Mexican Education Quality Standards in private schools: Perspectives from Students, Teachers and Administrators

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QUALITY STANDARDS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Abstract

Even though the education sector has established several successful strategies for boosting the comprehension of Mexican students, little advancement has been achieved in quality assurance processes and international accreditation at a high-school level to contribute to higher education standards.

Mexican educational institutions are looking for innovative and creative ways to improve quality standards while implementing different methods and frameworks to assure they are able to compete in the 21st century. This is in response to students graduating from high school without skills required to be contributors to society's advancement at the technological, economic, social and human levels. In an effort to achieve excellence, private high schools across the country are pursuing international accreditation which endorses excellence in education through robust quality assurance and accountability. The process of an international accreditation involves rigorous procedures, including self-evaluation by all stakeholders and members of the education community, including students, teachers, alumni, parents, and administration to evaluate their vision and mission. One could question if the use of international quality standards are appropriate in a developing country. The purpose was to critically examine and analyse the perspectives of students, teachers and administrators on quality standards and the accreditation process. This study was examined through an Appreciative Inquiry lensed using a mixed method approach. Semi-structured interviews and surveys were used as data collection tools with students, teachers and administrators from a prestigious group of 4 private Mexican high schools, across 4 states in Mexico. A total of 385 students, 74 teachers, and administrators answered a survey about their perceptions of quality and academic excellence in their institutions. For this purpose, 4 senior teachers/administrators and 15 students were interviewed. The study concludes with a conceptualization of academic quality from a local perspective of students, teachers and administrators infused with a bottom-up approach to give a voice and promote agency among stakeholders to complement a national and international accreditation process. The contribution to the field suggests having more

contextualised quality standards to foster deeper understanding and avoid the one-fits-all

paradigm of standardisation of academic quality.

Keywords: international accreditation, quality standards, private high schools, academic

excellence, creativity, and innovation.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1   Introduction

Educational rankings and global trends in education mean that institutions are involved in a competitive market to achieve "excellence". This leads to the measurement of quality of knowledge, information, education, and training to sustain the value of education mainly influenced by socio-political and economic initiatives.

It could be argued that policymakers' interest should be to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the processes and the alignment with institutional vision and mission (Dill & Soo, 2005). In the Mexican education context, international accreditation in K-12 is a very new process. In fact, a group of high schools in Mexico is one of the first private institutions to be accredited as a group of 8 schools that are trying to incorporate quality standards, policies and procedures in a context where some of these do not exist, as Mexican schools operate differently from the US as socio-economic issues and governance vary from country to country. International accreditation can be defined according to Kells (1995), as a periodical self-evaluation process supported by a private agency to raise accountability and set new organisational goals by following certain quality standards to promote a positive change (as cited in Blanco Ramirez, 2015).

Therefore, when it comes to quality, it is challenging to determine who should define the quality standards in education, especially as there is pressure for compliance and accountability with international regulations across cultures, policies and jurisdictions, while educators have their own perception of quality in their educational setting in a "global education crisis" (Smith & Benavot, 2019). Therefore, focusing on quality control in Mexico provides an ambitious and innovative market opportunity, but also raises a number of concerns in enhancing the overall quality of education as it involves multiple steps to implement quality when policies are not clear nor aligned to US international standards. That said, the United States is the greatest global quality assurance provider (Ewell, 2008) and appears to be the

international accreditor pioneer in the world (Dill, 1997; Raisberg, 2011, as cited in Blanco Ramirez, 2015).

However, in order to become more competitive, internationally recognised and gain new enrollment, private Mexican institutions are seeking the "golden seal" towards innovative marketisation of education to raise the prestige of the institution with a global focus (Blanco Ramirez, 2015).

Some of the challenges that institutions are faced with when introducing a new system for international accreditation in education when evaluating quality control and quality assurance in K-12 schools in Mexico may create tension and resistance across disciplines as the perception of quality and academic excellence or best practices differ from individual to individual, and from institution to institution. Moreover, some recommendations or tasks may be perceived as though the methods teachers have been using for many years no longer serve the educational purposes of the school system of tomorrow leading to a change of the school's identity.

Secondly, international accreditation requires a high level of information translated, created and coordinated by a group of leaders, in addition to an assessment of the requirements during the different stages of development. These are to determine the main goals and direction of the institutional policies and practices in the near future. However internal perceptions of stakeholders are also essential to contribute to this goal, but very little attention is given to the development of quality standards internally. Moreover, teachers, coordinators and administrators already have an intense workload, and this would add more tasks and challenges to their practice. Furthermore, unlike professionals in other occupations, instructors and students have little chance to improve quality initiatives by focusing and defining what is good for student success with real world outcomes. Also, selecting the finest instructor for an institution is an elevated undertaking, loaded with the risk that the selection will not benefit student development (Jacobo & Jansen, 2018). Personnel in charge of selecting instructors may have differing opinions on evaluating candidates to find the best "fit" for the job (Francis et al., 2021) while lacking other important aspects to fulfil student needs. Individuals responsible for

hiring in different school districts can usually be assumed to be attempting to employ the most experienced teachers, examinations and other screening procedures for the recruitment. Such standards, including entry requirements and maintenance incentives, may be established in guideline documents in authority in alignment with administrators, teachers and students' perspectives.

