Quality assurance policies evolution in pedagogical careers in Chile

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Abstract

Objective: to analyze the evolution of quality assurance policies in pedagogical careers in Chile. **Methodology:** qualitative study, with comparative analysis based on case studies and cross-sectional design. The analysis focuses on the evolution of quality assurance policies based on the dimensions and evaluation criteria of teaching careers in Chile. The units of analysis are the policies of the National Accreditation Commission, in different moments since the establishment of the evaluations in the pedagogy careers. **Results:** three moments are identified in the quality assurance processes of the pedagogy careers. Thus, quality assurance policies are rearranged in the organization of evaluation dimensions and criteria, reaching greater complexity and transversality, promoting self-regulation and continuous improvement, the qualification of initial teacher training and the consolidation of a quality culture. **Conclusions:** the evolution of the quality assurance processes of pedagogy careers expands and focuses efforts to improve the quality of initial teacher training. The challenges are transparency, institutional capacity to achieve a culture of quality, and the correlation between the requirements that accredit quality in pedagogy programs and the practice of the teaching profession.

Keywords: quality assurance; higher education; National Commission of Accreditation; pedagogy; Chile.

1. Introduction

A citizen perception study on the quality of education, conducted by *Ipsos Education Monitor* (2024) across 30 countries, highlights that Chile ranked 26th out of 30, in terms of public perception of educational quality—only ahead of Turkey, Peru, Hungary, and Romania, in that order.

While this study presents a globalized perspective—that is, it considers the education system as a whole, without differentiating by level or type of provision (public, private, or mixed)—the issue of educational quality remains a central and recurring concern in many countries, and Chile is no exception (Ministry of Education [MINEDUC], 2020). Given the broad public sensitivity and national relevance of this topic, states have focused considerable efforts on addressing it. This has involved the implementation of policies, allocation of resources, establishment of institutions, and the development of procedures and regulations—all aimed at improving the quality of education. These efforts are grounded in the recognition that enhancing educational quality is not only key to improving citizens' quality of life but also to advancing national development (Blancas, 2018; Reyes, 2016).

While all educational levels are undoubtedly important, the present study focuses specifically on the notion of quality in higher education. As previously noted, one of the globally acknowledged challenges in higher education is the continuous improvement of quality. This includes not only the teaching processes but also a wide range of supporting elements: the overall improvement of educational services, infrastructure, autonomy and integrity in resource management, progressive development of academics, establishment of mechanisms for process regulation and management, internationalization, research and its contribution in the formative processes, measurable scientific productivity, evidencing real progress to the global society, community engagement, technological innovation, and the employability of graduates, among other significant aspects (Martínez et al., 2024; Vilca et al., 2024).

National governments have implemented quality assurance systems in higher education as a means to improve both the supply and demand of educational programs that aim to enhance institutional training processes, strengthen educational institutions, foster a culture of quality based on self-regulation and autonomy, and ensure the proper use of public funds (where applicable) (Baltodano & Leyva, 2024; Ariza-Soto et al., 2023; National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation [CONEAU], 2020; García-Huidobro, 2018). According to García-Huidobro (2018), "Accreditation, therefore, is seen as a fundamental tool for public trust and transparency" (p. 298).

Quality assurance systems and processes in Latin America are not new. In fact, "it was towards the end of the 1980s and throughout the following decade that Latin American governments began to take a serious interest in the quality of higher education" (Martínez et al., 2017). Over time, the dynamic that drives for educational quality in the region has evolved, moving from an institutional to a micro-institutional level. Within this framework, teacher education has emerged as a central focus in the efforts to enhance the quality of higher education. Various experiences across the globe—particularly in Latin America—demonstrate the implementation of quality assurance systems and policies (CONEAU, 2020; Vezub & Cordero, 2024). Chile is no exception, since it

has adopted a higher education quality assurance system that focuses fundamentally on the quality of teacher education programs (Domínguez et al., 2012; Martínez et al., 2024).

