

Organisational and cultural similarities and differences in implementing quality in e-learning in Europe

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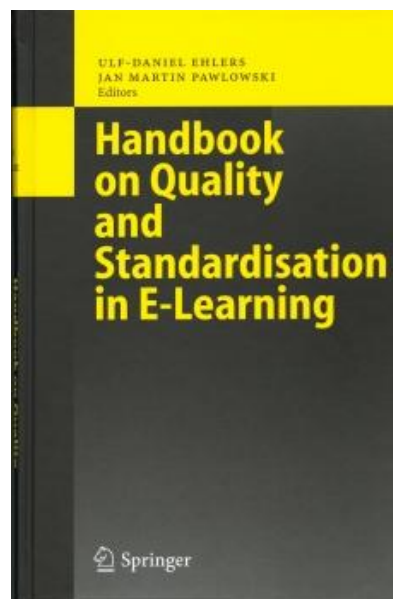
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22 Organisational and cultural similarities and differences in implementing quality in e-learning in Europe

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Abstract

Based on 5 national studies, from Finland, France, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland, the authors present and analyse organisational and cultural factors that can facilitate or block the implementation of Quality in Higher educational institutions in general and for e-learning in particular¹.

They make a comparison between these factors, some of them being common to the 5 countries, the other being relevant for only one or more countries.

This study is supported by the e-Quality Minerva Project (Socrates Programme). It aims the production and validation of training material to train teams in charge of ODL in these 5 countries.

One encounters here one of the important issues on international norms and standards: How to find equilibrium between the need for such specifications and the specificity of each country in terms of organisation and cultural representation of “Quality concepts”?

22.1. Introduction: Facing with Quality in Open and Distance practices

Quality has become in the last years, a very relevant aspect for the organizational life. It should be connected directly with the strategic planning and with the improvement and it can affect any product, process, service, person, etc. In this sense it affects even the organizational culture. Absolutely anything goes close with quality, and ODL Higher Institutions (ODL HI) are not an exception. In the model we present, the student is located as the user, the main element because of his/her role of “client”.

It is remarkable that to create a model that includes the whole universe of the ODL HI, three different views must be included: institutions, teachers and students. The quality treatment would have different aims depending on the selected object. Secondly, each one has different standards to attend. For instance from an institutional perspective there are different focus, such as: Governance and regulation, Curriculum design, Learning experience, Medium of delivery, Student support, Content of programmes, Financial viability, Qualification, Administrative support, Organizational process. (Harvey, 2003)

¹ We thank the authors of the **e-Quality** national reports on which important parts of this article has been based.

These standards, moving into a more in depth detail would be divided in more aspects, for example roles, activities, artefacts or of course others (e.g. Governance and regulation is a standard that needs the role of the decision maker and the educational laws as instrument, etc.). Concluding, quality could face one or more elements related to specific and concrete scenarios, where the cooperation and interaction between the elements of the different levels are needed.

Going to an educator's level, the picture is quite different; Institutional Commitment, Technology, Student Services, Instructional Design and Course Development, Instruction and Instructors, Delivery, Finances, Regulatory and Legal Compliance, Evaluation. However, educators are not of course the only involved roles, there are others, such tutors, programmers, head masters, etc., with their specific standards. (Frydenberg, 2002)

Our model has a student centred perspective, as it is argued in the forthcoming points of this document, and it is an organic element of the project, completely interconnected with the rest of the elements that create a system. Overall, this model should be linked to further actions in the quality field to enhance a more qualified learning, improving the academic achievements, a better knowledge and understanding, a better development of skills (professional too), a high level of satisfaction, etc.

Implementation of quality in Higher Education is nowadays a very important issue. To do it particularly with those programs regarding Open and Distance Learning (ODL) or e-learning is still a real challenge.

To face it, a group of European universities have initiated a project, partly funded by the European Commission under the Socrates/Minerva Programme², in which it is proposed to offer a ground for practical design and implementation of a quality methodology, a training package for staff in charge of its implementation, a validation field and a knowledge data base for results and best practice dissemination.

