Chapter 18

E-Learning Quality:
A Look towards the Demands of its Good Practices

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The evaluation issue has acquired significant importance in recent years and has increased concern about the analysis of educational practices’ quality. This chapter deals with the concept of quality and asks about the different aspects that define it. It develops certain criteria that allow for assessing good e-learning practices. The first aspects that are necessary to define are: (a) the pursued purpose and (b) the Institution’s structural configuration. Good practice evidences are: a direct relation between the program proposal and the intervention context; coherence between theory and practice; presence of interactive and multimedia materials together with permanent interaction; strategies and devices especially designed to support learning; appropriate technology; permanent evaluating research; and a clear human resources policy.

INTRODUCTION

The far-reaching importance that the issue of evaluation has acquired in the last years has not only impregnated our discourses with its vocabulary but also has increased the interest in the analysis of the quality of the educational practices.

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Evaluation and quality are two issues always related. In general, when we evaluate, we do it with reference to a model we consider ideal, desirable, and representative of our idea of quality. That conception of quality is what will orientate and will base our judgements of value in relation to the evaluated practice. Here lays the significance of a previous definition of the concept of quality, since this is a polysemous and multidimensional concept, it requires previous considerations that consider the ideological differences, the diverse meanings, and the multiple aspects that are entangled at the moment of defining its meaning, components, and characteristics.

Every day we hear many of the uses of this concept that range from the simple instrumental reason to the most utopian conceptions. Therefore, we find quality criteria defined from an organizational reality that considers the institution to be responsible for the action immersed in a structure of power that result questionable to us. In addition, the receptor of that action is considered from a passive perspective, “as a receptacle of a service or product” where quality exists independently from the participant subjects, unconnected with the collective experience (CINDA, 1990).

Other models aimed at the people’s quality of life improvement, based on respect toward diversity and on a renouncement to transform individuals into instruments (Nirenberg, Brawerman, & Ruiz, 2000), are opposed to that economic rationality mentioned before.

Brunner (1994) affirms that there are those who assess superior education quality from the point of view of the inputs, the products, or the processes. Consequently elaborating criteria, standards, or measures for its amelioration, completely opposite to them, and often contradictory.

Thus, if the importance of the input is emphasized to determine the quality of an institution or educative programme, the stress will be set in the expenses per student, in the available technological equipment, in the technical and academic qualification of the hired equipment, in the bibliographic resources, etc.

On the contrary, if the results are the main concern, the products linked with teaching, research, or production especially highlighting the good chances of job placement for graduates, the number of papers produced by their researchers, the awards received, etc., will be watched predominantly.

This third dimension in Brunner’s classification is constituted by the emphasis on the processes, underlining all the aspects referring to organization and administration of the different stages of development of the educational programmes. This is a way of appreciating the selected methods, the designed procedures, the learning environment built, the communication upheld, the promoted interaction and interactivity, etc.

It is completely possible to recognize these frames of assessment in the presentation of some institutions and/or e-learning programmes, especially in the corporate field, which marketing campaigns reflect visions based either on the important input

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