But is it still meaningful, in the current context, to continue debating the notion of quality in higher education? Why continue to consider this concept as a central axis of study, if there already appears to be consensus regarding its necessity? According to Brunner et al. (2023), what might seem so evident is not necessarily so. These authors argue that "the field of higher education studies is characterized by an insufficient conceptual development" (p. 31). In this regard, it is understood that the term 'quality' is polysemic—and even more so when accompanied by the qualifier 'education'. That is to say, if the concept was already complex, it becomes significantly more so when referring specifically to the quality of higher education.

The quality assurance systems in higher education—already discussed—have been agreed and implemented following a long evolutionary process, which has advanced together with broader collective understandings of what constitutes educational quality. Each national state, based on its own conception of education and model of governance, defines public policy and determines the quality of the offer that considers appropriate for achieving its strategic goals (Reyes, 2023). As such, the notion of educational quality is inherently complex, situated within a framework that includes outcomes, results, national development, market dynamics, and individual expectations, among other dimensions (Martínez et al., 2024).

Looking back in history, it is important to recall the establishment of the National Commission for Undergraduate Accreditation (CNAP) in 1998, which was "created with the purpose of designing and carrying out an experimental accreditation process and proposing relevant legislation" (Martínez et al., 2024, p. 1071). This occurred in a post-dictatorship country, during a time when the social, cultural, political, and economic structures were being reconfigured under the influence of neoliberal policies. Among these was an accreditation model for higher education inspired by the principles of the Bologna Process (Lago et al., 2014; Villanueva et al., 2024), which materialized through the Alfa Tuning project, heavily influenced by funding from the World Bank (Basso, 2016; Espinoza, 2017; Fleet et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2024; Reyes et al., 2024). At that time, the accreditation process of teacher education programs in Chile was voluntary. However, in 2016, with the approval and enactment of Law 20.903—establishing the Professional Teaching System—the evaluation and accreditation of these programs became the responsibility of the newly created National Accreditation Commission (CNA). Accreditation subsequently became mandatory, with a deadline set for 2019 by which all teacher education programs were required to be accredited in order to continue operating.

Since the enactment of Law 20.903 in 2016—which formalized the Teaching Career Law—teacher education programs in Chile may only be accredited through the CNA. This accreditation is now a mandatory requirement for the legal operation of such programs (CNA, 2018). Initiatives such as the creation of the National System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the subsequent establishment of the CNA have enabled the formulation and implementation of quality assurance policies for teacher education programs. These policies have evolved over time with the aim of strengthening and improving the quality of teaching and learning processes (Cancino & Schmal, 2014; Martínez et al., 2024).

1.1. Literature review

A review of the current state of the art reveals several elements aligned with this line of inquiry. For example, Domínguez and Meckes (2011) conducted a study that concluded that although accreditation criteria existed at the time, they were insufficiently complex. As a result, the lack of accreditation was often perceived as incidental for both teacher education programs and higher education institutions (HEIs). The authors recommended increasing the complexity of the process by raising the level of accreditation standards.

In a subsequent study, Domínguez et al. (2012) examined the role of accreditation agencies that, at the time, were responsible for evaluating and accrediting teacher education programs and HEIs in Chile. Viewed from a prospective standpoint and in comparison, with later developments, this study illustrates an evolutionary process in quality assurance policies. It highlights the involvement of a range of actors operating on behalf of the State through outsourced arrangements—actors that no longer play a role in the current system, given the creation of a state-led institution, the National Accreditation Commission (CNA), responsible for overseeing and developing these processes. Teacher education programs were previously evaluated by these outsourced agencies, resulting in inconsistencies in evaluation criteria, differences in how compliance was interpreted, and, consequently, in variability in accreditation rulings.

Corengia (2016) notes that quality assurance processes contribute to improving educational provision by enabling curriculum enhancements, diversification and improvement of teaching and learning processes, the strengthening and targeting of research, and, consequently, improvements in scientific productivity, academic staff qualifications, and access to better resources and bibliographic materials. In the specific case of Argentina, the author points out that quality assurance processes impact institutions differently depending on whether they are public or private, primarily due to differences in access to state funding. The evolution of accreditation policies and evaluation criteria point to the development of knowledge and the adaptive behavior of educational organizations within this context.

