

Initial evaluation exercise of a Higher Education Unit: In response to the guidelines of a National System

Ejercicio de evaluación inicial de una dependencia de Educación Superior: En respuesta a los lineamientos de un Sistema Nacional

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Abstract

This article addresses the importance of assessment and accreditation in higher education, highlighting its crucial role in ensuring quality and relevance. It focuses on the methodology used in a specific analysis of a Higher Education Unit in Northern Mexico, to evaluate academic programs through the requirements posed by the National System of Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education in terms of social responsibility, equity, inclusion, excellence, social innovation, avant-garde and interculturality. The results reveal strengths and areas for improvement, especially in aspects such as social equity and inclusion. The analysis concludes by highlighting the need for evaluation and accreditation to not be mere bureaucratic requirements, but rather dynamic processes that drive the constant evolution of higher education at a global level.

Evaluation, Accreditation, Criteria, Education, Improvement, Academic Programs

Resumen

Este artículo aborda la importancia de la evaluación y acreditación en la educación superior, destacando su papel crucial en la garantía de calidad y relevancia. Se enfoca en la metodología utilizada en un análisis específico de una Dependencia de Educación Superior del Norte de México, para evaluar programas académicos a través de los requerimientos que plantea el Sistema Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior en términos de responsabilidad social, equidad, inclusión, excelencia, innovación social, vanguardia e interculturalidad. Los resultados revelan puntos fuertes y áreas de mejora, especialmente en aspectos como equidad social e inclusión. El análisis concluye destacando la necesidad de que la evaluación y acreditación no sean meros requisitos burocráticos, sino procesos dinámicos que impulsen la evolución constante de la educación superior a nivel global.

Evaluación, Acreditación, Criterios, Educación, Mejora, Programas Académicos

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Introduction

Higher education, as a fundamental axis in the training of professionals and social progress, faces great challenges on the one hand to guarantee academic excellence in a demanding society that demands increasingly competent professionals who will have to face a globalised environment with educational programmes that must respond day by day to the needs of today's world, coupled with a strong educational demand. This article arises from the reflection of what the evaluation of higher education implies as a means of transformation and thus achieve continuous improvement, to enhance the construction of institutional environments that according to the General Framework of the System of Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education, (2022) prevail trust, shared visions, communities of practice and learning, recognition of good practices and innovation especially self-evaluation processes that are aimed at the transformation of the National System of Higher Education in Mexico. in a XXI century that demands innovation and relevance.

The purpose of this work arises from the guidelines established by the Mexican National System for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (SEAES), carrying out an initial self-evaluation exercise in a Higher Education Unit that can be used in the future as a guide to serve as an input to respond to these guidelines.

This exercise was carried out in a Higher Education Institution in the North of Mexico, called Universidad Autónoma De Nuevo León (UANL), applied within the Faculty of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering (FIME).

Background

Evaluation and accreditation in higher education have their historical roots in the need to establish quality standards in academic institutions. As Raza, D. F. (2019) points out, "Evaluation and accreditation processes originated in the early 20th century in the United States and Europe, with the purpose of ensuring the quality and relevance of higher education". These processes have developed and diversified over time to address the changing demands and expectations of society.

The emergence of evaluation and accreditation in higher education was strongly influenced by a number of issues and challenges facing academic institutions. According to Raza, (2019), "The expansion of higher education, diversification of programmes, lack of transparency and variability in the quality of teaching were factors that led to the need for the establishment of assessment and accreditation systems". Concerns for equity and accountability also played a crucial role in promoting these processes.

Evaluation and accreditation in higher education play a key role in improving the quality of education. According to Suárez-Landazábal (2023), "Assessment and accreditation promote continuous improvement by providing valuable feedback for academic programme development and institutional decision-making. These processes are essential to ensure that institutions meet quality standards and adapt to the changing needs of students and society at large".

Evaluation is a process of comparing and benchmarking higher education achievements, outcomes, aspirations, objectives and goals. General Framework of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation System, (2023).

According to the General Law on Higher Education (LGES), Article 10, section XII considers higher education evaluation as an "integral, systematic and participative process for its continuous improvement, based, among other aspects, on diagnostic, programme and institutional management evaluations".

According to Torres, (2023). The main objective of evaluation is to encourage and promote the continuous improvement of the overall quality of an academic institution.

Methodology

The methodology used in this analysis is descriptive, focusing on the specific case of FIME. The implementation of the criteria table is the central focus. This approach allows for a detailed evaluation of analytical programmes in terms of criteria provided by the SEAES.

In addition, quantitative and qualitative techniques are included to capture the complexity of curriculum evaluation and accreditation. This multi-modal approach ensures a holistic understanding of the results and allows for a deeper interpretation of the observed trends.

