

El valor público de la acreditación en el mejoramiento continuo de las Carreras de Educación en Costa Rica. Un estudio de caso

The public value of accreditation in the continuous improvement of Education Degree Programs in Costa Rica: a case study

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RESUMEN

Los diferentes procesos de acreditación por los que pasan los Grados universitarios son objeto de investigación debido al reconocimiento internacional que han adquirido por el valor asociado a la acreditación. De esta manera, la acreditación se ha convertido en el medio predilecto para supervisar y evaluar la calidad de la educación superior y observar el impacto que tienen las universidades en la sociedad. El estudio que se muestra forma parte de una investigación más amplia focalizada en el desarrollo de una tesis doctoral. Se enmarca en el paradigma cualitativo interpretativo de tipo exploratorio emergente. El objetivo principal se centra en identificar el valor público que genera la acreditación en el mejoramiento continuo de las carreras de grado acreditadas por el SINAES (Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior) en el área de Educación en Costa Rica. Se ha llevaron a cabo cinco entrevistas a profundidad para conocer las percepciones de los informantes clave que participaron en el proceso de acreditación de las seis carreras seleccionadas. Los resultados muestran el valor público que produce la

acreditación en el mejoramiento continuo de las Carreras de Educación por medio de 10 categorías que abarcan los logros, beneficios, resultados y efectos de la contribución del SINAES en el proceso de mejora continua de la Educación Superior. En conclusión, se observa como la acreditación se han convertido en uno de los factores determinantes a la hora de seleccionar una Carrera de Educación en Costa Rica. Los procesos llevados a cabo por el SINAES se perciben como legítimos y de excelencia en el desarrollo de este tipo de certificaciones de calidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación; evaluación; acreditación de carreras; valor público.

ABSTRACT

The different accreditation processes of undergraduate degrees are the object of research due to the value of international recognition based on their accreditation. Thus, accreditation has become the preferred means of monitoring and evaluating the quality of higher education and observing universities' impact on society. The present study is part of a broader research focused on developing a doctoral thesis. It is framed in the qualitative interpretative paradigm of an emergent exploratory type. The main objective is to identify the public value generated by accreditation in the continuous improvement of undergraduate programs accredited by SINAES (an anagram of Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior, National System of Higher Education Accreditation), in the field of education in Costa Rica. Five in-depth interviews were conducted to learn the perceptions of the key informants who participated in the accreditation process of the six selected degree programs. The results show the public value that accreditation produces in the continuous improvement of Education Degree Programs through ten categories that cover the achievements, benefits, results and effects of the contribution of SINAES in the continuous improvement processes of higher education. In conclusion, accreditation has become one of the determining factors when selecting an Education Degree Program in Costa Rica. The processes carried out by SINAES are perceived as legitimate and of excellence in developing these types of quality certifications.

KEYWORDS

Education; evaluation; accreditation; public value.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study is part of a comprehensive and deep research developed within the framework of a doctoral thesis. Therefore, the results shown make up a significant part of this research.

Accreditation has steadily gained increasing international recognition due to its symbolic value (Lucena et al., 2023). It has become the principal means used by the State to monitor and evaluate the quality of higher education and, in turn, evaluate the impact of universities on society (Guzmán-Puentes & Guevara-Ramírez, 2022).

Evaluation, as a policy of control, improvement and accountability adopted from the North American model, has become "a social space where values and power are disputed" (Marquina, 2017, p.5). Based on the experience in Brazil, Dos Santos & Gómez (2018) argue that educational management and evaluation research should be approached from a critical perspective that reveals the effects, connections and tensions that arise and allows for improving these policies.

In addition, it is important to note that accreditation is nothing more than the result of evaluative research. Therefore, it is essential to deepen the meta-evaluative analysis of external evaluation for accreditation as this will reveal aspects that are implicit in the evaluation and that arise in practice and evaluative discourses but are not necessarily part of the evaluation criteria of the accrediting agencies. For example, there is a need to investigate the effects of accreditation on strengthening pedagogy and critical analysis of curricular experience (Sahoo, Gulati, & Haq, 2021)

In most countries, quality assurance policies in higher education are implemented through quality assurance systems, usually of state origin (CONEAU-OEI, 2020).