Arias and Villarroel (2019) argue that one of the most significant measures for improving the quality of teacher education programs in Chile was the enactment of the Law on the Teaching Profession, which made accreditation a mandatory process. They further emphasize that this policy not only contributed to the improvement of teacher training but also enhanced the selection process for prospective teacher education students.

Martínez et al. (2022) contend that teacher education programs in Chile have oriented their training processes in response to institutional accreditation requirements. These demands are shaped by a context marked by tensions between market logics and institutional capacities, and such tensions become more pronounced in the face of continually changing accreditation policies.

In a bibliometric study on research related to quality in higher education in Chile, Villanueva et al. (2024) reaffirm that the topic has remained a central focus within quality-related studies in the country. Their study also notes an increase in research output on the topic, particularly between 2020 and 2021. The prevailing academic interest focuses on quality management in HEIs in light of changes in accreditation policies. It is worth noting, however, that their study does not address research explicitly focused on the accreditation of teacher education programs, despite the fact that

this process is intended to foster improvements across these programs as a transversal component within HEIs.

A study by Hinojosa-Torres et al. (2024) supports the necessity of accreditation processes in higher education, particularly as they point to the quality assurance of academic programs offered in Chile, with a specific focus on teacher education. The authors assert that implementing accreditation policies has enhanced educational quality, increased scientific productivity, promoted and extended the internationalization of universities, and improved internal management practices that reflect progress in quality assurance. However, they also point out persisting shadows in the system, including conflicts of interest, evaluation biases (given that peer reviewers are drawn from universities themselves), and the influence of institutions' financial and administrative capacities on accreditation outcomes.

Given that quality assurance policies in teacher education have changed over time—and that these changes may or may not have influenced the trajectory of accreditation processes—this study poses the following guiding questions: How have quality assurance policies in teacher education programmes in Chile evolved? How has this evolution impacted initial teacher training programmes? What challenges lie ahead for the accreditation in the context of teacher education programmes in Chile?

The aim of this study is to analyse the evolution of quality assurance policies in teacher education programmes in Chile, with particular attention to the implications of this process for institutional initiatives within higher education.

2. **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative approach, employing a comparative analysis based on case studies, with data obtained through documentary sources. The research design is cross-sectional in nature.

The comparative analysis focuses on the evolution of quality assurance policies starting from the dimensions and evaluation criteria applied to teacher education programmes in Chile. The comparison was carried out with reference to the policies issued by the National Accreditation Commission (CNA) at various points in time since the implementation of evaluations in teacher education programmes. According to Escott (2018), this type of study seeks to "gather observations from social entities or historical moments in society with the aim of examining similarities, divergences, and inquiring into their causes" (p. 57). In line with this, data were extracted from the CNA's official website, as it constitutes the authoritative body, thereby ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the information.

3. Results

Table 1. Evolution of Accreditation Criteria for Initial Teacher Education (FID) Programmes.

