Introduction

In recent years, there has been a strong increase in the adoption of quality assurance systems in higher education. ‘Quality Assurance’ comprises a set of mechanisms, procedures, and processes intended to ensure a desired level of quality in accordance with the specific mission of each institution or a set of previously defined standards for study programs.

While it may be claimed that evaluation and accreditation of university quality is a mainstream practice in some countries like the USA, the situation differs in
various other areas of the world. European and Latin American countries, for instance, have been using this instrument for a relatively short number of years, while Asian countries embraced it only recently, in the late 1990s (Corengia 2010).

In Argentina, with the creation of the National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation (Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria, CONEAU) in 1995, a series of processes were set in motion for the evaluation of higher education institutions and for the accreditation of undergraduate programs considered by law to be in the public interest, and of a socially critical nature (Art. 43 of Higher Education Law No. 24,521/95 / Ley de Educación Superior, LES)¹, as well as for the accreditation of graduate programs. Quality Assurance comprises a set of policies defined by the Higher Education Law and entrusted specifically to the CONEAU, namely, accreditation of newly-created universities, institutional assessment, accreditation of public-interest undergraduate programs, and accreditation of graduate programs.

Today, twenty-one years after the creation of CONEAU, there have arisen a need to show research outcomes that would enable leaving aside estimates and presumptions, and proceeding towards empirical evidence of the actual impact that those quality assurance policies and processes have had. Thus, it is relevant to analyze the role played by the evaluation and accreditation agency in terms of the expansion and coordination of university offerings, as well as the analysis of certain aspects that determine the improvement of organisational functions in Argentine universities and the perception of stakeholders faced with this new evaluation phenomenon.

This chapter assesses the impact of the CONEAU at two levels. On the one hand, at a macro-systemic level, we analyse the influence of the accreditation agency on the creation of new private universities. In this case, data is based on the statistics published by the University Policy Secretariat (Secretaría de Política Universitaria, SPU) as well as the data available from university sources. On the other hand, at the micro-organisational level, four case studies present the impact of the process of institutional evaluation and accreditation of medical study programs on the functions of teaching, research, extension, and management of Argentina universities. In this review, case study data gathering and analysis comprised of two stages. In the first stage, documentary facts were analyzed (e.g., reports of external evaluations and resolutions of medical program accreditations). In the second stage, interviews were carried out with 48 institutional actors, mainly management staff, in order to understand how they perceived the impact of these policies on their institutions (Corengia 2010; 2015).

During the macro-systemic analysis of the expansion of the private university market, the formulation of organisational isomorphism made by Powell and DiMaggio (1991) was used. On the other hand, to address the impact of case studies at the micro-organisational level, two theoretical perspectives were combined: the ‘organisational analysis’ (Clark 1986) and the ‘new institutionalism’ (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In the former, an internalist perspective of change prevails. This
Few Pages are not available
References


International Higher Education, School of Education, Boston College.


