

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN A PUBLIC TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES WITHIN THE SEAES FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Institutional self-evaluation has become a central mechanism of educational management in higher education, particularly in public institutions facing increasing demands for accountability, relevance, and quality assurance. This article analyzes the experience of a public technological institute in Mexico that implemented a comprehensive self-evaluation process within the System for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (SEAES). Adopting a critical educational management perspective, the study examines how self-evaluation functions as a governance tool to support continuous improvement, strategic decision-making, and academic leadership. A documentary and analytical methodology was employed, using institutional reports, quantitative indicators related to student trajectories, faculty professionalization, employability, and program performance, as well as qualitative evidence of social impact and institutional practices. The results show significant progress in aligning professional training with labor market needs and integrating environmental sustainability across programs. However, persistent challenges remain in terms of student completion rates, explicit incorporation of equity and inclusion, and the sustainability of external accreditations. The article argues that while SEAES provides a robust managerial framework, its effectiveness depends on strong internal governance structures, systematic monitoring, and a mature quality culture capable of transforming evaluation results into institutional learning and continuous improvement.

Keywords: *Institutional self-evaluation, educational management, continuous improvement, quality assurance, SEAES.*

1. Introduction

Quality assurance has become a defining axis of higher education policy at a global level, particularly within public institutions that operate under increasing social scrutiny and regulatory oversight. Over the last two decades, evaluation and accreditation systems have expanded significantly, reshaping institutional governance, academic practices, and managerial decision-making. In this context, institutional self-evaluation has gradually shifted from a bureaucratic requirement to a strategic instrument for educational management and organizational learning.

Public technological institutes occupy a distinctive position within higher education systems. They are expected to contribute directly to regional and national development through the training of highly qualified professionals, technological innovation, and social engagement. Simultaneously, these institutions often face structural constraints related to funding, infrastructure, and human resources. Consequently, self-evaluation processes acquire particular relevance as mechanisms for prioritization, strategic alignment, and continuous improvement.

In Mexico, the System for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (SEAES) represents a significant policy innovation aimed at articulating quality assurance processes across institutions and subsystems. SEAES promotes a holistic understanding of quality that integrates academic performance, governance, equity, sustainability, and social responsibility. However, the extent to which such a framework effectively contributes to institutional improvement depends on the internal capacities of institutions to interpret, appropriate, and operationalize its principles. This article addresses this issue through an in-depth case study of the Instituto Tecnológico de Zitácuaro.

1.1. Theoretical framework: Self-Evaluation, governance, and quality culture

From the perspective of educational management, institutional self-evaluation is closely linked to governance, strategic planning, and quality assurance. Rather than being conceived solely as an accountability mechanism, self-evaluation can function as a tool for organizational learning, enabling institutions to reflect critically on their practices, outcomes, and strategic orientations.

The literature on quality assurance emphasizes the importance of internal quality systems that go beyond compliance with external standards. Effective self-evaluation processes are characterized by stakeholder participation, systematic data collection, transparent analysis, and the integration of findings into decision-making processes. In this sense, self-evaluation becomes a managerial practice that supports continuous improvement, institutional resilience, and adaptive capacity.

A central concept in this discussion is that of quality culture. A quality culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and practices that support continuous improvement across an organization. Without such a culture, self-evaluation risks becoming a formalistic exercise with limited impact. Conversely, when embedded within a strong quality culture, self-evaluation can serve as a catalyst for institutional transformation.

Empirical studies also highlight tensions between formative and summative approaches to evaluation. While formative approaches emphasize learning and improvement, summative approaches prioritize accountability and control. Public institutions often navigate both logics simultaneously, creating challenges for educational management.

1.2. Institutional context and SEAES framework

The Instituto Tecnológico de Zitácuaro is part of the Tecnológico Nacional de México system, the largest network of public technological higher education institutions in the country. Located in the eastern region of the state of Michoacán, the institute serves a student population characterized by socioeconomic diversity, limited access to alternative higher education options, and strong regional ties.

The institution offers ten undergraduate programs and two professional postgraduate programs in areas related to engineering, management, and applied sciences. Although curricula are nationally standardized, local adaptation is achieved through specialization modules designed to respond to regional labor market needs and development priorities.