During the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the perception of the quality of higher education was affected by different factors, such as limitations in access to the internet and technological devices, teaching skills for virtual teaching, and the adaptive capacity of universities to maintain educational services, among other aspects (Molina Gutiérrez et al., 2021).

International experience reveals that there are divergent positions on accreditation. On the one hand, some research shows that quality assurance and accreditation processes drive change and improvements in higher education institutions (HEIs) and their programs, thus strengthening a culture of quality (Lemaitre, 2019; Scharager, 2018). On the other hand, certain questions persist about the measurable contribution of accreditation in improving the quality of higher education (Acevedo-De-los-Ríos & Rondinel-Oviedo, 2022; Callejas, 2018; Martínez Iñiguez et al., 2018).

In the specific case of Costa Rica, the Sixth Report on the State of Education in Costa Rica (PEN, 2017) states that, in general, “universities consider that accreditation is relevant, the first place, as a differentiator, a factor of legitimization or reaffirmation” (p.286). However, some university stakeholders lack clarity regarding the quality improvements associated with accreditation (PEN, 2017). This situation highlights the importance of promoting greater understanding and communication about the benefits and concrete results of accreditation in the Costa Rican context.

The accreditation model for undergraduate programs of the National Accreditation System for Higher Education in Costa Rica, known as SINAES (an anagram of *Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior*), is based on the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) approach developed by Stufflebeam (1966). This model is used to evaluate degree programs in light of the purposes, mission and vision of the institutions of higher education to which they belong and focuses on four evaluation dimensions. In addition to these four dimensions, the SINAES model also evaluates admissibility and sustainability criteria.

In the accreditation evaluation process, information is gathered from the main actors in the educational process, including the active student population; faculty, academic and administrative staff; university and degree program authorities; employers; and graduates. In some cases, other relevant actors are also considered according to the degree’s discipline. In addition, information is obtained from official documents. All information collected is analyzed and evaluated based on the criteria and standards established by SINAES.

The conception of the public value of accreditation, like that of educational quality, is a social construction that develops in a specific historical context and moment. Therefore, its definition varies according to the expectations of the different actors involved in higher education. These actors may be international networks and organizations such as UNESCO, political leaders, authorities, managers, academics and university professors, the employer sector, national and international evaluators, the accreditation agency, as well as students and their families, who are the final recipients of a higher education offer with quality accreditation (Calderón & Mun-guía, 2022).

The Public Employment Framework Law No. 10159, Article 5 defines the concept of public value as the “capacity of the Public Administration to respond to relevant problems of the population within the framework of sustainable development, offering efficient, quality and inclusive goods

and services, promoting opportunities, within a democratic context” (p.7).), i.e., the public value produced by a state institution is linked to the public purpose for which it was created.

This aspect is present in the laws of the Costa Rican Republic (Law 8256 and Law 8798), which have granted SINAES various powers to ensure the quality of higher education institutions, as well as degrees and programs in both the public and private spheres, at university and para-university levels. The objective is to guarantee the quality of higher education through accreditation publicly. As a result, research on the accreditation of undergraduate education programs in Costa Rica acquires particular relevance.

In the last six years, teacher training quality has been controversial nationwide (Marco Nacional de Cualificaciones para las Carreras de Educación, 2022; PEN, 2017). Expanding the coverage of SINAES accreditation in Costa Rica represents a challenge at the national level, especially in regional areas, since accreditation is voluntary. According to Barquero Mejías, Aragón Ramírez & Román Forastelli (2022), in 2022, 5,079 academic opportunities were offered in the country (61% undergraduate and 35% post-graduate), of which 20% were in the area of Education. As of May 2023, SINAES offered 250 accredited degree programs (5% of the total offer), most of which are concentrated in the field of Education, 51 (20% of the total). Of these accredited Education Degree Programs, 41 were offered within the greater urban metropolitan area, known as GAM and 16 in regional areas.

Given this background, there is a need to understand and make visible the public value that accreditation produces in the improvement of degree programs, in this case, Education Degree Programs in Costa Rican public universities. The following research question was formulated: What is the public value that SINAES accreditation has generated in the continuous improvement of Education Degree Programs?

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was mainly based on the qualitative interpretative paradigm of an emergent exploratory type (Vasilachis de Gialdino et al., 2006). From this approach, an interpretation of the evaluation discourses has been developed that analyzes how accreditation interacts in the academic environment and the quality culture of the degree programs accredited by SINAES in the field of Education.