ODL: Open and Distance Learning is a general expression covering all forms of learning and teaching different from traditional face-to-face training. E-learning is only one form of ODL but ODL is more general in terms of technological means. "Open" refers to Open Universities. Used also as "Online and Distance Learning" for instance at Athabasca University.

The pedagogical approach puts the student's needs at the root of the ODL quality process. This approach is comprehensive: it encompasses all the processes needed to validate in real situation the produced methodology and documents.

² The 3 year e-Quality project (Project number: 110231-CP-1-2003-1-MINERVA-M – 2003-2006) is supported by 7 institutions from 5 European countries:
The Pôle Universitaire Européen de Montpellier-Languedoc Roussillon (France), that is in charge of the management of the project, on behalf of the UO-MLR (Open University - Montpellier-Languedoc Roussillon);
The University Montpellier 2, France;
The UOC (Open University of Catalunya), Spain;
The University of Tampere, Finland;
The Technical University of Szczecin, Poland;
The University of Applied Sciences (Haute Ecole Valaisanne Spécialisée), Switzerland;
The University of Lausanne, Switzerland.
The external evaluation is lead by the Belgian company ATiT.

22.2. Methodology and design of the case studies

The **e-Quality** project starts with the comparative analysis of the partners' context that permits to be aware and detect a set of existing blocking factors in the implementation of quality.

A questionnaire has been designed and validated by partners, to describe the situation in all participating countries: Finland, France, Poland, Spain and Switzerland. This questionnaire is built from general information to more specific one:

- **The educational context**
 - General information (population, unemployment rate, national policy on ICT use...)
 - General information about the access to computers and Internet
 - General aspects of the Higher Education system with some questions about: evaluation process for Higher Education institutions, typology of teachers, use of ICT in teaching, quality
 - General aspects of ODL in the Higher Education system
- **Representation and implementation of quality**
 - Models of quality applied in the country
 - Efforts carried out by national agency(ies) on the implementation of quality in the public and private sectors
 - Main challenges for implementation of quality in the country (problems to solve, areas to improve...)
 - Global view on quality implementation in the country
 - Organizational and cultural specificity of the country that can influence the representation and the implementation of quality in the public organizations
 - Organizational and cultural specificity of the country that can influence the representation and the implementation of quality in the Higher Education institutions
 - Cultural specificity that can influence the representation and the implementation of quality in ODL services or departments within the Higher Education institutions
 - Implementation of quality in traditional universities
 - Current situation of quality implementation in institutions currently offering only ODL courses (if any)
 - Current situation of quality implementation in institutions currently offering both ODL courses and face-to-face courses
- **Implementation of quality in the partner's institution**

National studies have been conducted in the 5 countries using this common questionnaire. Reports have been written. The synthesis includes also an interesting comparison on blocking or helping factors for quality implementation in Higher Education institutions, in general and for ODL in particular. This collaborative work has been used to elaborate the objectives and to build the material of the training of national teams working for ODL development and delivery³. These national reports and a synthesis of them can be found on the project website⁴. This article presents the main results of this first step of the project.

³ The project aims to produce a training package to train, in face to face and at distance, several teams of concerned staff (both trainers, technicians and administrative, with students as observers) on quality, at least one in each participating country. Each trained team is to experiment these supports in their own ODL training programme.

22.3. Quality in higher education: 5 case studies

We present here, after some general references and the position of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, the situation of quality implementation in the 5 participating countries as seen from the national reports.

22.3.1. Different models for different geographical areas

As described by Kells (Kells,1993), there are three main models of quality assessment in education, regarding four basic variables: the assessment purpose, the evaluation framework, the wideness of the approach and the main procedures of the system. Also Kells considers, from a worldwide approach four basic models: the American, the European Continental, the British and the Scandinavian ones.

The American tries to improve the institutional programmes and give guarantee to the users. It is focused on the achievement of institutional goals. The European Continental is based on the fact of extending the guarantee not only to the users, but to the Administration and Government as well. Peer-assessment is usually adopted.

The British model emphasizes on academic degrees standards and to establish quality criteria. Peer-assessment and performance indicators are the tools used the most. Finally, the Scandinavian one is a diversification of the European Continental one, introducing accountability purposes and external assessment practices.

