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Indicators of quality in Higher Education – Literature review

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Abstract: The educational indicators, like the rest of the social indicators, have experienced great diffusion in recent years. For this reason, education indicators are increasingly being talked about, in very different contexts and referring to very different realities. Despite the many drawbacks that present, quantitative indicators are still in the process of improvement and even creation, the truth is that they facilitate the analysis of education, although their values do not explain the causal relationships or allow conclusions to be drawn univocal. Although in the different editions (OECD, 2008) some concrete indicators have been varying, the general structure is maintained around four groups: context, resources, process, and results. Evaluating the number of students who complete the studies initiated serves not only to know the failure or academic success of a certain group of young people and, therefore, of a part of society, but also is a good way to measure the "efficiency" of the educational system. The articulation between the education system and the world of work is one of the priority objectives of economic development policies. The finding that in most countries the qualification of workers does not correspond to that required by employers, converts these educational indicators - which evaluate the effectiveness of education in the training of workers - into indispensable for educational and labor planning. Effectiveness of education can be increased by: eliminating discrepancies between the competences acquired by graduates of higher education and the demand of the labor market and industry; lowering the disparity between the number of students enrolled in scientific careers and in the humanities, as well as the proliferation of private service providers.

Keywords: Indicators, quality indicators, higher education, efficiency of education, competencies

Indicators of Quality in Higher Education

The educational indicators, like the rest of the social indicators, have experienced great diffusion in recent years. Several causes have made this possible (Olivera Poll, A., 1997: 695). They include the process of globalization that favors spatial comparisons on levels of well-being and that includes among its parameters measuring educational indicators. Secondly, the concern of international and national organizations to create adequate statistical systems to evaluate the educational levels of the population. Finally, the growing demand for manageable synthetic indicators, not only by social scientists, but also by those responsible for educational institutions - precisely this political use has led some authors to consider them instruments in service of a technocratic consideration of education and not very useful for teaching practice.

For this reason, education indicators are increasingly being talked about, in very different contexts and referring to very different realities. These procedures provide relevant information about some significant aspect of the educational situation. Most are quantitative; hence, they have received numerous criticisms arising from those who believe they are inadequate to synthesize a qualitative reality in a numerical data.

Despite the many drawbacks that present, quantitative indicators are still in the process of improvement and even creation, the truth is that they facilitate the analysis of education, although their values do not explain the causal relationships or allow conclusions to be drawn univocal. Their contribution consists of offering elements of judgment to interpret said reality: they provide relevant information about educational phenomena, they allow detecting problems, and they provide elements for their interpretation and data to evaluate the educational systems. One should not magnify their usefulness or condemn them but use them as instruments that facilitate the analysis of complex educational phenomena and their planning (Olivera, A. 1997). Similarly, the researcher interested in social welfare and the educational structure of the population, the levels of schooling, the relationships between education and labor market, educational spatial inequalities, student performance, equipment, planning, etc., are of maximum utility.

The need to define and measure the issues related to development, living standards and social and economic conditions led to the emergence, since the 1970s, of various social indicator programs developed by international organizations. Among its relevant thematic areas to measure social welfare, the topics related to education and schooling of the population have been present since the first trials. The Organization of the United Nations since 1976 has overseen harmonizing the different international programs, with the purpose of creating a flexible system of social indicators capable of adapting to the different degrees of development of the countries or regions. In 1989, it published a Manual on the use of such indicators that includes a list of thirteen thematic areas.

However, it has the disadvantage of not specifying the types of indicators used in each case. Among the programs of international social indicators, will analyze in more detail the one elaborated by the OECD, not only because it is the most widely used in most countries, but also because it has a specific indicator system related to the education problem in almost all countries.

In 1987, the Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), in cooperation with the Education Indicators and Statistics Unit of the OECD, developed an international system of indicators of the educational situation. The project, known as the INES Project (International Indicators of Systems), was organized into five working groups, four networks and a technical group.

The technical group oversaw perfecting the traditional statistical indicators such as schooling, education expenses, resources, etc.

- Network A - indicators on educational outcomes.
- Network B - education and employment.

- Network C school processes; and
- Network D - attitudes and expectations regarding education.

Although in the different editions (OECD, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996 and 1997) some concrete indicators have been varying, the general structure is maintained around four groups: context, resources, process, and results.

Context indicators serve to characterize the demographic, socioeconomic and cultural conditions in which education is developed. The first is the general level of education of the population that is related to the skills and competence of the workforce, with the creation of jobs and with the economic and social development of the countries.

Resource indicators evaluate material and human resources. On the one hand, the economic investments and infrastructure expenses and, on the other hand, the number of students by levels (schooling) and lecturer training, remuneration, characteristics, etc.