CRONOLOGY		
2007 -2015 (Momentum 1)	**2015 to 30-09-2023 (Momentum 2)**	**2023 (From October 1st to present time) Momentum 3**
CRITERIA (C)	**CRITERIA (C)**	**CRITERIA (C)**
Dimension I: Graduate Profile and Outcomes Graduate profile; Curriculum structure; Effectiveness of the teaching and learning process; Outcomes of the training process; Engagement with the wider community. Dimension II: Operational Conditions Organisational, administrative and financial structure; Human resources; Infrastructure; Technical support and teaching resources. Dimension III: Capacity for Self-regulation Includes, in addition to the criteria, an analysis of the self-evaluation process undertaken: Aims; Integrity.	Guidelines from 2015 onwards. Exempt Resolution No. DJ 009-4 Dimension I: Aims and Institutional Framework of the Programme C1. Aims; C2. Integrity; C3. Graduate Profile; C4. Curriculum; C5. Engagement with the Wider Community. Dimension II: Operational Conditions C6. Organisation and Administration; C7. Academic Staff; C8. Infrastructure and Learning Resources; C9. Student Participation and Wellbeing; C10. Knowledge Creation and Research by Academic Staff. Dimension III: Outcomes and Capacity for Self-regulation C11. Effectiveness and Outcomes of the Educational Process; C12. Self-regulation and Continuous Improvement.	Dimension I: Teaching and Outcomes of the Educational Process C1. Graduate Profile; C2. Curriculum; C3. Practical Training; C4. Academic Staff. Dimension II: Strategic Management and Institutional Resources C5. Aims; C6. Governance and Resource Management. Dimension III: Internal Quality Assurance C7. Outcomes and Capacity for Self-regulation; C8. Self-regulation and Continuous Improvement.
Emphases		
* Evaluation of the design of policies and procedures to ensure alignment with stated objectives. * The evaluation focuses on teacher education programmes, which, where applicable, lead to the awarding of a degree. * Between 2007 and 2010, the CNA retained the nine evaluation criteria divided into three analytical dimensions, inherited from the CNAP pilot experience. * The procedure continued to be structured around the programme's self-evaluation, external peer review assessment, and the decision-making process carried out by the CNA or the respective authorised agency. * Entities responsible for the process: CNA or an authorised private agency.	* Evaluation of the design, quality assurance policies and procedures; social responsibility in relation to the sustainability of the educational project; suitability of academic staff and student rights; occupational relevance of the training provided; and the bidirectional nature of community engagement. * Self-evaluation and external evaluation. * 2018, institutional accreditation became mandatory. * * Until 2019, authorised private agencies could conduct accreditation processes. Each operated with its own criteria and implemented its own model for programme accreditation. * From 1 January 2020, legislation discontinued the operation of private accreditation agencies. * In 2021, accreditation of community engagement (VCM) became mandatory.	*Evaluation and Verification of Compliance with the *New Quality Criteria and Standards for the Accreditation of Teaching Degrees and Programmes* (CNA) *Certify the quality of programmes and degrees based on the stated objectives of the institution offering them and in accordance with the current regulatory framework governing the profession. *Accreditation may be granted for up to seven years, depending on the degree of compliance with the established quality criteria and standards. *Some criteria include standards defined as critical; failure to meet these results in non-accreditation of the institution, programme, or degree. The term "critical" refers to a baseline level of compliance—minimum elements that must be demonstrated to ensure quality. .

Source: Author's own elaboration (2024), based on CNA (2010, 2015, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c).

A primary finding of this study allows us to verify the existence of an evolutionary process in the quality assurance policies governing teacher education programmes in Chile. When referring to the evolution of such policies, particular attention is given to the dimensions and evaluation criteria, as these elements concretely reflect changes over time.

As illustrated in Table 1, from 2007 to the present, three distinct periods can be identified, each marked by significant modifications in quality assurance policies. These are specifically observed in the implementation and redefinition of evaluation dimensions and criteria applied to teacher education programmes. Notably, the three evaluation dimensions have remained constant; however, each dimension is subdivided into criteria that operationalise the policy. The persistence of three dimensions does not necessarily suggest a lack of change; rather, a modification has been made in the incidence and scope of each dimension have evolved in accordance with the elements considered for evaluation.

A key aspect of this comparative analysis lies in identifying the reorganisation of dimensions and criteria. Beginning with the first dimension, similarities are observed across the first and second periods, while the third period, although seemingly different, actually consolidates the previous criteria into broader, more comprehensive categories. The first dimension continues to focus on curriculum, encompassing criteria related to graduate profiles and study plans or curricular structures—elements consistently present across all three periods. However, notable changes emerge: in the second period, the criteria of purpose and integrity, originally part of the third dimension, are relocated to the first dimension to align with curricular concerns. In relation to the third period, the criterion related to academic staff—previously part of the second dimension—is incorporated into the first dimension. In the third momentum, the first dimension, which addresses graduate profiles and curriculum, also encompasses practical training and academic staff, considering that the latter criterion includes the training of the academic body, research activity, and engagement with the wider community, thus the need for increasing the recognition of academic staff and their qualifications as relevant components in ensuring training quality, is confirmed