SEAES establishes a multidimensional evaluation framework structured around several scopes, including student training, faculty development, academic programs, research, governance, and social impact. It explicitly incorporates transversal principles such as equity, inclusion, sustainability, interculturality, and social responsibility, positioning self-evaluation as a continuous and formative process within institutional management.

2. Methodological design

This research adopts a qualitative–quantitative documentary methodology. The primary source of analysis was the institutional self-evaluation and continuous improvement report produced within the SEAES framework. Additional sources included internal regulations, curricular documents, statistical records, institutional development plans, and performance indicators.

Quantitative indicators were examined to identify trends in enrollment, student retention, terminal efficiency, employability, faculty qualifications, research participation, and accreditation status. Qualitative data were analyzed to examine institutional practices related to teaching, governance, professional development, research, and social engagement.

A key methodological limitation lies in the reliance on self-reported institutional data. To mitigate this limitation, data triangulation was employed, combining quantitative indicators with qualitative evidence to support a more critical and contextualized interpretation of results. This approach enhances the credibility of the analysis while acknowledging its inherent constraints.

3. Results

3.1. Findings I: Student training and trajectories

The self-evaluation process revealed important strengths in student training and professional preparation. Graduate profiles across programs demonstrate strong alignment with professional, scientific-technological, and productive contexts. Environmental education and sustainability have been systematically integrated into all undergraduate programs, reflecting both national policy priorities and global development agendas.

Professional residencies and applied projects constitute a central component of the educational model. Approximately 40% of students undertaking professional residencies are hired by host organizations, indicating a high degree of labor market relevance. These experiences also contribute to the development of transversal skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

However, the analysis of student trajectories reveals persistent challenges. Terminal efficiency has declined in recent cohorts, suggesting weaknesses in retention strategies, academic advising, and socioeconomic support mechanisms. These findings point to the need for more integrated student support policies.

3.2. Findings II: Faculty professionalization and governance

Faculty professionalization represents another critical dimension of institutional quality. The self-evaluation process highlights progress in postgraduate training, participation in research networks, and the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies. Digital technologies and learning management systems have been increasingly integrated into teaching practices.

From a governance perspective, faculty development policies are closely linked to institutional leadership and strategic priorities. While opportunities for professional development exist, their impact depends on coherence with broader institutional goals and systematic follow-up.

The findings suggest that strengthening academic leadership and aligning faculty evaluation with institutional strategic objectives are key challenges for consolidating continuous improvement.

3.3. Findings III: Accreditation, equity, and quality assurance

The self-evaluation process also identified challenges related to accreditation continuity and equity. Although the institution previously held external accreditations, their loss in recent years reveals vulnerabilities in quality management systems, documentation practices, and institutional memory.

Equity and inclusion principles are present in institutional discourse but remain unevenly operationalized across academic programs. This gap highlights the need for clearer policies, indicators, and accountability mechanisms.

These findings underscore the importance of integrating equity considerations into quality assurance systems, rather than treating them as ancillary concerns (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Institutional Self Evaluation.



4. Discussion: Self-Evaluation as a strategic management device

The case analyzed demonstrates that institutional self-evaluation can function as a strategic management device when embedded in governance structures and decision-making processes. However, when treated primarily as a compliance-driven exercise, its potential to generate organizational learning and transformation is limited.

Within the SEAES framework, self-evaluation offers conceptual coherence and methodological guidance. Nevertheless, its effectiveness depends on leadership capacity, data literacy, and the consolidation of a quality culture. Public technological institutes must therefore invest in strengthening internal governance mechanisms to fully realize the benefits of evaluation.

This discussion highlights the need to move from episodic evaluation cycles toward permanent monitoring systems that support strategic planning and continuous improvement.

5. Conclusions and implications for educational management

Institutional self-evaluation within the SEAES framework represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen educational management and quality assurance in public technological institutes. The experience of the Instituto Tecnológico de Zitácuaro illustrates both the potential and the limitations of such processes.

Meaningful progress has been achieved in professional relevance, faculty development, sustainability integration, and social engagement. However, persistent challenges related to student completion, equity, and accreditation continuity underscore the need for stronger internal governance and systematic follow-up.

From a managerial perspective, consolidating self-evaluation as a continuous practice is essential for translating evaluation into sustained institutional improvement and aligning educational strategies with broader social and developmental objectives.

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