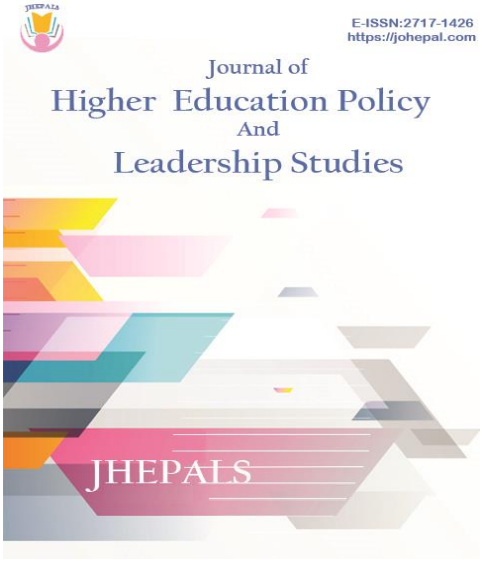
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Serving Two Masters: First and Second-Generation Quality Assurance Reforms in Latin America



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Abstract

The present study is an interpretation of the trajectories of quality assurance policies in higher education in Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Costa Rica. These trajectories are presented as cases of two instances of reform: one in the first generation and the other in the second generation, each stemming from different variants of the neoliberal economic-cultural program in Latin America that affected the role of the State and bureaucracies. The methodological strategy used in this article is a case study that includes a qualitative design for the production and analysis of data through a review of laws and relevant literature. Content analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data. The most significant results establish that both the first and the second-generation reforms use their own logics when promoting quality assurance in their respective countries in matters such as central state systems, in the case of the first generation, and public-private systems, in the case of the second. Likewise, the concentration of the bureaucratic functions of evaluation and accreditation are characteristic of the first generation, while decentralized bureaucracies are characteristic of the second.

Keywords: Quality Assurance Policies; Latin American; Higher Education; Neoliberalism in HE; Public Policies in Education

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Introduction

Quality policies and their role in higher education are directly related to the changes produced in the State's role during neoliberal reforms (Murphy, 2009). Although the policies developed to obtain quality in higher education rest on common premises, the evolution of national and regional systems has taken a different path (Travers, 2007; Van Vught, 1994). In the case of Latin America, the study of this evolution's various dynamics has favored observing the articulation of its trajectories with the premises (competition, innovation, growth, globalization) to the detriment of the trajectories themselves. This results in an interpretive problem of the evolution of quality policies in higher education in Latin America, where the reforms that were undertaken tend to be presented as part of a common and chained process that emerges as a result of unbridled growth dynamics (Bernasconi & Celis, 2017; Gerón-Piñón et al., 2021).

Schugurensky (1998) has argued that the most significant global trend during the 1990s has been the drastic restructuring of higher education. The generation of reforms in higher education at the end of the 20th century was fundamentally characterized by changes in financing models, demands for efficiency through the implementation of evaluation systems, and the pressure to create closer relationships with the productive sector. These changes focused on policies that concentrated on the general globalization process and were based on a meritocratic and utilitarian educational policy approach monitored by various policy models (Espinoza & González, 2015). In parallel, an evaluative policy agenda unfolded, whose purpose was to systematize the universities' performance levels based on the objectives that they were required to achieve. A strategic evaluation technology was developed to establish if the objectives had been effectively met, but it did not consider the inputs that the universities received (Neave, 1998).

In many Latin American countries, the transformations derived from this generation of reforms took place in the 1990s and lasted until the beginning of the 21st century (García Guadilla, 2003). Many studies that use the interpretative scheme when investigating neoliberal reforms in Latin America maintain that both the State and its regulatory apparatuses must first diminish to later incorporate new participatory regulations that reduce traditional bureaucracy (Duque, 2021). This conclusion has been extended to the study of higher education. Oszlak (1999) called these reforms first and second-generation reforms, and Hibou (2013) has characterized the process of bureaucratization in the neoliberal era as a globalization of bureaucracy. In the case of higher education in Latin America, the identification of two instances of reforms is pertinent when considering the quality reforms in higher education undertaken in countries such as Argentina and Colombia at the beginning of the 90s and Chile and Costa Rica at the beginning of the 21st century. However, it is necessary to ask: Did quality policies in higher education in Latin America have a first and second generation, and to what extent did they diminish the role of the State and bureaucracy?