The process indicators are the most recent and report on the organization and functioning of the centers, educational practice, and school climate. They are more related to qualitative than quantitative aspects, which is why they are the most difficult to use.

The results indicators show the achievements of the educational system through the success of the students' school through the evaluation tests, certificates, and degrees they obtain and their insertion in the labor market. Despite the huge volume of existing indicators, (fifty are already available), those related to educational facilities are lacking, particularly those that deal with the educational offer, its accessibility, location, etc.

The analysis of the teaching staff is of great interest to represent an essential element in the evaluation of educational quality. Undoubtedly the lecturer is one of the most important pieces of the educational process. The indicators that can be included in this section are of different nature, from those that relate the lecturer variable with the students to those who try to know the training or its remuneration. These include the following: number of teachers per 100 schoolchildren, lecturer / student ratio, number of teachers per educational level, number of schoolchildren of different educational levels per lecturer, etc.

Educational indicators of the OECD (3rd Edition)	
CONTEXT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demographic - General level of education of the population; level by sexes; young people and the whole population. ● Economic and social - Activity rate and level of training; unemployment of young people and adults; national per capita income ● Opinions and hopes - Subjects; qualities and aptitudes; public trust in the school; educational responsibilities of this; respect for teachers; priorities in the practice of the school; decision making at the school level.
RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education expenses - Expenses in relation to GDP; expenses of public and private institutions; expenses for students; allocation by level; operating and capital expenses; Educational R & D expenses. ● Human Resources - Faculty - Staff employed; lecturer / teaching staff ratio; teaching time; training, remuneration and characteristics of the teaching staff R + D personnel. ● Participation in education - Schooling in formal education; preschool education; participation in secondary education; transition from secondary to higher education; access and participation in higher education; and continuous training.
PROCESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teaching time - Teaching time by subject and teaching hours. ● School processes - Distribution of students by groups in the classes

RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At the student level - Progress and frequency of reading ● At the level of the education system - Graduation in second cycle secondary education; university graduation; University degrees; staff in science and engineering. ● At the labor market level - Unemployment and level of education; training and salaries; training of workers and employment situation for those who complete their training.
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Table 1: Educational indicators of the OECD (3rd Edition)

Educational Performance

Evaluating the number of students who complete the studies initiated serves not only to know the failure or academic success of a certain group of young people and, therefore, of a part of society, but also is a good way to measure the "efficiency" of the educational system. In general, it is determined by establishing minimum performance - in the field, the course or level concerned - considered being required for academic or professional reasons. The procedures are varied and some of them, however, very ambiguous. The most frequently used are gross rates of repeaters, index of positive final evaluations, rate of school delay and dropout rate by promotions. All can be obtained by age, sex, and ownership of centers (public, private or arranged).

The gross rate of repeaters is obtained by relating the number of repetitive students of each course with the total enrollment of that same course. It is useful in post-compulsory education and, in compulsory education, only in those courses that are the end of the cycle, and as a result, students do not promote the following course automatically. It is conditioned by the social extraction of the students and the economic characteristics of the area; hence it is not significant. The index of positive final evaluations is a good indicator to measure the effectiveness of the education system. It is a ratio that relate the group of students that has obtained a positive score with all the students evaluated. It can be calculated by subject or by complete courses. Despite its undoubted usefulness, it is an indicator that is influenced by the evaluation criteria - which are not always the same - used by the teachers or the evaluation committees of the centers.

The rate of school delay is the proportion, with respect to the total number of students enrolled, of those who study older than the theoretical level corresponding to it. This indicator is conditioned by many variables such as the improvement of the standard of living, the difficulty in finding work or the higher training requirements. In addition, the fact that a school delay rate is low does not necessarily indicate a better educational situation, but perhaps the abandonment of studies before reaching the theoretical age of finishing them. Both the gross rates of repeaters and the index of positive final evaluations and the school delay can be obtained by age, sex, and ownership of centers (public, private or subsidized).

The school dropout rate by promotions consists in evaluating the "school mortality" the loss of cash for promotions in a certain cycle or educational level. It is a method of longitudinal analysis and consists of monitoring a student promotion by calculating the percentage of those who drop out each year. The purpose is to find out how many of those who started these studies reach the corresponding credential. The result is very interesting but, often, it cannot be determined to what extent the abandonment is definitive, temporary or it is simply a change of teaching.

Relationship between Education and the Labor Market

The articulation between the education system and the world of work is one of the priority objectives of economic development policies. The finding that in most countries the qualification of workers does not correspond to that required by employers, converts these educational indicators - which evaluate the effectiveness of education in the training of workers - into indispensable for educational and labor planning. The most used are unemployment rates by level of training, unemployment rates of those who complete their training, the wage index by level of training, and the gender wage relationship.