The second dimension retains the same title during the first and second periods; however, in the second period, it integrates new evaluation criteria. In the current third period, both the title and the evaluation criteria differ from those used previously. Elements linked to HEIs operational conditions—such as institutional management, organisational structure, funding, infrastructure, governance systems, and student participation—remain consistent across all three periods in the quality assurance policies in the teacher training programmes. This continuity demonstrates the cross-cutting nature of these elements, both temporally and institutionally. It is also worth noting that criterion C10, originally found in the first dimension during the initial period, is reassigned to the second dimension in the second period and then returns to the first dimension in the third. This criterion gains prominence in the second period, and its relevance is reaffirmed in the third.

Although the third dimension undergoes slight changes in its title, its focus remains on the self-regulation processes specific to the programme. During the first period, this dimension included criteria related to purpose and integrity. In the second period, it incorporated criteria addressing the effectiveness and outcomes of the training process. In the third period, however, it is limited to criteria concerning regulation, self-regulation, and continuous improvement.

A closer look at the evaluation criteria across the three periods reveals notable changes, whether through the introduction of new criteria, the merging of existing ones, or their relocation to different dimensions. These criteria serve to break down and operationalise measurement

parameters and quality assurance standards within teacher education programmes.

For the period 2007–2015 (Table 1), the criteria within Dimension I emphasise a results-oriented logic of evaluation, prioritising outputs and outcomes. There is a notable absence of specific criteria related to teaching staff. Although "Human Resources" is mentioned under Dimension II, its definition refers merely to the minimum resources and processes required to ensure fulfilment of the graduate profile (CNA, 2010, p. 59). A strong emphasis is placed on assessing achievement of the graduate profile, with criteria such as student participation and well-being—introduced only in the second period—conspicuously absent, as is any criterion for evaluating academic staff research or knowledge creation.

In the third dimension, "Self-Regulatory Capacity," the focus is on the analysis of the self-evaluation process itself. No reference is made to concepts such as coexistence management, gender equity, diversity, or inclusion. This omission persists throughout the periods examined, with the exception of 2024, when the CNA introduced a criterion addressing these concerns.

In this initial chronological synchrony, the focus of the criteria is clearly on programme-level evaluation. In contrast, contemporary evaluation efforts centre on quality assurance across macro, meso, and micro-curricular levels, determined by the achievement of graduate profiles.

In the second period, the criteria reflect a broader perspective, extending beyond the declarative content of graduate profiles. Accreditation criteria during this time are expanded to include the assurance of educational quality, social responsibility related to the sustainability of the educational project, teacher suitability, student rights, occupational pertinence, and community engagement based on a bidirectional model.

Moreover, the third dimension, now titled "Results and Self-Regulatory Capacity," merges the previous criteria "Effectiveness of the Teaching–Learning Process" and "Training Outcomes" into a single criterion: "Effectiveness and Outcomes of the Training Process." This indicates the maturation of a more integrated understanding of teaching and learning. The introduction of "Bidimensional Evaluation: Self-Evaluation and External Evaluation." is also noteworthy. Compared to the previous period, this dimension becomes more complex, incorporating additional elements such as self-regulation, effectiveness, training processes, results measurement, and continuous improvement. Thus, the complexity of accreditation criteria increases over time, although a strong focus on results measurement remains.

During this same period, the absence of an integrated accreditation model continued to have negative implications, as confirmed in the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities CRUCH (2020) report, which criticises the CNA's proposed criteria and standards for lacking a foundational framework to support continuous improvement and institutional development.

Additionally, this stage sees the emergence of criteria that highlight various important aspects: institutional quality, implementation of successful educational models, outcomes linked to community engagement, publication in prestigious indexed journals, university internationalisation, successful graduate profile attainment, and high rates of timely graduation. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that within initial teacher education (FID), operationalised criteria omit aspects related to holistic health and self-efficacy competencies—both among institutional teaching staff and teacher trainees.