In this sense, the present study will address the trajectories of quality policies in higher education in Latin America from the interpretation of two instances of reforms represented by Argentina and Colombia as part of the first framework of reforms and Chile and Costa Rica as part of the second framework of reforms. In each of them, a descriptive dimension of the process will be addressed, emphasizing the role of the State, the intermediate bodies

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(bureaucracy), and the use of information to assess its eventual decrease in higher education policies.

Theoretical background

Quality Policies and Higher Education in Latin America

There is scant research that presents a general interpretation of quality policies in higher education in Latin America, and there are even fewer studies that specifically address the relationship between universities and the State. It is possible to distinguish between studies that address (1) the process as a transition from direct State regulation to indirect State regulation and (2) the process of the erosion of social trust in universities to a hegemonic role in social activity.

In the studies on direct and indirect regulation, those inspired by state audit theory stand out (Malagón Plata et al., 2019; Bernasconi & Celis, 2017; Davila & Maillet, 2021; Gerón-Piñón et al., 2021; Lamarra, 2009; Perez-Uribe et al., 2020). Higher education reforms are generally studied in isolation (and almost always from the perspective of their implementation) without considering the broader pattern that articulates and contextualizes the instruments selected by public policy (Ferlie et al., 2008). However, much of this gap in the literature has been filled by Guy Neave (1998), who uses the Evaluative State to provide an interpretive framework to explain, in a comparative view, the scope and coordinated operation of the reforms associated with higher education. The Evaluative State is a response to the normative homogeneity through which the relationship between the State and the universities was traditionally defined. The Evaluative State combines different discourses that go in the same direction: One is European and political, the modernization of society, and the other is North American and economic, reducing the State through deregulation, replacing the State with the market (Neave, 1998).

The research that focused interpretively on the transition from an erosion of social trust in universities to a hegemonic role in social activity oscillates between those studies that critically model this new hegemonic role (Gazzola & Didriksson, 2008; Orellana Calderón, 2015) and those that attribute this new hegemonic role to a sophisticated instrument of intervention tools, including information as the most significant factor (Lemaitre, 2017, 2018; Rodríguez-Ponce et al., 2009). However, Lemaitre & Mena (2012) warn that the configuration of national instruments in Latin America is developed based on a limited set of alternatives.

The notion of quality assurance is broad and covers all the policies, procedures, and activities used as a means to validate and improve the performance of a university (Kinser & Lane, 2014). Quality assurance aims to establish trust in the higher education system but does not guarantee it since that would imply a specific guarantee for consumers if performance standards are not met. Currently, no country that has an assurance system has such a guarantee.

During the last three decades, the problem of the quality of higher education has become a critical aspect of sectoral policies on a global scale (Santiago et al., 2008). Assessment instruments, sanctions, and improvements in quality have gained prominence to the extent that funding and regulatory instruments add consequences to external assessments carried out at various levels of universities (Maassen & Stensaker, 2011).

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Economic rationality seems to be at the base of this agenda (Torres & Schuguresnsky, 2002), and its trajectory, although eventful, has tended to follow a common path. First, it spreads among industrialized nations (which, most of the time, have an established university culture), then it spreads to countries and regions in the industrialization process, with the support of multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, OECD, and UNESCO, although with different emphases (Espinoza, 2017).