Development

FIME, aware of contemporary challenges, led the initiative of curriculum innovation. Its SEAES criteria grid is not simply an evaluation tool; it is a tangible manifestation of the institution's commitment to social responsibility, equity, innovation and cutting edge. This pioneering approach seeks not only to meet external standards, but also to forge a path towards higher education that transcends conventional expectations.

Assessment is not an end in itself; it is a means for continuous improvement. The promulgation of SEAES standards seeks not just superficial compliance, but a deep commitment to educational transformation. Figure 1, in pointing to the need for analytical programmes in all universities, not only advocates administrative uniformity, but a collective commitment to educational excellence.



Figure 1 Necessary Requirements for Quality Assessment. General Framework of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation System

Continuous improvement and curriculum evaluation are closely intertwined in education. The dynamics of continuous improvement are reflected in the constant evaluation of curricular approaches and practices. This process involves making repeated decisions, comparing results with expectations and goals, and adapting strategies to align with quality standards and the changing needs of society.

Closely related to the above, Curriculum Evaluation refers to the linking components in a system; it aims at adapting and being flexible in the areas and types of evaluation related to continuous improvement, clarifying the objects and referents of evaluation in terms that are correct and interrelated with the Transversal Criteria indicated to us by the SEAES.

For this reason, the present work points out the need to respond to the aforementioned requirements, visualising a second stage in the future within the Curricular Evaluation, where the results obtained in this evaluation are reflected and compared.

The cycle of Integral Evaluation and Continuous Improvement, proposed by SEAES, ranging from self-evaluation to external and internal evaluations, co-evaluation, evaluation of state systems and sub-systems, and the re-signification of good practices, constitutes a dynamic and collaborative process that is fundamental in curriculum evaluation. According to Figure 2.

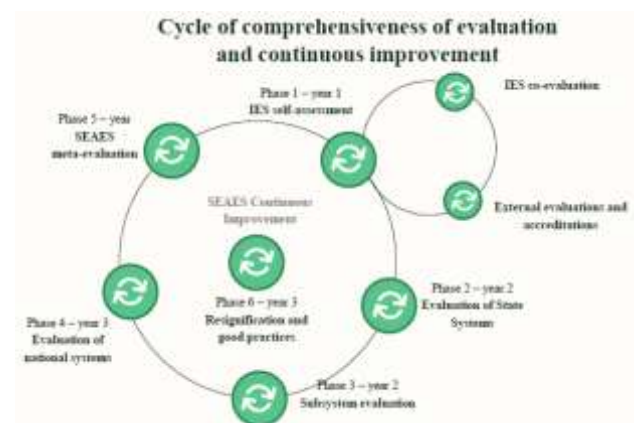


Figure 2 Cycle of comprehensiveness of evaluation and continuous improvement. General Framework of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation System

This holistic approach allows for a comprehensive view of educational practices, identifying areas of improvement and strengths. By integrating internal and external evaluations, as well as feedback from various levels, it creates a robust system that drives educational excellence and ensures the continued relevance of academic programmes to the changing challenges of the educational environment.

In congruence with the LGES, the National Policy for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (PNEAES) establishes seven criteria that are considered guiding and transversal, since they are intended to offer a vision of the transformation of the National System of Higher Education (SNES) and cover all areas of evaluation and continuous improvement. General Framework of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation System, (2023).

The following are the guiding criteria in the PNEAES:

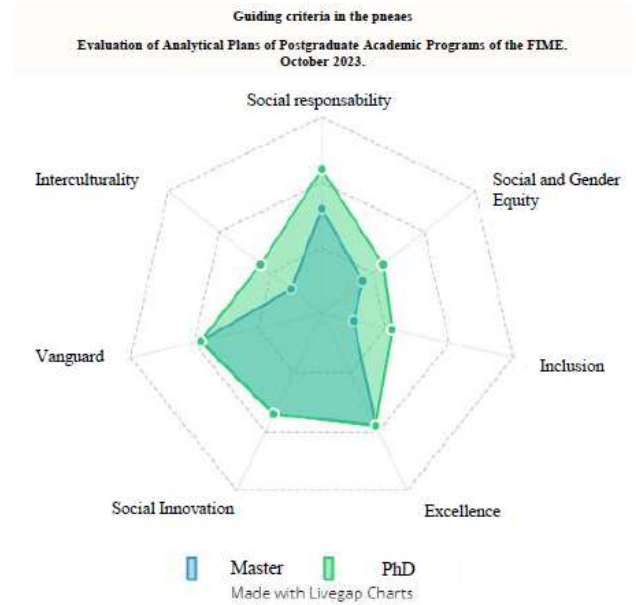
- Commitment to social responsibility.
- Social and gender equity.
- Inclusion.
- Excellence.
- Social innovation.
- Avant-garde.
- Interculturality.