In the final period analysed, emphasis is placed on criteria relating to "Teaching Dimension" and "Training Process Outcomes." The focus now lies in the evaluation and verification of compliance with the new quality assurance policies for teacher education programmes. This final stage demonstrates considerable progress and successes in the reorientation of evaluation criteria applied to FID programmes.

4. Discussion

Starting from the assertion made by Martínez et al. (2024), namely that "accreditation is a key process to ensure the quality of teacher education" (p. 1133), the results of this comparative analysis on quality assurance policies in teacher education programs in Chile focus on two key elements: evaluation dimensions and the associated criteria. The study reveals that, in fact, there has been an evolutionary process in Chile regarding quality assurance policies for teacher education programs. These are considered policies because, even though the changes are operationalized in terms of dimensions and criteria, they are embedded in a policy framework that has undergone modifications (hence the observed changes in dimensions and criteria), which in turn has affected the behaviour of evaluation processes, as acknowledged in statements by the CNA itself (2018).

One key element worth highlighting—given its significant impact—is the enactment of Law 20.903 (2016). Thus:

Since 2016, with the enactment of Law 20.903, which established the National System for Professional Teacher Development (commonly known as the Teacher Career Law), teacher education programmes can only be accredited by the CNA, and such accreditation is a mandatory requirement for these programmes to be offered (CNA, 2018, para. 1).

The decision to constitute the CNA centralized the accreditation processes of teacher education programmes, taking into account several factors, namely: a) the importance of having an autonomous body to evaluate internal quality assurance, privileging the role of a public institution in overseeing this process (Aguirre, 2018); b) the need for standardized evaluation criteria, especially given that studies like that of Zapata and Clasing (2016) warned of inconsistencies in the use of criteria and quality indicators among the various private agencies responsible for accreditation. These inconsistencies included: number of evaluation processes performed and their evolution over time, distribution of accreditation processes by discipline, preferences for certain types of universities and programmes, decisions on accreditation outcomes, positive or negative, and the length of accreditations granted; c) the professionalization of accreditation processes through CNA-led training for peer evaluators, national commissioners, and official witnesses, among others; d) the guarantee of the ongoing review and improvement of the concept of accreditation itself, where evaluation and self-evaluation are understood as essential components. Studies such as Fernández et al. (2022) highlight in their conclusions that universities and their key stakeholders—students, faculty, administrative staff, and authorities—perceive these developments as a shift toward prioritizing the formative process, institutional support for programmes according to their needs, financial restructuring, improved academic and administrative management, and better regulation; e) aligning efforts to improve education quality across institutions like the

Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), the National Education Council (CNED), and the CNA, in accordance with the principles of Law 20.903 (2016).

It is also important to mention that, during the period from 2007 to 2015, the following advances stand out: prior to this, there were no clear conceptual definitions of educational quality, and accreditation was not mandatory for higher education institutions. The enactment of Law 20.129 on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2006) marked a significant advancement by establishing the accreditation system in effect at that time and assigning the CNA responsibility for designing and managing accreditation processes. These developments advanced both the understanding and operationalization of accreditation criteria and the concept of educational quality in Chile. However, by allowing private agencies—under CNA supervision—to handle accreditation processes, the law also contributed to the proliferation of diverse and often inconsistent evaluation criteria, leading to confusion about what educational quality actually meant.

It is worth mentioning that during this same period, the accreditation criteria used were those inherited from the 2007–2010 phase, in which the CNA maintained the evaluation standards applied in earlier years when the CNAP implemented a pilot accreditation process. This initiative began in 2006, when "Congress unanimously approved the Quality Assurance Law. It was the culmination of a long process that began in 1999 with the pilot project of the National Undergraduate Accreditation Commission" (CNAP, 2007, p. 7).