The literature has long documented the conflicts and tensions that come with the installation and operation of new assessment instruments (Duque, 2021). This operation seems to have the potential to change the balance of power in the sector as well as frame the debate about the new assessments' usefulness and impact within national systems (Harvey & Knight, 1996). This helps to explain why the very idea of quality has been met with skepticism by academic communities (which are suspicious about the purpose of these evaluations and still question the legitimacy of their results in numerous national systems). Nonetheless, the underlying philosophy and recursive application of these instruments have allowed universities the ability to transform different organizational practices (Stensaker, 2007).

Neoliberalism in Higher Education and Reforms to the State in Latin America

Scott (2019) in his text on Trow, projected a linear trajectory in relation to the expansion of the national systems and claimed it would develop in three stages (elite, massive, and universal systems); however, the evident expansion of these systems has not followed this path. In fact, the new classifications that the literature has provided (high/low participation systems) have also not managed to adequately reflect the differences in quality that can be seen within the national systems. The description of neoliberal policies in higher education in Latin America is presented as a sort of "big bang" whose subsequent transit is more of a counter-reform process. Quality policies in higher education are more than a political agenda; they are a reaction to neoliberal reforms.

Although the reduction of the State and bureaucracies has been emphasized, in countries where the States conduct the evaluation (as is the case in France, Italy, and Norway), this has meant significant bureaucratic expansion. In the countries that have systems focused on competition (Germany, Great Britain, and Portugal), the number of agencies that set standards and grant quality seals have multiplied, significantly increasing the number of evaluation processes that are carried out at the national level. This has resulted in overcrowding in university management.

In the Latin American case, there are two moments of change to the State in the recent social-political process, which are marked by the last decade of the 20th century to the first decade of the 21st century (Miceli, 2019). Oszlak (1999) has called these two moments of change first-generation reforms and second-generation reforms. For the purpose of this study and its focus on higher education, the definition of two instances of reform is pertinent and coincides with the particular actions of articulation of the States; however, the characterization of those instances as a reduction of the State, in the first reform, and as participation mechanisms, in the second reform, has been strongly questioned by research that maintains that the State has not reduced its role in the configuration of public policies, but rather, the State has grown under strong privatized internal regulation (Hibou, 2013).

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In this sense, the first generation of reforms was linked to an accelerated and radical process of the privatization of the economy at the end of the 20th century. During this process, rather than reducing the State, a highly centralized one was promoted to consolidate this process of economic transformation (Hibou, 2013). For its part, the second generation of reforms to the State was characterized by carrying out a profound process of the privatization of state institutions that allowed for a more accelerated articulation of the financing frameworks and fields of action of the new public-private scenario of the institutions, which was supported by a new bureaucracy (Travers, 2007).

However, not all the changes introduced had the same intensity, especially in relation to the diversification of evaluation methodologies and their results. Although the process is still underway, two trends seem to account for the effect of the measures adopted. The first is that the States' role regarding quality has been postponed due to the prominence that accreditation has acquired, although they have the option of participating more actively in this domain if their own needs are not satisfied. The second is the renewed emphasis that the study of the results of the training processes acquires within the evaluation processes. This means that the financial and organizational cost of institutional accreditations increases substantially for universities.

Research Methodology

This research project follows a case study methodology. It is an embedded case with two distinctive units of analysis (Yin, 2018): i) the moments of quality policies in higher education and ii) the role of the State and bureaucracy in the development of quality policies in higher education in Latin America. In both dimensions of quality policies, the study seeks to describe, analyze, and typify the specific trajectories that these units of analysis have experienced, to build a description of the case based on the information that the study will gather, systematize, and analyze. A case study methodology is especially suitable for this study because the two cases are situated in real contexts in which there is no clear delimitation between the context and the phenomenon to be analyzed. It requires that the situation to be studied be technically distinguishable (as occurs with the interaction between the evolution of public policy and the trajectory of higher education) in that there are multiple variables involved in the occurrence of the same result. Case studies assume a research design that includes: a set of questions that the study seeks to answer, one or more hypotheses about the case, the identification and definition of the units of analysis, an analytical model that links the available information with the hypotheses raised, and criteria for interpreting the findings that the case produces. The central question of this research is: Did quality policies in higher education in Latin America have a first and second generation, and to what extent did they diminish the role of the State and bureaucracy?