As the five countries analysed in our project belong to the European Continental and Scandinavian models, similarities are quite evident. We will try to point out mainly on the differences.

It is also true that most of these models are attempts to adapt to the educational field the corporate sector certification standards. Quality management systems are not so commonly used in education, because they have not suited well enough for the quality of education, even if, in professional and vocational education, there are some standard and certificated systems which have been used, e.g. in the demonstration of competencies.

22.3.2. Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area

As mentioned in the Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin in 2003 (Berlin, 2003): “The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area”. After reaffirming that each institution is responsible for its own Quality Assurance, based on the principle of institutional autonomy, the Ministers “stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies” and they fixed 2005 as a deadline for ENQA⁵ “to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies”.

⁴ www.e-quality-eu.org

⁵ ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. <http://www.enqa.net/>

In fact, during the Bergen conference in May 2005, the Ministers adopted “the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA” (Bergen, 2005), stressing that “there is still progress to be made, in particular as regards student involvement and international cooperation.”. From this date, these “standards and guidelines” (ENQA, 2005) must be considered as the main reference for quality assurance in Higher Education at the European level and are also relevant for ODL, even if in this case some other criteria have to be taken into account.

22.3.3. The situation in Finland

EFQM, TQM, and ISO 9000 certification standards, are common in Finland⁶. Many subjects affect the quality in the public Finnish organizations. There are well-built infrastructures, high standard of education and technological knowledge is high. There are also stable social welfare and equal circumstances. Quality management systems are very common in Finland and there are many rationales to implement a quality system, e.g. the motivation of staff, competitiveness, marketing advantages, better quality in all functions, better communication and organizational culture. University is based on Humboldtian ideals of autonomy, freedom of research and teaching and the unity of research and teaching. The Ministry of Education and The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (**FINHEEC**) favour decentralized quality work. The universities have been opposed to the establishing of a national quality agency. Quality assurance is considered as the universities’ task. The Ministry of education recommends that universities and polytechnics develop quality assurance systems, which should a) meet the developing quality assurance criteria of the European Higher Education area, b) be part of the operational steering and management system, c) cover the entire operation of the higher education institution, d) be interrelated as part of the normal operations of the higher education institution, e) be continuous, f) be documented, and g) enable the participation of all members of the higher education community in quality work. The **FINHEEC** gathers information about the quality work in the universities; it doesn’t produce formal quality models for the universities’ purposes. Quality models that are created by individual institutions are not very formal models, but more guidelines on how to enhance quality. However, these quality systems are not very visible or transparent systems for the universities’ personnel or the outside actors to perceive.

22.3.4. The situation in France

There are specific and formal models applied in France for quality management mainly: ISO 9000, EFQM and TQM. A few public Higher Education institutions have implemented a formal quality step. But all are involved, at least, in a self-evaluation based on the “Book of reference”⁷ edited by the National Committee for Evaluation (**CNE**⁸), the agency in charge of the evaluation of Higher Education institutions. It is independent from the Ministry. “The book of references and the logic of demonstration” explains the new approach to the evaluation of Higher Education institutions; it is designed as “a tool to support the setting up of quality assurance procedures and as a document that will facilitate institutions’ entry into the European Higher Education area”.

⁶ EFQM Annual Quality Award ceremony and seminar were organized in Finland in Autumn 2003.

⁷ English short version: http://www.cne-evaluation.fr/WCNE_pdf/bulletin38bis.pdf

French full version: http://www.cne-evaluation.fr/WCNE_pdf/LivrereferencesCNE.pdf

⁸ <http://www.cne-evaluation.fr/>

22.3.5. The situation in Poland

In Poland, product certification is performed by Polish Research and Certification Centre (PCBC⁹). Their main objectives are investigation and certification of products, Quality management certification and auditors certification. About difficulties to implement Quality in Poland, one can mention:

- Society does not force the use of quality standards ;
- Lack of funds ;
- Lack of formal support on quality initiatives.

In Poland, **the State Accreditation Committee (SAC¹⁰)** is the only organisation authorised-in-law operating to control quality in education process in Higher Education institutions. SAC negative rating implies the decision from Ministry of Education to withdraw its authorisation on particular institution which does not respond with applicable quality indicators (restricting the fault specialisation at the higher education institution).

