

A systematic literature review on quality management in higher education: a trend towards integration

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Abstract

Purpose This paper presents the results of a systematic literature review on quality management (QM) in higher education (HE), aiming to understand whether the literature presents a trend towards the idea of integration.

We define integration as the development of QM practices and methodologies within organisations which are part of their global management systems, covering different processes and organisational levels, whilst including the implementation of the principles that underlie the definition of QM.

Our thesis is that the literature about QM in HE is evolving towards this idea of integration and is discussing, more and more, broad and holistic approaches to quality, in which these dimensions appear, reflecting a systematic view of higher education institutions (HEIs) and its processes.

In line with this reasoning, our goal is then to understand: how the literature approaches QM in the HE field; to what extent the practices and methodologies of QM in HE become closer to the broader definitions of QM, reflecting its main principles; and to what extent authors provide an overview of QM in an integrative way.

The literature was analysed by taking into consideration that there are three main levels in HEIs: processes level, organisational level and, since our focus is specifically on the field of QM, QM principles level.

Design/ Methodology/Approach The research was carried out using Elsevier's Scopus data base. Bearing our goals in mind, we searched for the expressions 'QM' and 'HE' in articles from social sciences and humanities, from 1980 to 2013. This search resulted in 195 articles. After the first search, data was exported to Endnote and a first reading of the abstracts resulted in the exclusion of articles outside the scope of our research. The remaining 58 articles were then analysed.

Findings From the analysis we conclude that the integration at the three levels of analysis is strong. Moreover, we identify a trend towards the development of holistic QM approaches, both in conceptual and empirical research. In this sense, the reviewed literature confirms our main hypothesis that there is a trend towards the integration of QM practices and it relates positively to our research question, which is that QM is becoming integrated in HEIs.

Originality/Value The most innovative contribution of this work is that it presents a systematisation of management literature on the subject of QM in the field of HE; and it provides insights for a discussion on the idea of the integration of QM in institutions' management systems.

Keywords: quality management, higher education, integration, literature review