The methodology used focused on an integrative descriptive secondary literature review that is characterized by addressing a broad approach to the field of study and includes a review of empirical and theoretical literature according to the objectives of the text (Guirao Goris, 2015).

The research process consisted of four stages: 1) a preparatory phase, which has two sub-stages, a reflective and design stage; 2) fieldwork; 3) an analytical stage; and 4) an informative stage (in which the research report was prepared). This proposal assumes that,

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although the stages are successive, they do not follow a linear logic since they overlap and give feedback. Following this logic (Rodríguez et al., 1999), documents and bibliographies were reviewed during the preparatory stage to refine the formulation of the problem, the research question, the background, and the theoretical framework.

The cases were selected based on two criteria: (1) the existence of legal bodies of quality policies and (2) that these laws were enacted at the beginning of the 1990s or the beginning of the 21st century. It was concluded from this selection that the quality policies of Argentina and Colombia were developed during the early years of the 90s and those of Chile and Costa Rica during the beginning of the 21st century.

To analyze and interpret the data, semantic analysis and content analysis were used. To systematize the empirical data, the Atlas.ti platform was used as well as open, axial, and selective coding procedures. During open coding, the expressions were classified by units of meaning and assigned codes. Next, they were grouped into categories according to their relevance to the research problem. During axial coding, the most significant categories were recognized and related to subcategories. Finally, in the selective coding stage, a central category was developed that gave rise to the interpretative model proposed in this research.

Results

The analysis of results is structured in a descriptive interpretation of two types of temporally significant cases to represent this displacement and the main axes of change. The first case deals with the creation of the quality assurance system of higher education in Argentina and Colombia as representatives of the first countries that openly reformed their systems in that direction. The second case deals with the configuration of the quality assurance systems in Chile and Costa Rica that articulated their systems more decisively at the beginning of the 21st century.

First-generation Quality Assurance Reforms: Trajectory Argentina and Colombia in Centralist Model

Law 24,521 on Higher Education in Argentina is one of the first regulations to establish quality policies in a Latin American country (García Gil et al., 2018). The creation of the National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation of the Argentine Republic [La Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria de la República Argentina (CONEAU)] resulted from this law, and it was enacted in August 1995. It began as part of a Higher Education Reform Program, which was an agreement held with the World Bank in 1994, whose first negotiations began in 1986 (World Bank, 1994).

The central axis of the higher education reform program was the World Bank loan, and it was structured in two dimensions; on the one hand, in the Fund for the Improvement of Higher Education [Fondo para el Mejoramiento de la Educación Superior (FOMEC)] and on the other, CONEAU. CONEAU had to evaluate the universities and programs, and FOMEC had to provide them with financing according to a competitive mechanism (Stubrin, 2010).

This design had a preparatory phase known as Project 06. The reaction, in general, was critical towards that approach. After many consultations, the National Interuniversity Council reached an agreement in which a series of protections of autonomy and conceptual and technical stipulations were established. Without this agreement, universities would not

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have accepted an external evaluation due to the fear that this process would transform into a ranking of universities (Mollis & Marginson, 2002).

It is due to this context that the introduction of evaluation and accreditation required a national State law. Providing the public with an official guarantee of quality was distributed between two main agents, the new evaluation agency and the ministry with the main jurisdiction in the latter. This was established in Article 46, subparagraph B that states: "according to the standards established by the Ministry of Culture and Education in consultation with the Council of Universities." For its part, this council was also made up of centralized institutions because it had twelve members appointed by the National Executive Branch at the proposal of the following bodies: three by the National Interuniversity Council, one by the Council of Rectors of Private Universities, one by the National Academy of Education, three by each of the Chambers of the Honorable Congress of the Nation, and one by the Ministry of Culture and Education (Giuffré & Ratto, 2013).