Poland suffers from lack of institutions supporting quality in ODL in general. The ODL process establishment and formation are considered ‘fresh’, challenging, not widespread. Only few higher education institutions exist offering ODL courses and these are parts of traditional institutions (universities and technical universities). The distance learning student does not represent legal student status (only as extern student status). Therefore, the quality implementation is at a very limited and restricted level.

22.3.6. The situation in Spain

The Spanish Education law (LOGSE) opted for the application of different European quality models, overall the EFQM model (but it was not the only one), quality being defined in the following phrase: “the users’ satisfaction of the public education services, of the teachers and staff personnel, and the impact in the society can be achieved through a leadership which fosters the planning and strategy in the educational institution, its human resources management, resources and processes to improve the results permanently”. The National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, **ANECA¹¹**, is a State foundation. Its purpose is to assure quality in the Spanish university system, assessing and publicizing Higher Education performance, and reinforcing transparency and comparability in the Spanish system. Nevertheless, autonomous communities have the possibility to create specific quality agencies, and this is what the Catalan and Andalusian regions have done. At this stage, both Spanish and Catalan Agencies for Quality in Higher Education are developing quality and accreditation criteria for the new fully online courses.

In discharging its functions, the **ANECA** is likewise bound to co-ordinate and co-operate with the external assessment bodies existing for similar purposes within and under the laws of the different Autonomous Governments.

22.3.7. The situation in Switzerland

The Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ¹²) is an academically independent institution, trying to define its own certification model. Each

⁹ <http://www.pcbc.gov.pl/certyfikacja.html>

¹⁰ Source: <http://www.men.waw.pl/pka/index.php>

¹¹ <http://www.aneca.es>

¹² <http://www.oaq.ch/>

Academic University defines its own model of quality, which has to be validated by the OAQ. Applied Universities refer to eduQua and ISO 9000 but not specifically for ODL courses. A specific norm called eduQua¹³ has been developed for continuing education institutions. It qualifies a good formation, assures and develops the quality in the continued education institution, offers more transparency for the consumers. Presently, 406 education enterprises are certified eduQua. Nevertheless, the students will preferably choose a certified institution, but it is only one of the criteria for them and not the most important one.

22.4. Organizational and cultural specificities that influence the implementation of quality in higher education institutions in 5 European countries

We present here, based on the national studies, some specificities that can explain why differences exist between these European countries in term of implementation of quality in their Higher Education institutions. We consider two main aspects, as they are explicitly mentioned in the objectives of our project: the organisational aspects (i.e. the status of the different kinds of teachers, the way institutions are evaluated or not...) and the cultural aspects (i.e. the general representation of quality in education, the interest of teachers for pedagogy, the use or not of an evaluation of courses by students and its impact on teachers...).

22.4.1. The situation in Finland

Main challenges in Higher Education institutions have an influence on quality implementation. First of all, autonomy of universities is an important issue. Universities differ from other educational institutions due to their large size and the heterogeneous nature of the different departments. This is the reason why changes and even improvements are adopted slowly in universities. Multidisciplinary universities have difficulties in creating quality models that are general enough but yet compatible with the department's own culture.

There are in some departments much expertise on leadership, management, and quality assurance that could be used for the benefit of the whole of the University. In order to benefit from this strength, the University needs an effective mechanism for transferring its knowledge and expertise in academic quality assurance not only across departments within a faculty, but also across faculties. Another difficulty is a lack of transparency in administrative decisions. Support by the administration is needed. The lack of support is a common challenge in quality development. It influences the teacher's work, e.g. the teacher can feel that the work s/he does for a better quality is not appreciated.

Quality work is often seen as a hard and time consuming work.

22.4.2. The situation in France

In spite of so called "university autonomy" most of university organization is defined by a law, most of university budget comes from the state, nearly all of university staff (including researchers and professors) are paid by the state. At university level, professors are recruited on their thesis and research and on their bibliography and scientific publications; their career is done mainly on the same base, with little consideration on the involvement in pedagogy.