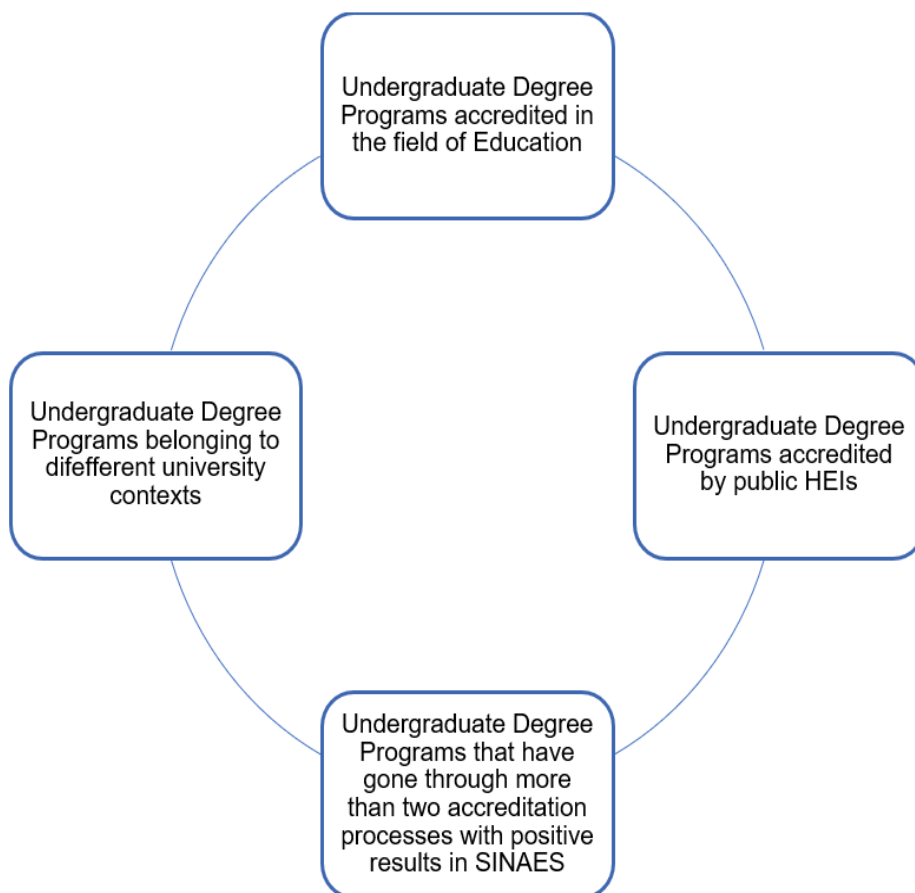
2.1 Objectives

The main objective of this research is to identify the public value generated by accreditation in the continuous improvement of undergraduate programs accredited by SINAES in the area of Education.

2.2. Research Context

This research analyzes the case of six accredited degree programs in the area of Education, which are part of Costa Rican public HEIs, in contexts that are assumed to be dynamic and the result of diverse interactions. When selecting the case studies, the criteria shown in Figure 1 were applied.

Figure 1. Selection Criteria of undergraduate programs in the Field of Education



Source. Own elaboration

To preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of each case, random coding has been assigned to each of these six degree programs. Table 1 shows the assigned codes.