Article 46 said law establishes CONEAU as a decentralized body affiliated with the Ministry of Education. CONEAU initially focused on the evaluation and accreditation of graduate courses (specializations, master's degrees, and doctorates) and institutional evaluation.

In short, in Argentina, with the sanction of Law 24,251 in 1995, new criteria were introduced to operate public universities, which generated a contradictory process in which the State shrank and deregulated markets; however, in the university system, a reverse process began: specific structures were created to control the sector and, in particular, to evaluate it (Stubrin, 2010; Lamarra, 2003).

In the case of Colombia, the Political Constitution of 1991 preserved the freedom of education, recognized education as a right, and assigned the State the role of inspection and surveillance (Jeisson, 2018). Later, Law 30 of 1992 was approved, which established the normative base of the higher education system. This norm defined the principles and objectives of the sector and classified the academic programs and the institutions that included professional technical institutions, technical schools and universities.

Law 30 of 1992 established the Ministry of National Education and the National Council of Higher Education [Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior (CESU)] as governing bodies. The National Accreditation System was included in CESU as a strategy to improve the quality of higher education. The introduction of assessment in educational policy in Colombia was established by Law 30 of 1992 (Rubaii & Lima-Bandeira, 2018).

The Political Constitution of Colombia defined education as part of the State and delegated responsibility for quality at all levels to the Ministry of National Education through its promotion, inspection, control, and surveillance. In parallel, the Higher Education Quality Assurance System [Sistema de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (SACES)] was created, which, in turn, was made up of the information subsystem, the promotion subsystem, and the evaluation subsystem. This information system was aimed at the educational community as stated in Article 56 of Law 30 of 1992: Create the National Information System for Higher Education, whose main objective will be to disseminate information to guide the community on the quality, quantity, and characteristics of the system's institutions and programs.

In this way, in 1994, according to the provisions of Articles 53 and 54 of Law 30 of 1992, a decree (2904 of December 1994) defined what accreditation consists of and the

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instances that are part of the National Accreditation System, as well as the stages of the accreditation process, such as 1) self-evaluation, 2) evaluation of external academic peers, 3) evaluation of the National Accreditation Council, and 4) the accreditation act. Also, the decree ratified the State's control over the process by framing it as the act by which the State adopts and makes public the recognition of higher education institutions (Duque, 2021).

As both cases of Argentina and Colombia show, the first designs of quality assurance institutions in higher education in Latin America dismembered their actions in various institutions without the State control of the process being disassociated from it and its ratification. This makes it possible to define this first generation of quality assurance reforms as a centralized model.

In the Argentine case, the Ministry of Education, as a representative of the State, articulates practically the entire process, while in the Colombian case, specific state institutions are created, such as the Development Institute. Despite this difference, the Ministries of Education are organized as guarantors of higher education in both countries, where explicated mediation was not used. Along with this, in both cases, the main objective of the intermediate instances of committees and councils is to install new bureaucratic processes in the systems through procedures and actors. Finally, information is used as an input for the community and not yet as a management mechanism to articulate institutional competence.

Table 1.
First generation of quality policies: The centralized model

Country	Dimension	Legal Description
Argentina	Condition	Law 24,521 Article 45: "…The patterns and standards for the accreditation processes will be those established by the Ministry…"
	Bureaucracy	Law 24,521 Article 46b: "Accredit the undergraduate courses referred to in Article 43, as well as the graduate courses, whatever the field in which they are developed, in accordance with the standards established by the Ministry of Culture and Education in consultation with the Council of Universities"
	Information	Law 24,521 Article 28: "e) Extend its action and its services to the community, in order to contribute to its development and transformation, studying in particular national and regional problems and providing scientific and technical assistance to the State and the community."
Colombia	Condition	Political Constitution of the Republic of Colombia Article 67: "It is the State's responsibility to regulate and exercise the supreme inspection and vigilance of education in order to ensure its quality…"
	Bureaucracy	Law 30 Article 54: "The System provided for in the previous article will have a National Accreditation Council that will be led, among others, by the academic and scientific communities and will depend on the National Council for Higher Education (CESU), which will define its regulations, functions, and integration"
	Information	Law 30 Article 56: "Create the National Information System for Higher Education, whose main objective will be to disseminate information to guide the community on the quality, quantity, and characteristics of the system's institutions and programs."

