessity and they are included in academic processes and in the training of the professional itself, the development of computational skills is required to successfully face the challenges that society imposes. These competency-based changes will require the restructuring of assessment systems. High-quality assessment programs are needed to fulfill the professions' education contract with society.

Academic excellence is one of the most important and controversial elements in contemporary higher education; since its determination is closely linked to

the processes of curricular evaluation and academic accreditation of universities (Salas, 2000).

In the face of the accreditation process, the article "Accreditation of teacher education in Turkey: the creation of a culture of quality" discusses the introduction of accreditation criteria and the way in which they were introduced. Educators largely embraced national standards and accreditation, but desired flexible means of implementation.(Grossman et al., 2010). The university administration must adhere to quality policies, including the set of processes (quality planning, quality assurance, and quality control) and the active participation of all faculty, administrative, and student staff. (Samir Abdel-Haq, 2020). To understand, assess, and improve the quality of higher education, it is critical to explore and examine how those implementing accreditation perceive the accreditation process and whether it has any association with their motivation and participation (Abdul & Alaskar, 2018).

In 1978, the University of Phoenix was one of the first for-profit universities to receive accreditation, marking a turning point, becoming an example of how innovation in American higher education can happen quickly and with relatively little controversy (Bañuelos, 2021). There is a positive linear relationship between the years of institutional accreditation and the number of doctors, the number of publications and the number of projects, there is support to indicate that scientific productivity is important for institutional accreditation (Barra, 2019). The university is a space that brings together researchers, students and teachers, all of whom must participate and actively promote intellectual-scientific development in order to achieve accreditation. HEIs They have accreditation as an institutional alternative that allows them to be at the forefront and seeks to differentiate one institution from another within a dynamic and flexible global environment (Barra, 2019).

Most smaller countries in Europe, South America, and the Pacific only have access to general undergraduate accreditation, and many countries in Africa do not have accreditation available (Bedoll et al., 2020), in Denmark and the European Union, they have been addressing accreditation in higher education institutions since 2014, focused on quality assurance, they have quality systems; however, system-level accreditations are questionable and insufficient because, in view of the country's general public interest, they have taken the focus away from important general social and academic aspects of educational quality (Bendixen & Jacobsen, 2020), a situation that is not convenient because universities must project themselves to the community and

comply with social responsibility by delivering suitable professionals who feel that the transformation of the world is in their hands. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can play an important role in ensuring and maintaining legitimacy in the post-accreditation phase (Chedrawi *et al.*, 2019). When we look at how quality assurance works in practice, we naturally go into and influence the quality of education itself, but an institutional accreditation is about quality assurance, not about quality itself (Danish Accreditation Council, 2017), quality in education is the concept of how an educational program meets the requirements, while quality assurance refers to how an accrediting agency monitors, documents, and evaluates this quality (Harvey, 2006).

The accreditation process as a whole has improved academic quality by raising the standards of teacher productivity, as well as boosting internationalization. However, after a decade, the accreditation system seems misaligned with new improvement efforts (Celis & Véliz, 2020; Well, 2008). The issue of quality in the research reviewed crosses various paradigms, among them is achieving proposed goals, adhering to a normative process, complying with international standards, achieving certifications, promoting higher education focused on the pedagogical task, improving methodologies and having prepared teachers, introducing digital technologies to close communication gaps, influencing research, as a way of generating knowledge of their reality, among others. Whatever the option, the search for quality is still under construction and is a current issue. The culture of quality thus becomes a process to be built between all levels of HEIs.

Some of the research reviewed presents certain approaches ranging from the evidence-based approach that addresses the limits found in the literature in relation to university accreditation and quality assurance (Andreani *et al.*, 2019), the interpretativist approach, in which it aims to give importance to the context, function and meaning of each human act, valuing the reality, ideas, feelings and motivations of its actors (Ortiz-Herrera, Jorge; Cadena-Vela, Susana; Gualli Tania; García Serrano; Padilla Verdugo, 2020); while in other research it is noted the lack of accreditation approach to the academic content of the programmes is so that the

Danish Accreditation Institution has had the opportunity to include the issue of content and level of education and the topic of relevance more substantially (Bendixen & Jacobsen, 2020). The qualitative research privileges most of the articles reviewed, based on the interest of the study to directly collect information from university actors, their beliefs, their vision of the world and their culture, the methodology chosen allows these conceptions not to be segmented, but understood in a holistic way.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

1. Research on accreditation and/or licensing is not numerous, it has increased since 2010; interrupted in 2020 by the pandemic, this admits virtuality in the processes of institutional external evaluation by accrediting institutions.
2. The educational quality management systems that were implemented in the universities that are part of the study have allowed the achievement of institutional objectives focused on the quality improvement policy; however, in some universities, as is the case in Ukraine, these management systems cannot be evidenced due to the maturity of the accreditation systems and incentive schemes.
3. The lack of quality of training processes, and the lack of coherence with the labor market, ends up being the way in which governments have the option of increasing external regulation.
4. Good management is fundamentally in the hands of the authorities; however, the participation of the entire educational community is also necessary to promote what is called a "culture of quality".
5. The quality management system does not in itself constitute the exercise of quality for higher education, but it is the tool that allows actors to focus with quality in the practice of their daily functions and thus create a culture of quality that allows the university to achieve high standards of compliance in its substantive functions.
6. Having a system of evaluation indicators in various dimensions and that responds to the context of the universities becomes a dynamic proposal, since it requires the participation of the sectors involved.

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