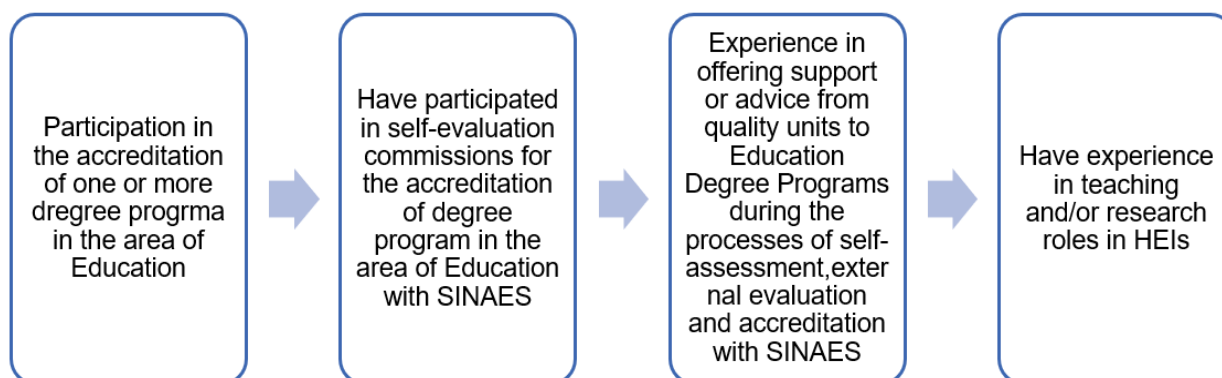
Table 1. Coding assigned to each case

Degree	Code
Education Degree Program 1	ED1
Education Degree Program 2	ED2
Education Degree Program 3	ED3
Education Degree Program 4	ED4
Education Degree Program 5	ED5
Education Degree Program 6	ED6

In this case study, the primary source of information used was the academic staff that had participated in the accreditation of the Education Degree Programs that are part of the research.

These professionals provided crucial data and perspectives for the development of the study and made it possible to provide an answer to the research question posed. The selection criteria for these informants are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Key informant selection criteria



Source. Own elaboration

In order to gather the necessary information, five in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants who had participated in the accreditation processes of the accredited degree programs in the area of Education.

The process of setting up and developing the in-depth interviews began by convening the key informants. Subsequently, the voluntary nature of participation in this study was explained, and participants were provided with an informed consent document detailing some relevant aspects, such as the research objectives.

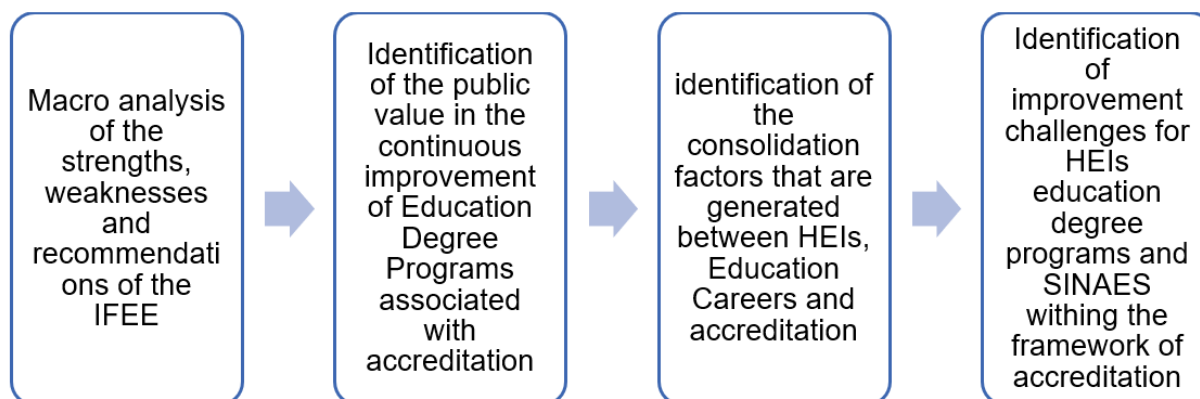
The five interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Office 365 Teams tool due to public health restrictions in the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed the meetings to be recorded. Each interview lasted a maximum of one hour. The transcription of each interview was carried out by the first author, as agreed in the informed consent.

Concerning secondary sources, with the support of SINAES and the researcher's commitment to confidentiality, access was gained to the Final External Evaluation Reports, IFEE in Spanish (*Informes Finales de Evaluación Externa*), of the degree programs and to documents with the observations issued by the representatives of the Education Degree Programs regarding the IFEE.

Three specific technological tools were used during the analysis: Excel databases, the Power BI visualization tool and the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software.

Likewise, in the development of this study, four significant methodological moments were determined, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Methodological moments in the development of this study



Source. Own elaboration

3. RESULTS

This section presents the results obtained after analyzing the evaluative discourses of the documentary sources, as well as the testimonies obtained during the in-depth interviews.