The unemployment rate by level of training is a proportion that relates the unemployed in each of the educational levels with all the graduates in that level. Since belonging to a specific cohort and sex are decisive when obtaining a job, specific rates must also be taken considering these variables. They are useful to know the labor success of the training levels. Unemployment rate at the end of their training. This group is defined as the group of students who have successfully completed a certain level of education - not university - and do not continue their studies; that is, at the beginning of the reference school year (1 year or more after leaving school) they are not enrolled in full-time education or training (OECD). This indicator tries to verify the effectiveness of training in reducing youth unemployment. It is usually compared with the unemployment rate of the active population and with that of the same age group. It is also of great interest to evaluate the degree of adequacy of educational levels with the labor market.

The wage index by level of training relates the average annual salary of the population that has levels of compulsory and university education, with that of the population that has secondary education in the second cycle. The base of the index can be 1, to 100. If the result is higher than the base, it indicates that the salary at that training level is higher. It is usually found separated by sexes. This index allows to verify the individual social returns of the educational investment and evidences the higher income of the group with high levels of training. The gender wage relationship is a quotient that relates the average annual salary of women with that of men by level of education. It is useful to check the maintenance of female employment discrimination. In the interpretation of this indicator, together with social factors, the greater incidence of part-time work of the female population, which reduces the income obtained in this group, should be considered.

Guarantee the quality of higher education

Over the last two decades, ensuring the quality of higher education has gained a lot worldwide. The main driving forces of this evolution include: increasing public interest in obtaining better results in higher education institutions, greater access and a clear call by stakeholders to increase efficiency and accountability, the need to train graduates with a higher level to manage the national economy, the adequate use of public resources destined for higher education and the increase in the number of cross-border devices. These are the challenges: eliminate discrepancies between the competences acquired by graduates of higher education and the demand of the labor market and industry; the disparity between the number of students enrolled in scientific careers and in the humanities, as well as the proliferation of private service providers.

This is the reason why UNESCO and the Member States reinforce capacities in quality assurance of higher education, particularly in developing countries, which contributes to the establishment and strengthening of adequate systems for guaranteeing higher education quality and regulatory frameworks that include all interested parties. This call for action is followed by an unprecedented increase in the rate of enrollment in higher education worldwide. At the international level, this rate was 97 million in 2000, 155.2 million in 2007 and 207.5 million in 2014, of which 10 percent corresponds to online, distance and flexible learning enrollments. In this way, it is estimated that the total of students will reach the figure of 412 196 million in 2030 and that of 522 526 million in 2035.

Higher education is essential for socioeconomic development, which in turn is essential for competitiveness in an increasingly global world. The principles of the 2030 Agenda for Education: "Towards an inclusive, equitable and quality education and lifelong learning for all" underline the importance of the application of solid quality assurance systems, to overcome these challenges. To this end, UNESCO supports national systems responsible for quality assurance and collaborates with policy makers, education sector specialists, quality assurance professionals and other regulatory bodies, as well as with interested parties.

During the past two decades various strategies have been developed, aimed at achieving a higher quality education -institutional strengthening of Higher Education Institutions (IES), overcoming the teaching staff, strengthening the postgraduate course, assuring the quality of the Educational programs-. One of these is especially important -

the promotion of flexible educational approaches centered on learning - since it has taken up a need that has been constantly detected and has gained visibility in educational policies.

Total Quality Management

A very important dimension in the concept of quality refers to the teaching-learning processes. In this sense, the global concept of institutional quality must be visible in the classroom processes and this is where quality makes sense. Quality, as the property of a complex teaching and learning process, should not refer only to goals or institutional budgets; it must necessarily be approached from an analytical-formative point of view. Rue et al., (2007) state that a point of view proper to formative evaluation, allows to understand - and eventually correct - certain procedural aspects or certain components of the formative relationship, which may be considered as insufficient, or as dissatisfied, with respect to currently accepted learning approaches. The same author points out that evaluation becomes an indicator of quality, linked, of course, to pedagogical practices in which the lecturer systematically verifies where the student is at each moment in the development of their work; everything that gives the lecturer a direct control over the quality of your achievements, in short, everything that is provided to a student so that, during their learning, they know, on their own, where to review and how far to go (p .6).

The quality of higher education is an element of institutional recognition that has accreditation as reference, this is understood as "the constancy issued by the community, through a competent body, of the high levels of quality offered by either an institution or a program "(Arango, 2007, p.2).