Based on the criteria established by the PNEAES, a cross-data analysis of the Analytical Programmes (AP) was elaborated; by learning unit (LU) of the selection of six Postgraduate Educational Programmes offered at FIME (three Masters and three Doctorates).

As an initial step, a spreadsheet software (Excel) was used, in which the AUs were listed vertically and the PNEAES Guiding Criteria horizontally, from which the results described below were obtained.

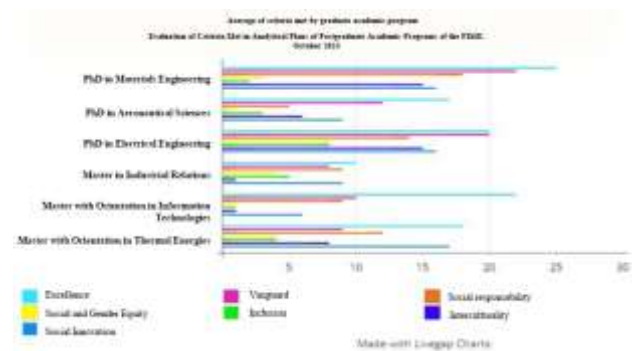
Results

The results obtained from the exercise indicate that the criteria of excellence and vanguard stand out in the curricular evaluation, while aspects such as social equity and inclusion present areas for improvement. The graphical representation (Graph 1) provides a clear visualisation of the strengths and areas to be strengthened in the academic programmes evaluated.



Graph 1 Evaluation of Analytical Plans of Postgraduate Academic Programs of the FIME. 2023
Own Elaboration

On the other hand, the results obtained in the application of the analysis are integrated, making the focal selection of the PNEAES Guiding Criteria. The average number of criteria fulfilled per postgraduate academic programme (Graph 2) offers a global vision of the situation at FIME, highlighting the need for specific focus on certain aspects.



Graph 2 Record of SEASE Criteria met by Postgraduate Academic Program at FIME. October 2023
Own Preparation

In the detailed analysis of the analytical programmes, a diverse and dynamic panorama is revealed. Excellence and avant-garde emerge as the standard, but social equity and inclusion demand more meticulous attention. Figure 1 and Figure 2 are not just visual representations; they are impressions of a process of institutional introspection that triggers essential dialogues on how FIME and other institutions can evolve to address the identified gaps.

As the programmes were reviewed, it became evident that not all had Analytical Programmes, underlining the imperative need for all universities to have these documents in place in order to execute effective quality assessments.

This analysis applied at FIME is a call for reflection at a global level, in a world where education is the foundation of progress, evaluation and accreditation should not be mere bureaucratic requirements, but dynamic processes that drive constant evolution.

The contribution of this analysis is not limited to the boundaries of one institution; it seeks to impact on the context of higher education, acting as an Orientation Guide for other Higher Education Institutions, who will address these requirements by challenging paradigms and fostering an integral educational revolution.

Recommendations

- Maintain a continuous review of academic curricula to adapt to changing demands.
- Comprehensively address aspects of social equity and inclusion, maintaining levels of occurrence in the criteria of interculturality, social responsibility, vanguard and excellence.
- Fully include SEAES criteria in evaluation processes.
- Promote ongoing conversations at institutional level based on the results to collectively reflect on identified areas for improvement.
- Ensure that all academic programmes have curricular analyses, which are fundamental for quality assessment.

Conclusions

In conclusion, curricular evaluation and accreditation are essential elements for ensuring quality education in higher education. The regularity of these processes is a fundamental pillar for adapting to the changing dynamics of society. The implementation of SEAES standards highlights the importance of commitments such as social responsibility, equity, innovation and vanguard in higher education, leading to a comprehensive and socially responsible training of professionals.

The contribution of this analysis lies not only in the evaluation of FIME, but also in its potential to inform and improve practices nationally and internationally. Curricular evaluation and accreditation are more than institutional protocols; they are the tools that shape the future of higher education. The regularity of these processes is not only necessary; it is the constant heartbeat that drives educational life.

The implementation of SEAES standards is not simply regulatory compliance; it is a commitment to excellence, equity and innovation in higher education.

This analysis does not simply seek to evaluate FIME; it seeks to catalyse a movement of reflection and improvement at a global level, which in the future encourages continuous improvement and, in a second stage, becomes an indispensable tool for the evaluation and satisfaction of the Criteria of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation System itself.

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