The use of inductive logic, together with an approach of discovery and interpretation focused on the understanding of meanings and realities in Education Degree Programs, allowed the development of a dynamic research process that involved a constant back and forth in interpreting evaluative discourses. This facilitated the formulation, reformulation and construction of an answer to the main research question: What is the public value that SINAES accreditation has generated in the continuous improvement of Education Degree Programs? This research aims to identify the public value generated by accreditation in the continuous improvement of undergraduate programs accredited by SINAES in Education.

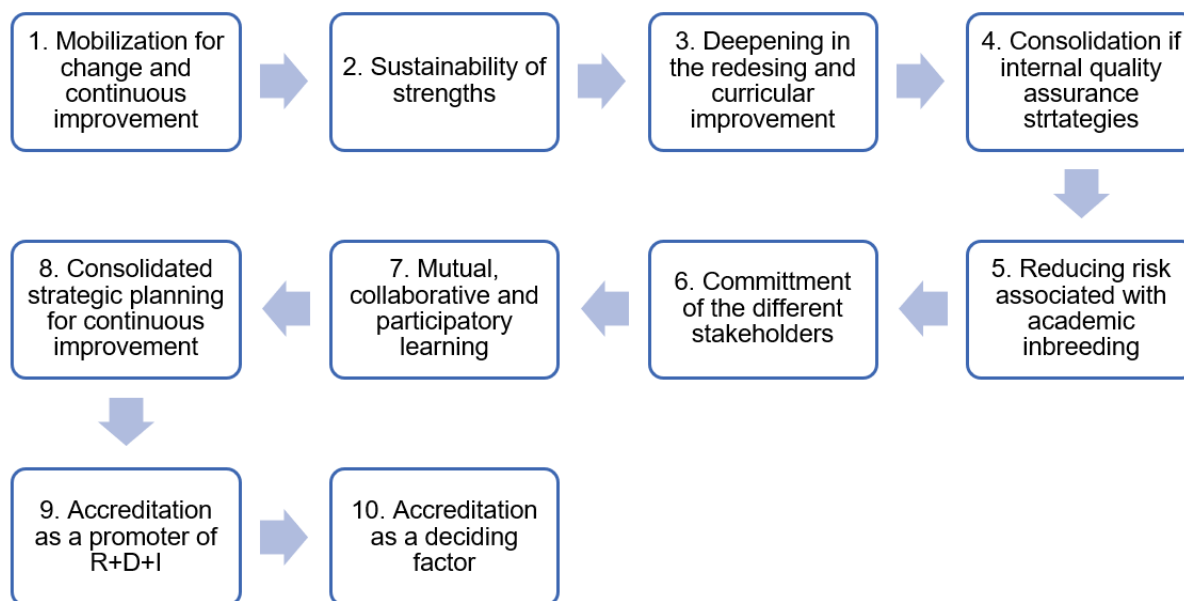
3.1 The public value of accreditation through SINAES in the continuous improvement of Education Degree Programs

In constructing the responses, we initially identified and conceptually classified the systematized information by creating pre-categories. These emerged as a result of a preliminary analysis.

Subsequently, through an iterative interpretative-reflective process, a continuous and enriching revision of these pre-categories was carried out transversally, constantly providing feedback on the findings.

As a result of this process, the Final Categories were formed, making it possible to establish a solid and coherent basis for developing well-founded and structured responses (as seen in Figure 4).

Figure 4. Final categories on the public value of Education Degree Programs



Source. Own elaboration

As a result of the stated purposes, it is recognized that accreditation with SINAES has a significant public value that encompasses a series of achievements, benefits, results and effects. This value is manifested through the contribution of SINAES to the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education, both at the institutional level and at the level of university degree programs. It also highlights the importance of accreditation in promoting academic excellence, generating confidence in society and guaranteeing the quality of higher education in a public manner.

Based on these reflections and the interpretative, reflexive and transversal analysis of the evaluative discourses of two consecutive accreditation processes of the Education Degree Programs studied, ten final categories related to the public value generated by SINAES have been identified.

3.1.1. Mobilization for change and continuous improvement

Accreditation has become one of the principal means used worldwide in quality assurance systems to guarantee the continuous improvement of higher education. The analysis carried out in this study shows that accreditation is achieving this objective in the Education Degree Programs that SINAES has accredited.

It is worth highlighting that, despite the same accreditation model being applied in each period, the Education Degree Programs always find new opportunities for improvement, indicating that the accreditation process is not only a static evaluation but fosters a dynamic and adaptive approach to educational quality. Education Degree Programs take advantage of these opportunities to identify areas for improvement and make the necessary adjustments, contributing to their constant progress, transformation and evolution.