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Second-generation Quality Assurance Reforms: Trajectory Chile and Costa Rica in Public-Private Model

In the regional scenario, Chile is a prominent case of the consolidation of external quality assessment instruments (Salazar & Rifo, 2020). The first stage took place between 1990 and 1998 (Salazar & Leihy, 2014). During this stage, the Higher Council of Education [Consejo Superior de Educación (CSE)] became the main regulatory agency in the sector, and governments began to appreciate the importance of quality assessment as an axis of sector policy (Espinoza & González, 2015).

The second stage was related to conducting pilot experiences for the installation of a national accreditation system, which was developed between 1999 and 2002 (since the creation of the National Undergraduate Accreditation Commission and the National Graduate Commission and until their proposal for the consolidation of a national quality assurance system was made public). It was an agenda that had the technical support of the World Bank through the program for Improving the Quality and Equity of Higher Education [Mejoramiento de la Calidad y Equidad de la Educación Superior (MECESUP)] (Salazar & Leihy, 2014; Fernández Darraz, 2015).

Finally, the third stage began in 2003 and accounted for the progressive implementation of the model, including the implementation of institutional accreditation, the establishment of the new legal framework, and the implementation of [Comisión Nacional de Acreditación] CNA (Salazar & Leihy, 2014). The status of autonomy that CNA acquired with respect to the government, in turn, made the latter especially cautious about interfering in its work, although the government was able to notice the significant implementation problems that the new agency faced. In this sense, despite the fact that information mechanisms had been designed as axes of institutional management, CNA's operation fell into corruption, undermining its legitimacy. Towards the end of the period, the centrality that accreditation had within the framework of Chilean policies remained unchanged, but its weakness affected the coordination and coherence of higher education policies.

For Costa Rica, the economic crisis of the early 1980s generated serious problems in the financing of public education and the role of the private sector. For this reason, it was necessary to create bodies in charge of its regulation, such as the National Council for Higher Education of Private Universities [Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior de Universidades Privadas (CONESUP)] and the Higher Council for Education. CONESUP was structured as a highly decentralized body, affiliated with the Ministry of Public Education through Law No. 6693, on November 27, 1981, as the institution in charge of the inspection and auditing of the private universities in the country (Torres-Salas et al., 2018; CINDA, 2009). Thus, the National Higher Education Accreditation System [Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (SINAES)] was approved by Legislative Decree Number 8256 in April 2002. Said law declared the activities of SINAES to be of "public interest" and states, in Article 2, that the purpose of accreditation was to officially identify the degrees and programs of public and private universities that meet the established quality requirements. Along with this, the decree rearticulated its regulatory frameworks in a decanted public-private scenario and chose to encompass the actions of the system from the recognition of these new relationships not regulated by its Ministry of Education but by the National Council for Accreditation of Higher Education.

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SINAES had a National Higher Education Accreditation Council that certified the quality of university degrees. All these processes sought to ratify the bureaucratic processes already installed in the universities as established in Article 4b: Reliably demonstrate that they have the internal mechanisms to carry out the self-assessment processes. Along with this, the information system promoted information on the various academic programs and their development frameworks that allowed for the generation of curricular management over institutional management as such.

In short, Chile and Costa Rica represent a new model of accreditation policies within the continent. In the case of Chile, the creation of a commission was structured as an autonomous body of the State where the Ministry of Education mediated regulatory situations, but it was the commission that set the articulation of the bureaucracy of this new management that crossed public and private borders. In the case of Costa Rica, the council was the articulating entity over the role of the State and its ministry in a scenario that was also radically privatized. In this public-private model of accreditation design and mediation, information played a new role; it no longer focused on contributing to the community or students as in Argentina and Colombia, but rather, it took on the role of institutional management in Chile and curricular management in Costa Rica. In summary, at the beginning of the 21st century, a new public-private model of regulation of quality policies in the continent was created that distances itself from the centralist model adopted at the end of the 20th century.