Accreditation also refers, according to the CNA (2010), to the act by which the state adopts and publishes the recognition that academic peers make of the verification carried out by an institution on the quality of its academic programs, its organization, functioning and fulfillment of its social function. The accreditation then becomes an instance where the services offered by the institution to its students or clients are monitored in a certain sense. This quality business concept provides a structure for the control of strategy, management and institutional evaluation and contributes to improving work practices, products, and services, to meet the needs of its users (Rosario & Espinosa, 2008). Another conception of quality in business terms is that which is related, to a greater or lesser extent, with knowledge related to employability (Almada, Rivas & Troquet, 2007), this concept in turn linked to the new institutional order of labor competencies of which is spoken in the Colombian educational systems.

Financing as an Indicator of Quality Teaching

Financing is a central issue in the application of quality to higher education. Different governments and international organizations have promoted the transformation of the old "blind trust" between states and universities when it comes to the delivery of resources (World Bank, 1995b, IDB, 1997, OECD, 2009). The World Bank and the IDB have been promoting these changes since the 1990s. Your financial support in this area is subject to the development of performance indicators as a guide for monetary incentives and penalties (World Bank, 1995, BID, 1997). Although the financing mechanisms are diverse - basal, oriented to research or to specific projects - one that has a radical importance is the contribution per student in countries with a tariff education (Rodriguez Espinar, 2013).

The rationalization of reference tariffs in terms of quality (determined by considering indicators on teachers, academic practices or even employability) is an emerging issue of concern in the United Kingdom, and the United States. Quality is projected as the notion that allows, rationally and legitimately, to establish price differences between better or worse programs (Sotomayor & Gysling, 2011). Sometimes this objective is pursued directly in the regulation of tariffs, or indirectly through the amounts delivered via scholarships or loans. The point is that the idea of teaching quality is fundamental for a rational calculation of its cost.

The described processes of internal and external transformation of higher education, linked to the application of quality, are obviously related. More precisely, internal processes are, in countless opportunities, a condition of

possibility for external ones, and as the latter expand or strengthen, the former tend to be promoted (Verger, 2010). The primacy of exogenous or endogenous trends in the deployment of quality applied to higher education varies, as will be seen below, by virtue of national experiences and historical contexts (Virno, 2004). As a global process, in the end, the implementation of quality in higher education goes through it from end to end and redraws its contours.

Productive Work as an Indicator of Quality Teaching

The rationalization and objectification of the product of academic work exists and is closely related to the tendencies described above. Determining productive work and optimizing it has no other meaning than increasing productivity, and therefore, its success becomes visible only in the objectification of the product. If work is a rational action according to ends, the criterion of its success or failure is the objectification of the end. There are two basic ways in which we can observe it: as objectification and rationalization of aggregate human capacities in the educational process, and as linguistic products to which some type of license, proprietary right or objective recognition can be applied. In the first category, teaching is evident, and in the second, research, patent registration, certification, sale of programs, and provision of services.

The exercise of objectification is eminently qualitative, since it demands a normative consensus and a cognitive operation in which it is considered as something, even by civil law. The product of academic work must leave the metaphysical terrain and be located as an experience able thing (transiting from the noumenon to the phenomenon). Most of the time, although not always, rationalization implies its digitization, or at least gradation, as a differential expression of substance value. However, the central issue does not lie in the numbers. Insofar as the paradigm is based on epistemological assumptions associated with the theory of human capital, this value is attributed to the object and is not conceptualized as labor-value, but as value in a neoclassical sense. This reasoning can be explicit, in the use of value-added models, or implicit. In the latter case, rationalization is not associated with value as an economic substance, but it is assumed as the criterion of success or failure of productive labor accrued ex-ante, understood in turn, the latter, as rational action according to ends. This criterion can be qualitative or quantitative. Generically, it is described as achievement, and productive work as performance. As we saw in the first chapter, there is a copious literature on achievement and performance in education, organically linked to the paradigm of quality. Its objectification and exact measurement encourage extraordinary pressure for the development of psychometrics and standardization. In logical terms,

This bridge allows the abstraction of concrete work to work-value, in the same way that the calorie count can determine the success or failure of a job aimed at decreasing the fat content of a food. In both situations, the objectification of the product is a necessary condition for its communication with the rest of society in the value-work form, since it allows the delimitation of what will appear in the market as merchandise form. The paradigm of quality is also present on both occasions. Neither the standardization of skills nor the indexing of journals constitutes by themselves the objectification of labor-value, but only their technical condition of possibility. Being educative measures, they rationalize the value of use, but they are not part of it, just as calories are nutritional units of measure, and not food. None is responsible for its deployment in the process of transformation, even when this process, as a concentration of initiative and social energy, can even help to develop them. To think that alienation resides in technical instruments would be as fetishistic as to believe that value resides in commodities.

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