¹³ http://www.eduqua.ch/002alc_00_fr.htm

The same is true of ODL: pedagogy being not a specific issue, if one knows a subject, one can teach it face-to-face; if one can teach face to face, one can teach at a distance... Professors' evaluation by students is very seldom done. Quality of teaching and students' success are not the priority of the majority of teachers at university level. Universities have problem with quality implementation because they can hardly address the questions: "What are the services that an university must deliver? How are they evaluated? By whom? Do the universities deal with clients? Who pays for what? ». Teaching/teacher is at the core of university organisation, not learning/learner. Pedagogical approaches, learner centred, are not obvious in French culture.

Another blocking factor still remains: the status of ODL teaching is not fully recognised for University teachers: only on-campus teaching is recognised by French legislation to fulfil teaching obligations. Several universities have by passed the problem but with not fully legal arrangements. This situation is one of the most blocking factors for further development of ODL in Universities.

22.4.3. The situation in Poland

Three main issues are important in Poland in regard with quality: the number of High Education institutions, the lack of thorough participants' verification, because of evolving staff, and varying conditions and also the lack of clear and responsive quality normative body for Higher Education institutions.

22.4.4. The situation in Spain

Similarly to school education, in the last 10 years Spain has lived two changes of government, whose have proposed educational reforms with some differences. It is quite probable that the last law (LOU) is discussed again due to the new changes in the government.

There is a continuous debate about the university: its function, the appropriateness of the increasing use of ICT, the growth of the university participation, the new importance of 'humanism training', the relationship with the labour market and the importance of the 'professional function'.

Concerning the role of the teacher, it is moving from a mere transmitter of knowledge to an academic counsellor or facilitator and someone which may fit the students' needs. At last we have to mention the importance of the value of autonomy and the function of quality agencies in the evaluation, certification and accreditation processes.

22.4.5. The situation in Switzerland

Cooperative Federalism is one of the most important cultural aspects that influence quality evaluation process in Switzerland. With 4 official different languages¹⁴, one has to take into account different points of views. In German part, people are more quality oriented than in French or Italian parts. Focusing on learning quality evaluation process, it is to note that in this country, one generally thinks that if every minor task is certified, the whole process will present the best quality and doesn't think about including a large creative vision of the process. Learners are generally considered like any other "product" and pedagogy is not often included in the norm. This point of view on learning process qualification will not increase quality of future qualified institutions. ODL has a very short history in this country so quality is oddly not the first preoccupation of ODL course developers and sustainers.

¹⁴ French, German, Italian and Romanche

22.5. Examples of quality strategies in institutions offering ODL courses

We present here several examples of existing quality strategies in institutions that deliver ODL courses in 3 of the participating countries, to illustrate the on-going process of quality implementation.

22.5.1. Examples in France

We can mention two examples with interesting results.

In 2001, the French National Centre for Distance Education (CNED¹⁵) has launched a quality step and a Director of Quality has been appointed. Within the framework of the institution programme (2005-2007), a quality policy, accompanied by objectives / criteria and by indicators, is in final phase of elaboration around four axes:

- Quality of the services,
- Satisfaction of the customers,
- Satisfaction of the staffs,
- Look for financial balances.

This situation is to be mentioned as CNED is the oldest and largest French institution dedicated to ODL and has a reputation of being conservative, very heavy to move and kind of old-fashioned. Such quality "offensive" – learner centred – is quite surprising but illustrate a real change in the policy of the institution: they have to get more students and – above all – to keep them, in a difficult environment where CNED has many competitors.

In 2003 a study was lead for the Ministry of Education on the quality process within the "Campus numériques" (Digital Campuses)¹⁶.

Several main points must be noticed:

- The quality improvement aims first the trainees;
- Certification is not a crucial objective for most of the respondents;
- Main objective: a good level of satisfaction for both students and staff.

In 2003, 64 ODL formations obtained a label to which four campuses concerning the electronic environments of work added¹⁷. This study shows that a change appeared in the representation of training in these institutions: trainees' satisfaction is an objective and is linked with quality. This evolution is in accordance with Bergen communiqué.

22.5.2. Example in Poland

The ODL department on Technical University of Warsaw (called OKNO), at the bachelor level, has implemented two quality systems, one focused on the didactic process, the second one on the computer infrastructure. All didactic materials and production procedure are standardized. The quality factor is increased by the feedback between the teachers and the students.