A second element in the evolution of quality assurance policies is Chile's alignment with international organizations that promote agreements in various areas, including education. This evolution has also been influenced by global developments in accreditation systems, with teacher education placed at the centre of such reforms (Espinoza & Lufin, 2020). Furthermore, it is relevant to note that Chile is considered a model country in accreditation processes due to the quality assurance culture it has developed over time (Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo, 2024; Prieto, 2019).

A third element that accounts for such evolution points to the multidimensional socio-political, cultural, and economic dynamics of Chilean society. Aziz (2018) notes that such development is grounded in "changes in our social, cultural, political, economic, and institutional environment" (p. 4), which shape the development of public educational policies in every area of intervention of a national State (Reyes, 2023).

Given that the evolution of quality assurance policies is particularly reflected in evaluation dimensions and criteria, the results of this study show dynamism in this area. Three distinct moments of restructuring in these elements are clearly identified. But what explains such changes in the microstructure of the accreditation process framework? At its core, this evolution appears to stem from a deeper understanding that prioritizes the educational process, the achievement of graduate profiles committed to students and Chilean society, the tracking of student progress through the implementation of assessment tools, the role of research in teacher training, community engagement, internationalization, etc. Additionally, it seemed that academic and administrative management, service to teacher training, and equity and/or gender equality have become key elements in the CNA's evaluative approach. This suggests a comprehensive

understanding of the process—an understanding that may allow to expand a sense of need to/for build the foundations and generate the conditions to promote a quality culture within institutions, and that it may be settled as a process that permeates all the actions, making it an intrinsic part of the institutional project. Vilca et al. (2023) stress this in their study, emphasizing that such a culture is not only a necessity but an imperative in contemporary Chilean society.

Finally, the restructuring of evaluation dimensions and criteria allows to notice an intent to approach accreditation from its genesis as an integrated and interconnected process. Elements previously seen as distal or peripheral are now understood as central, highlighting the need to bolster teacher education through complexity, integration, and articulation across processes, units, teachers, etc. In this sense, inter-institutional articulation—including the CNA, MINEDUC, and the National Education Council—is also viewed through this lens. However, this effort also requires participation from other stakeholders, such as higher education institutions, consortia, national councils, employers, and others, as noted by the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (2020).

While it is true that significant changes have taken place in quality assurance policies for teacher training programmes, and that researchers and institutions highlight positive elements in these developments, there are also some concerns. For example, Carrasco et al. (2024) argue that although there is general consensus on the need for policy evolution, current frameworks may be understood more as state control mechanisms than as support tools—a view shared by Marquina (2017). In other words: are these policies about oversight and control, or institutional support? Villarroel-Albornoz (2024) points to a growing trend toward management models based on standardization, which, suggested by changing quality assurance policies, may become more entrenched in higher education institutions. This concern was already expressed by Acción Educar (2020). García-Huidobro (2018) had earlier warned of academics' fears regarding the "enormous power" of the CNA. He also expressed concern over the loss of institutional identity in universities due to their alignment with CNA-defined profiles, stating that the CNA "exerts decisive influence over the operation of universities" (p. 296) and criticized the lack of neutrality in evaluations carried out by academic peers from other universities. These concerns were also raised by Marquina (2008, 2017), as well as Scharager and Díaz (2007).

Another issue relates to the social inequalities that characterize Chile and that impact the education system—naturally affecting different programmes and institutions. University trajectories differ, academic cultures vary (often according to institutional history), and disparities in resources, faculty, and student backgrounds persist. These realities significantly influence progress in universities. Standardizing accreditation processes based on outcomes puts smaller, less-resourced universities at a disadvantage. As García-Huidobro (2018) noted, such standardization can result in "levelling down," or alternatively, penalizing less-resourced universities.