So, even when an initial accreditation is evaluated, when it comes to a fourth accreditation, it is evaluated more rigorously. It is more rigorous because it is understood that we have evolved, advanced, and continuously improved processes through research or any mechanism decided by the different universities (Academic staff 5, personal communication, June 08, 2022).

The cyclical nature of accreditation has proven effective in overcoming various cultural, political and budgetary barriers affecting the higher education system. This systematic and participatory evaluation provides valuable feedback to identify improvement areas and make informed decisions regarding corrective actions.

3.1.2. Sustainability of strengths

The dynamic processes in evaluation and accreditation have proven to have positive effects on the sustainability of the strengths of the Education Degree Programs, allowing them to maintain their status as SINAES-accredited degree programs.

Evaluation and accreditation provide Education Degree Programs with constant opportunities to identify and strengthen their areas of excellence and best practices. Through the peer evaluators' feedback and recommendations, continuous improvement is promoted, which in turn helps degree programs maintain high-quality standards and develop improvement strategies in identified areas.

Accreditation also entails a commitment on the part of the Education Degree Programs to maintain and continuously improve their educational quality. This involves adjusting and adapting based on changing student needs, educational trends and labor market demands.

By maintaining and improving their strengths, SINAES-accredited education programs demonstrate their commitment to quality and excellence, benefitting not only the students who receive a quality education, but also strengthens society's reputation and trust in these careers and institutions.

If we ever stop, we will lose it, and this process also obliges us to continuous improvement. Many times they say the two words "continuous improvement," but they do not rationalize well what continuous actually means because when they come to evaluate me for a second, third, fourth time, etcetera, they are not evaluating what I already gained, what they already know I am doing well, they see how I took advantage of that resource what I did well to continue improving (Academic staff 5, personal communication, June 08, 2022).

After the analysis, 11 strengths have been identified that show the sustainability of the quality of the education degree programs. These strengths are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Strengths that determine the sustainability of Education Degree Programs

Strengths of the Sustainability of the Education Degree Programs
Access to and dissemination of career information
Fairness in admission processes
Continuous improvement of the curriculum
Teacher profiles, regulations and job stability
Career Commitment of Qualified administrative personnel
Condition of Physical and technological infrastructure
Adequacy of budget to meet career needs
Teaching, learning and evaluation methodologies
Contribution to the development of the context through the Extension function

Strengths of the Sustainability of the Education Degree Programs

Student Services

Satisfaction of graduates and employers with training

Source. Own elaboration

3.1.3. Deepening in curriculum redesign and improvement

Curriculum redesign is a common and recurrent practice in HEIs and their degree programs, which seeks to improve and update curricula. However, self-evaluation and external evaluation for accreditation have played a crucial role in deepening these processes, thanks to the contributions of the external view of peer evaluators.

Self-evaluation and external evaluation for accreditation provide an objective and expert perspective on the curricular design of education degrees. In examining the curriculum, peer reviewers can identify areas of strength and suggest recommendations for improvement. This enriches the curriculum redesign process by incorporating external perspectives and best practices from other institutions and experts in the field of education.

Furthermore, curriculum redesign processes are not necessarily linked exclusively to self-evaluation. HEIs and their degree programs are constantly making adjustments to their curricula, such as creating new elective courses and revising, eliminating or merging subjects, among others. These changes are part of a frequent practice in response to educational demands and trends in the field of study.

3.1.4. Consolidation of internal quality assurance strategies

The perspective of the academic staff highlights the importance of consolidating internal quality assurance strategies to achieve continuous improvement in accredited programs. Accordingly, this consolidation is indispensable to ensure that improvement efforts are carried out in a coordinated and effective manner.

In addition, it is important to note that these internal quality assurance strategies are supported by specific and general institutional policies related to continuous improvement and accreditation. This means that educational institutions have established regulatory frameworks and guidelines that support and promote the implementation of quality and improvement practices in all accredited degree programs.

The support of university authorities is a key factor in the success of these strategies. The support and commitment of the authorities demonstrate the importance given to quality assurance and continuous improvement in Education Degree Programs. This support provides the necessary resources, institutional backing and motivation to effectively carry out quality assurance practices.