¹⁵ <http://www.cne-evaluation.fr/>

¹⁶ Details on: <http://www.educnet.education.fr/superieur/CN-demarchkal.htm>

¹⁷ <http://www.educnet.education.fr/superieur/qualintro.htm>
<http://www.educnet.education.fr/chrgt/CN-demarchkal.pdf>
<http://www.educnet.education.fr/superieur/campusqualite.htm>

List institutions having obtained a quality label: <http://www.educnet.education.fr/superieur/CNlabel.htm>

22.5.3. Example in Spain

UOC has its own quality model, based on the EFQM model, which is also used for institutional evaluation purposes. Concerning the organizational part, the UOC model follows the lifecycle of the learner, from the beginning of the student-institution relationship until the end of these. This vision is very pragmatic as it allows to design and evaluate processes fitting the learners' needs during all their lifecycle at UOC. The way in which we design the process map follows the EFQM model. On the second hand, the quality must also be focused in learning processes. This is the 'evaluation of the methodology', centred in three macro-indicators: learners' success, learners' satisfaction and learners' drop-out level. These indicators are measured by asking learners about them in several e-learning fields (learning materials, virtual learning environments, teachers' role and tasks, assessment, contents...). An organised system of structured questionnaires has been created, called 'Balance Scorecard for methodology', which allows to gather information about the situation in the UOC's subjects and degrees. This is a measure process, but not an evaluation one (understanding measure as getting information and evaluation as decision making).

The results obtained by these questionnaires are the basis to generate hypothesis, for instance: "students from technical degrees have less problems to use virtual tools than other students"; "the drop out level during the first month is very high because learners are not motivated by the institution"... The data obtained from this MCQ system allow to go in depth with the evaluation of specific aspects of the courses, which will be carried out through interviews with learners, teachers, staff... and through specific questionnaires.

22.6. Summary: Organisational and cultural factors blocking or helping quality implementation

The political commitment of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education for Quality Assurance, as presented in the Communiqué of Berlin in 2003, and confirmed during the Bergen Meeting in 2005, is, potentially, a strong opportunity to develop quality steps in the Higher Education institutions in general and in ODL in particular. However there still exist some critical factors that will influence this initiative and overall any other implementation of quality in the ODL.

As it had been said before, five different countries with their concrete reality had been analysed under the frame of the **e-Quality** Project. After the data obtained had been studied, four main categories have been built up when dealing with favourable or blocking factors for the quality implementation in ODL in Higher Institutions. The first one is dedicated to the favourable factors that are common in the whole countries. The second category is related to the favourable factors just detected in some scenarios. The third category deals with the blocking factors that appear in the five national reports, while the fourth and last group of factors is devoted to just specific blocking dimensions in four or less countries.

22.6.1. Facilitating factors for quality development

Moving to the first category of common favourable factors, some similarities exist for the university evaluation process. For instance, quality is a compulsory process in all the countries with no exception. Furthermore, quality is a process that is always defined by the state. The five states count with national agencies that are in charge of quality, even if they don't have the same status, especially in Finland. Another coincidence is the practice of an

internal and an external evaluation. And lastly, quality is always an implicit or explicit objective at the university level.

Apart of the university evaluation process and going in depth with ODL Higher Institutions, there is a set of favourable factors for the whole countries such these:

- The new European degree organization (Bachelor Master Doctorate) will lead universities to publicize their training programmes and to facilitate to their students an access to training modules from other universities;
- The ECTS system with possible equivalence of credits will promote student virtual mobility;
- With an easier and faster access to Internet, the universities begin to face concurrence with other European universities;
- ODL appears as a new reality and a means to attract national and foreign students;
- The evolution of technologies, including high-speed access to Internet, development of e-mail communication, forums, videoconferences, streaming video etc., make possible the condition for high level ODL services.

However a large effort is still needed to help teachers and technical staff to produce better training material and to offer better services (e.g. tutoring), as far as there are blocking factors dedication to overcome the situation is needed.