Fernández (2024), like García-Huidobro (2018), also critiques the system from an inequality standpoint. However, unlike García-Huidobro, Fernández (2024) addresses the topic exploring correlations between multiple variables: on one side, the increase in entry scores for teacher education programmes in Chile, on the other side, the projected teacher shortage over the coming decade, and finally incorporates a topic associated to the need to strengthen the teaching profession

in the context of low salaries (relative to other professions) and the undervaluation of educators. Low salaries—along with excessive workloads—contribute to high attrition rates among teachers in the Chilean system, as highlighted by a study from the Centre for Advanced Research in Education (2024). As if that were not enough, the OECD (2023) also places Chile among the three lowest-paying countries for teachers relative to other professions in the OECD. These factors are all directly related to social inequality in the Chilean education system and have contributed to the declining social status of the teaching profession, reflected in the yearly drop in applications to teacher education programmes (Donoso, 2025; Elige Educar, 2021; Quiroz et al., 2024; Weiss, 2024). Gender inequality is another dimension, and current policies have increasingly focused on this issue—particularly from the second phase of the quality assurance policy evolution (Paulsen & Escárate, 2024).

All these elements impact the generic framework and the quality assurance model and system in Chile, as discussed in reports by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018) and the World Bank (2021).

Martínez et al. (2024) note that, while quality evaluation in higher education—especially teacher education—is both necessary and relevant, the model imposed in Chile derives from market logics rooted in the country's military dictatorship, echoing arguments by Riquelme and Fuentes (2021).

Lastly, García-Huidobro (2018) criticizes the bureaucratic expansion of quality assurance processes, which slows implementation and enlarges the State Apparatus. Along similar lines, Martínez et al. (2017) suggest that bureaucratic burdens are elements that delay programmes presentations and evaluations.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study allow us to conclude stating that the quality assurance process for teacher education programmes in Chile has been largely shaped by the broader evolution of the national higher education quality assurance system. That is, the fluctuations observed in the process have been influenced both by the actors responsible for accreditation at different points in time, and by the establishment of explicit state objectives concerning quality standards for teacher education.

The evolution of quality assurance policies in teacher education in Chile has led to a reconfiguration of programme evaluation processes, the roles of the responsible bodies, the unification of standards, and of evaluation of dimensions and criteria. These changes reflect a shift in the evaluation approach. Initially, the focus lay predominantly on the measurement of outputs and outcomes. Subsequently, a broader and more integrated perspective began to emerge, placing greater emphasis on elements such as the assessment of graduate profiles, the involvement of key stakeholders—particularly students—and cross-cutting themes such as inclusion and gender equity. In its current phase, the process prioritises the formative process of teacher education and considers how academic and administrative management contribute progressively to the enhancement of initial teacher training, signalling a movement towards the consolidation of an institutional quality culture that permeates university practice in the training of future teachers, from self-regulation, continuous planned, and intentional improvement.

The modifications observed in quality assurance policies, as reflected in the restructuring of dimensions and criteria, have reorganised the normative, administrative, and academic frameworks that interact with the own identity of teacher education programmes in Chile. It is posited that the evolution of such policies enables a refocusing of the core aims of teacher education, thereby improving the effectiveness of proposals that each institution presents to Chilean society in the field of initial teacher training.

Although Chile appears to be setting the pace for quality assurance and accreditation processes in higher education across Latin America, it is equally true that significant challenges remain. Some of these include the need to further develop and implement mechanisms that enhance transparency in the processes; the ongoing training and professionalisation of evaluators and commissioners; and the active participation of higher education institutions (regardless of their typology) in the design and adjustment of mechanisms that support the development and continuous improvement of the quality assurance system—not only in relation to teacher education programmes, but also at the institutional level. Safeguarding the identity of higher education institutions and their respective teacher education programmes offered in Chile, is another pressing concern.

An additional challenge—by no means a minor one—lies beyond the direct legal or administrative responsibility of the CNA, yet it cannot be overlooked, concerns the broader social framework linking teacher education to the professional practice of teaching. This challenge implicates other actors as well, such as the Ministry of Education, the National Education Council, teacher-training institutions, professional associations, scientific societies, and other stakeholders. Issues related to the teaching profession—its social valuation, professional remuneration, and working conditions—are not secondary, especially considering that the demands placed upon teacher education programmes by the CNA appear to be increasingly disconnected from these wider structural elements that affect the professional practice of teaching in Chile.

6. Conflict Of Interest

The authors of this study declare no conflict of interest.

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