In the Education Degree Programs, the protagonism of the teaching staff in developing participatory quality assurance practices stands out. The teaching staff's active participation and pedagogical experience are fundamental to guaranteeing the quality of education in accredited programs.

3.1.5. Reducing the risks associated with academic inbreeding

The accreditation of Education Degree Programs involves self-evaluation and external evaluation processes that consider both institutional and national references (standards and best practices) and experiences, as well as international ones, to evaluate and improve the quality of teacher training.

The academic staff involved in accreditation processes recognizes the value of the views of external peer reviewers, as they provide an opportunity to question one's own practice and the status quo, confronting them with external experiences and perspectives, both nationally and internationally.

By receiving external reviews and evaluations, Education Degree Programs can reflect on their teaching practice, compare it with international standards and references, and take improvement actions. This exchange of experiences and perspectives contributes to enriching and raising the quality of teacher training.

3.1.6. Commitment of the different stakeholders

The accreditation of Education Degree Programs generates a commitment and awareness in the various actors involved in the training and improvement process. These stakeholders identify with the quality of the education provided and recognize the aspects that need to be improved to train professionals in education with a solid vocation, capable of meeting the country's current needs.

This commitment becomes the primary motivator to articulate the work of the different institutional actors and the Education Degree Programs in search of improvement and accreditation goals. These people are willing to go above and beyond what is expected to deal with the additional workload generated by these processes. However, overcoming the challenges also requires institutional commitment and support.

The visualization of accreditation as a common goal within the Education Degree Programs has positive effects on the sense of belonging of the academic staff to the career, the teaching training and the educational institution in general.

3.1.7. Mutual, collaborative and participatory learning

In the accreditation process, various areas such as infrastructure, management and other structural, procedural and practical aspects of the curriculum are evaluated. These aspects require effective communication and participative and collaborative work between the Education Degree Programs and the different departments and academic units of the HEIs with interconnected functions.

The academic staff have emphasized that, from an internal perspective, accreditation processes connect degrees with other degrees. This has been very interesting. In other words, it has become a collaborative work environment. We begin to look at other instances of the institution with which, if not for these processes, we would not talk (Academic staff 4, personal communication, May 27, 2022).

In addition, communication with other areas can also influence the development of the infrastructure and management of Education Degree Programs. The exchange of knowledge and experiences in these aspects can lead to the implementation of improvements in the physical infrastructure, technological resources and management of administrative processes, thus contributing to the quality not only of the careers but also of the university in general.

3.1.8. Consolidated strategic planning for continuous improvement

The experience accumulated in the Education Degree Programs accreditation processes has led to greater consolidation of the improvement commitments with the institutional strategic planning. This has made it possible to concretize and sustain continuous improvement within the accreditation framework.

As the Education Degree Programs have undergone accreditation processes and received feedback from peer evaluators, they have gained a deeper understanding of the quality standards and the aspects that need to be strengthened in their commitment to continuous improvement.

Consequently, the Education Degree Programs have integrated the results of the evaluation and accreditation into their development plans and have established specific goals and actions to address the identified areas for improvement.

This consolidation between accreditation and strategic planning has been critical to the sustainability of continuous improvement. Improvement efforts have become an integral part of the institutional culture, and mechanisms and processes have been established to regularly monitor and evaluate progress in achieving established goals.

3.1.9. Accreditation as a promoter of R&D&I in higher education

In the analysis of the weaknesses identified in the Education Degree Programs during the accreditation process, it was found that research was one of the main areas in which improvement was required. However, the analysis also revealed that in both accreditation periods, the degree programs had made sustained efforts to strengthen research.

Regarding the improvements made in the Education Degree Programs since the accreditation, some members of the academic staff mentioned that internal changes had been implemented to encourage research development by teachers, taking concrete actions such as the implementation of policies and support programs, the creation of spaces and resources dedicated to research, and the promotion of a research culture among academic staff. These internal changes reflect the commitment of the Education Degree Programs to strengthen Research as an integral part of their educational work.

...we have managed to be recognized as professionals within the institution with the capacity to do research and register very important research projects, not only in case they want to give us funds at some point but also if we want to enter into an agreement with a foreign university (Academic staff 3, personal communication, June 9, 2022).