The second category, non common favourable factors in all the countries, represent almost all the countries trends but with just one or two exceptions. In this sense, a positive statement that has to be highlighted is that society compels quality standards. Beside this factor some others set up this group such:

- There is some formal support on quality initiatives;
- Highly centralized management of public services does not decrease operational aspects;
- The value “autonomy” is important to create and develop quality practices;
- ODL is not anymore a marginal means of learning;
- The importance of “humanism training” is increasing in universities.

22.6.2. Barriers for quality development

Before going in detail with the third and fourth categories, there are some factors that were perceived as blocking ones at the beginning of the work but they were finally concluded as “non blocking factors”, this do not mean they are favourable but just “non blocking”:

- Lack of training as “virtual teachers”;
- Lack of high speed bands which do not allow to work with some ICT tools;
- Institutions do not provide clear methodology on how to use the ICT to learning;
- ODL policies not promoting enough a specific use of ICT and methodologies in ODL;
- No budget allocation for quality implementation;
- No known models of quality used in universities;
- Universities using unknown models of quality do not have a clear definition about the theoretical aspects and implementation of such a model (the process is not documented);
- Existing national agencies do not propose special models for ODL courses;

- National agencies do not provide specific certificates which guarantee that a university is applying quality measures¹⁸ (lack of quality certificates);
- Management of quality is highly centralized at a national level;
- No specific policies in quality implementation.

Another set of factors is still under discussion, in other words, the **e-Quality** team has not yet decided whether they are or not blocking factors:

- Quality systems in ODL do not have clear indicators, these are not well defined and there are no orientations on how to measure;
- The quality system is not integrated in the management system of the institution.

There is a clear consensus on the third established category that starts treating the non favourable aspects and consequently deals with the common blocking factors. The ones listed below should be taken into a very serious consideration because they are mentioned in the five national reports. Furthermore, these factors are all of them very relevant in quality terms:

- High focus is put on teaching instead of learning;
- To design quality ODL material is time consuming.

¹⁸ It is not a perceived blocking factor because basically the issue is more related to certification than to quality.

In the following table we present some examples of blocking factors in 2 to 4 countries.

Table 22-1: Blocking factors and their distribution within the 5 participating countries (In bold: factors directly linked with quality in ODL)

	Fi	Fr	Pl	Sp	Sw
Blocking factors common to 4 countries					
Teachers are reluctant to be evaluated	x	x		x	x
Low value of the pedagogical issues: when recruiting new university teachers, the pedagogical skills are not a prerequisite	x	x	x		x
Copyright issues are not taken into account	x	x	x		x
Traditional low consideration of ODL and consequently no recognition of ODL teaching	x	x	x	x	
Blocking factors common to 3 countries					
Lack of technical assistance for the staff		x	x	x	
Lack of preparation to new methodologies and tools		x	x	x	
‘You can teach face-to-face when you know the content, and you can teach at distance when you can teach face-to-face’	x	x			x
Blocking factors common to 2 countries					
Need for good infrastructures, high standards in education, high technologic skills	x		x		
Role of the teacher ¹⁹	x			x	
Lack of training on the use of ICT for the staff	x			x	
Diverse concepts of success in education			x	x	
Diversity and too many educational reforms			x	x	
Lack of transparency in decisions		x		x	
Costs			x	x	
Unclear criteria to reward e-authors and e-trainers		x		x	
Teachers’ training in ODL is not favoured within the universities		x			x

22.7. Conclusions: Main challenges for implementation of Quality in Higher Education

Most challenges are related with management in Higher Education institutions and the difficulty of considering students as “clients” more than “users” and definitely different of “products”.

In addition, there are not particular quality models fully adapted to the educational reality. In some countries, lack of formal regulations considering ODL in the same level of conventional education is also an important handicap. On the other hand, some norms are too

¹⁹ In Spain for instance, there are considerable differences between the values of the teachers, the assumptions of the educational reforms and the requests of parents and society.

manufacturing process-based integrating too many administrative issues, so a need of inclusion of pedagogical approaches is needed.

Nevertheless, the **e-Quality** project is an interesting opportunity to develop and validate a set of pertinent and clear indicators that enable the measurement of results and give confidence enough in order to make growing a good image of ODL quality.

Authors

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