Table 2.
Second generation of quality policies: New public-private model

Country	Dimension	Legal Description
Chile	Condition	Law 20,129 Article 6: "Create the National Accreditation Commission, hereinafter the Commission, an autonomous body that will have legal personality and its own assets, whose function will be to evaluate, accredit, and promote the quality of autonomous universities, professional institutes, and technical training centers, and the majors and programs they offer."
	Bureaucracy	Law 20,129 Article 4e: "Promote coherence between the criteria and defined standards for accreditation processes, with the regulations governing licensing, as well as everything else from the higher education sector"
	Information	Law 20,129 Article 8: "d) Maintain public information systems that contain the relevant decisions related to the accreditation and authorization processes in charge, and provide the National Information System of Higher Education with the corresponding information."
Costa Rica	Condition	Law 8256 Article 3: "SINAES will be made up of public and private university higher education institutions that voluntarily wish to join."
	Bureaucracy	Law 8256 Article 12: "Approve and update the procedures, criteria, and evaluation standards established for accreditation and monitor their strict compliance."
	Information	Law 8256 Article 17: "SINAES must provide to the public, in a clear and timely manner, the results of accreditations, as well as the methodologies used. The accreditation of a plan, major, or program will be valid for four years. Once the period has expired, its review and re-accreditation must be requested."

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Discussion

The emergence of quality assurance in higher education has been a global trend and is not restricted solely to the proliferation of accreditation and independent external evaluation agencies. During the last two decades, almost half of the countries have introduced agendas to assess the State and performance of the sector. The narratives that revolve around the need to assume more commitment to the quality of the sector focus on the deployment of generic evaluation instruments that combine incentives and regulations that operate in contexts that are profoundly local, giving rise to a multiplicity of quality schemes. This situation has led most researchers to focus on national processes and their articulation and the impact of the implemented instruments (Malagón Plata et al., 2019; Bernasconi & Celis, 2017; González-Bravo et al., 2020; Salazar & Leihy, 2017).

The relevant literature on quality policies in Latin America tends to characterize their dimensions in a framework of cumulative policies by country or as a framework of policies whose instruments are partially aligned (Pérez, 2004; Lemaitre & Mena, 2012; Lamarra, 2003; Stubrin, 2010). From it, those studies that are linked to State audit theory, as a framework of interpretation, fall into the error of placing the auditing State as an agenda and not as a critical normative social theory. Neave's (1998) Evaluative State breaks the scheme used by comparativists and distinguishes between centralized and decentralized higher education systems by completely redistributing functions between the center and the periphery. Within the Evaluative State, the center (the State) maintains strategic control over the sector –it sets the objectives of the system and defines criteria to evaluate the quality of the products– while the mid-level coordination is entrusted to the periphery (the universities). In this way, the rhetoric that justifies the Evaluative State (reducing the borders of the State) produces the opposite result: a robust apparatus to regulate deregulation (such as the strengthening of institutional leadership), allowing for a broad intervention within the universities through of a new bureaucracy (Neave, 1998).

The studies that focused on the new role of higher education do not accurately demonstrate the progress towards the contractual relationship modality between the information received by the State through external evaluations and each university (Bernasconi & Celis, 2017; Rodríguez-Ponce et al., 2009). This makes it easier to redefine the purpose of the university and the relationships that mediate between government, higher education, and the economy. Intermediary agencies between the State and higher education are multiplying to build autonomy; however, the opposite effect is produced by expanding their indirect influence on the universities and making them dependent on other means.

In this direction, the review of the exposed cases shows that it is more pertinent to interpret the policy framework as two instances of reform, where these scenarios are subject to various scales of globalization and where higher education has been a central actor.