3.1.10. Accreditation as a deciding factor in the selection of a degree program

According to several academic staff members, accreditation has become a determining factor in the decision of students when choosing to enter an Education Degree Program.

Accreditation provides students with a sign that the Education Degree Program meets the standards and criteria established to guarantee the quality of education. By opting for an accredited degree, students are confident they will receive a quality education that will adequately prepare them for their future profession.

This perception highlights the importance of accreditation as a significant referent in choosing an Education Degree Program. Accreditation provides an external and objective endorsement of the quality of the training offered, which generates confidence in both students and their families.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research has succeeded in answering the research question posed and has provided significant contributions to the field of accreditation related to the study's primary objective. Both the methodology used and the results obtained have contributed to understanding the public value that SINAES accreditation has generated in the continuous improvement of the quality of undergraduate programs in the area of Education.

Thanks to this research, ten final categories on the public value of accreditation were identified, which respond to the need to understand, communicate and make visible the benefits of these processes for the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education in Costa Rica. These are interrelated with the four elements extracted from Law 8256 and Law 8798 that comprise the notion of the public value of accreditation developed (Continuous Improvement, Contribu-

tion to the achievement of Academic Excellence, Collaboration internally and within the higher education system, and Trust and public assurance of quality).

Research has shown that SINAES accreditation has fulfilled its purpose of improving the quality of Education Degree Programs, contributing to the development and strengthening of these degrees for the benefit of society. The results obtained have evidenced the positive impact that accreditation has had on the educational environment, promoting continuous improvement and academic excellence.

This is part of the thread of other investigations of a similar depth where it is revealed how accreditation has a significant role in strengthening teacher training (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2012). In the study carried out by Castro (2017), it is observed how the accreditation processes imply an exhaustive review of the study plans, the quality of the teaching staff, the educational infrastructure and the link with the educational and social environment. This constant scrutiny promotes the improvement of the quality of teaching and encourages the updating of pedagogical and technological methods, which has a positive impact on the preparation of future educators.

In addition, the research has provided a clear vision of the role of SINAES as an accreditation system and its contribution to fulfilling the established public objectives. The findings allow for a better understanding of the benefits and effects of accreditation in the educational field, both at the institutional level and in university degree programs. That follows the line of the study carried out by Granados (2017) in which it is shown that accredited programs enjoy greater prestige and trust both nationally and internationally, which facilitates student mobility and the validation of academic credits in other countries.

One of the main contributions of this research is to the field of study of accreditation through the development of the notion of public value based on Costa Rican legislation, specifically Law 8256 and Law 8798. This notion is based on the public purpose for which the accreditation system was created with SINAES and represents an innovative conceptual contribution to an issue that has been the subject of debate in the country. Various reports and documents, such as OECD reports (2017) and PEN reports (2017), have highlighted the low awareness of the benefits and impact of accreditation on the quality of higher education. As a result, in recent years, a broad debate has been generated in the National Accreditation Council of SINAES (CNA, 2023) on this issue.

The results obtained in this study on the public value of SINAES accreditation for the improvement of Education Degree Programs support the points made by PEN (2019). According to the PEN report, the primary education programs of the public universities that best meet the needs of the MEP (anagram of *Ministerio de Educación Pública*, Ministry of Public Education) in terms of graduation profiles have experienced significant improvements thanks to accreditation. These findings coincide with what has been reported in OECD reports (2017), which has led both organizations to emphasize the importance of making accreditation of Education Degree Programs in Costa Rica mandatory in public and private universities to ensure that future professionals in Education possess quality training.

In conclusion, choosing a university major represents a crucial decision in the lives of students, since it will have a significant impact on their professional future and personal development. One of the key factors to consider in this process is the accreditation of the academic programs offered by higher education institutions. Accreditation is a process through which specialized organizations evaluate and certify the quality and relevance of educational programs.

This study has shown that the ten categories of the public value of accreditation in the continuous improvement of education degree programs that have been identified are linked to each other and produce a synergy between SINAES, HEIs and education degree programs, which are based on the shared commitment to continuous improvement of the quality of higher education. Thus, it follows that as the dialogue between SINAES and HEIs increases, mutual learning will increase and proliferate between accredited programs and those that have not yet begun this process, both in the public and private sectors, and the public value of SINEAS accreditation in the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education in Costa Rica will increase.

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