



Quality in higher education: the view of quality assurance managers in Chile

Judith Scharager Goldenberg

Escuela de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of a study about the views of quality managers, in Chilean universities, with regard to the meaning of quality in higher education. The article begins with a brief description of Chilean higher education system. It portrays the context of the last 30 years, with a growing number of universities and little state regulation. An increase in coverage, student population's heterogeneity and diversity of the educational offer and of the quality of the education provided are described. After the nineties, the Chilean state established control mechanisms and demands for accountability. Consequently, universities developed organisational changes within the non-academic staff, incorporating professionals to administer quality assurance. The study analyses the opinions of these professionals. Data were gathered in two stages; the evidence discussed in this article comes mainly from the second stage, in which 20 quality administrators were interviewed to explore their conceptions of quality in higher education. The most recurring distinctions identified are framed within a conceptual scope that varies between complying with the demands of the external environment and adjusting internally to institutional goals. There were no significant differences between the interviewees from different universities.

KEYWORDS

Quality; quality assurance; quality manager; higher education; accreditation

Introduction

The Chilean university system has gone through changes in both its structure and functions in the last few decades. During the military dictatorship at the beginning of the eighties and in the framework of the creation of a neoliberal economy, there were only eight universities in Chile. In that period, state investment in the system significantly decreased and universities had to find ways to generate their own funds by selling services and charging fees. A regulatory framework was established to make the diversification of the educational offer legal and private

CONTACT Judith Scharager Goldenberg ✉ jscharag@uc.cl 📍 Avenida Vicuña Mackenna 4860., zip code: 7511261 Escuela de Psicología

This study is part of a research carried out for a PhD thesis at the University of Leiden, called 'New Actors on an Old Scene: the Professionalization of Managing Academic Quality in Chile from 1990-2015' by Judith Scharager, author of this article