These scales of global, regional, and local change have not been supported by similar incidences, rather, as other authors have pointed out, policy agendas fluctuate in qualitative or quantitative leaps depending on the incident in question. In this sense, quality policies in higher education in Latin America coexisted with two incidences: (1) during the last decade of the 20th century and (2) during the second decade of the 21st century. In the first

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incident, the scope of the reforms is met with mistrust and ignorance, resulting in shared frustrations during the design of the policy. On the other hand, in the second incidence, the development of the sector had already consolidated or legitimized massive private actors, which placed the reformers at the moment of articulation and strengthening of that formula of mistrust. With this, two models of quality policies are configured.

The first model seeks to give guarantees to public universities despite the growth of private education. This situation is possible precisely because the accelerated privatization process of the systems is partially recent or a possible threat. Along with this, in Latin America, many countries, like Argentina and Colombia, come from national political experiments with a strong State presence in the economy and social systems. In this sense, higher education in this type of model articulates its processes from a decentralized State control but ultimately seeks to ratify its processes in centralized institutions. To a certain extent, neoliberalism, which seeks to reduce the State's power through managerial management models, was not yet a consolidated public policy. As a result, the countries in this model needed a centralized power that would give impetus to these new processes, as was the case of the accelerated process during the Chilean civic-military dictatorship.

The second model was established during the later years of the 90s of the 21th century, and its main objective was to legitimize the new private universities and the stabilization of their growth in the region and the world. Both, the Chilean and Costa Rican cases, show the growing trajectories of the private offer in higher education and a weak resistance to its role in the educational offer. In this scenario, the reformers focused their actions on building institutional designs that disanchored the regulation process in central state apparatuses. They also promoted autonomous institutions with diverse actors in their composition but whose attributions allowed them to direct their regulatory efforts no longer in planning the development of the sector but to use the information emanating from the accreditation processes as a substantive source of information to manage growth dynamics that seemed structural and quasi-functional.

Table 3.
Axes of the first and second-generation reforms in quality policies in Latin America

Reforms Country	Model	Ministry of Education	Committees, commissions and/or Councils	Information
Argentina	Non-concentrated	Quality guarantor	New bureaucracy	Materials for students
Colombia	Decentralized	Quality guarantor	New bureaucracy	Materials for the community
Chile	Autonomy	Quality mediators	Regulation new bureaucracy	Utility for management
Costa Rica	Autonomy	Quality mediators	Regulation new bureaucracy	Utility for management

In short, although the literature has sought to emphasize the new cycle of quality reforms by focusing on perfecting legal frameworks, or creating them if they do not exist, and gathering evidence of the best or worst evaluative instruments, in light of this research, it seems more pertinent to assess the recent trajectories of quality processes in higher education since they lack the bureaucratic capacities to plan for the sector at both the

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national and regional levels. The balance shows that the bureaucracy built on the axis of information as the main source of planning is insufficient when it comes to undertaking such ambitious social engineering agendas. It may be time to rethink planning.

Conclusions

The interpretive balance of the trajectories in quality policies in higher education in cases such as Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Costa Rica show two instances of specific reforms that we can understand as neoliberalism in education. These instances organize the State, its ministries, its intermediate bodies, and information of clearly distinguishable and diverse forms. In the case of the first reforms, the states were organized centrally under non-concentrated or decentralization modalities in which decision-making never escapes their control and information does not replace state planning. In the second moment of reforms, the states organized intermediate autonomous administration bodies that have limited planning functions and replace those functions with the use of information as a source of management in curricular or institutional matters, abandoning the dynamics that were very strong in that period: the growth of enrollment, the expansion of higher education, financing, and the growing role of importance of the sector in a series of policies.

In summary, this research suggests that it is essential to continue the study of the trajectories of quality policies in higher education, where researchers refocus their attention to key aspects of policy design, such as planning and the development of an appropriate bureaucracy.

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There is no conflict of interest to be cited here.

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Human Participants

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