A third challenge is that the implementation of a proper framework in regards to quality and academic excellence would be needed to evaluate academic quality, to better measure results for academic success and advancement to higher education. Even though some might suggest (higher) education is not just there to support the workforce, one could argue that the support of creativity and innovation in education will also support a deeper engagement with knowledge and information by learners as these are motivational drivers in the learning process (Halliwell, 1993). It is suggested that from all the skills, creativity and innovation are two of the top five skill sets demanded in today's global world (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006) and have already been highlighted as important 25 years ago. Then, it will be interesting to see if the current process of accreditation examines creativity and innovation as a driver for quality in the Mexican context.

1.2 Problem statement and purpose of research.

According to the OECD Mexico´s education system is one of the most complicated ones in the world. It is the second country with the highest inequality with one of the lowest income and economic growth (Perez, 2019). Therefore, the need to improve quality and access to education is required to level up the disparities among different socioeconomic groups to better prepare students for the future. Moreover, Mexico represents one of the lowest levels in education attainment, as only less than 60% of male and female Mexicans graduate from high school (Perez, 2019). However, in the local private sector, institutions are finding innovative ways to redesign higher-quality standards to assure accountability and high-quality teacher and student development at a human, cultural, economic and social level.

As part of a Mexican private institution, seeking quality standardised evaluation through an American Institution might demonstrate multiple misalignments as a result of the

sociocultural and economic aspects. Therefore, this accreditation process involves more than evaluating quality as it informed me as a researcher of how to effectively reinforce a culture of "care" not only for students but for teachers that will include creativity in the education process embedded in the mission, values, and vision of the schools. (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008).

Teaching quality and teaching creativity definitions are somewhat subjective, according to Andiliou and Murphy, (2010). Some educational researchers refer to them as a process, others as a product. Therefore, it is challenging to fully grasp and appraise this lifelong learning process. In fact, conceptions of quality teaching happen to be stakeholder dependent: students, teachers or evaluation agencies do not share the definition of what "good" teaching is or what "good" teachers are (Henard and Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p.4).

1.3 What is quality of education?

Harvey and Stensaker define quality education as the degree to which an educational system can produce desired outcomes through the efficiency of resources to ensure high-quality teaching and learning processes (Rosa et al., 2012). Quality education is more than just the quantity of resources allocated to a system; it is also about the quality of the teaching and learning processes. Quality education is not only concerned with the end product but also demands that the techniques used to create the end product are of a high standard. Quality education requires teachers, students, and administrators to work together to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved efficiently and effectively (Stronge & Xu, 2021). Quality education must also adjust to the changing needs of society, the sociocultural context and the environment in which it operates and respond to these needs on time.

Even though there are multiple definitions and assumptions about quality of education being made in the last five decades, most of them relate to the quality in higher education. However, very little has been done in describing academic quality in a private high school education setting in Mexico. One that resonates the most with this research, involves student centeredness, high quality content, innovative instruction materials, skills development, and specialised teachers. All to provide a nurturing global community to broaden students'

cognitive, emotional, physical, cultural, social, and technological competencies that have a ripple effect on the society they live in (Ramirez Abdala, 2023). This envisions quality to not only involve how educational practices are related to international standards and league tables but also to local values and educational priorities. This involves local creativity and innovation related to global technological change.

1.4 What is creativity?

Halliwell (1993) describes creativity in teachers as an authentic, meaningful and innovative relevant process which involves not only the student but also the teacher (Woods, 1990). A more recent perspective on creativity is suggested by Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) as it promotes and fosters authentic interactions, demonstrates originality, and cutting-edge professional skills, to articulate innovative ideas and promote new knowledge across disciplines. The 21st-century skills are defined as the set of "skills and competencies future graduates will need to have in order to be effective workers and citizens in a global society" (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p.8). Furthermore, in daily practice, in the Mexican educational context, students and teachers might perceive that their classes are not engaging enough as these are mostly textbook based with limited meaningful opportunities to explore skills relevant to their needs. Yet there is a demand on students to be creative in their learning process, but this is not reflected in how the teachers' own skills impact students' performance (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). The teacher is influenced by the student and administration, and equally, the student is influenced by the teacher and the exposure to different learning environments (Ramirez, 2023).

1.5 Difference between good, excellent and real-world education

At a macro level perhaps, there is a need to look beyond skills and competencies to focus on what the purpose of quality of education is, academic excellence, and connect it to the real world. Biesta (2015) argues that the purpose of education needs to be the main focus rather than wanting to provide 'excellent' education (p.1). Additionally, Saunders and Blanco Ramírez argued that even though teaching excellence is synonymous with a legitimate institutional commitment and accountability towards internationalisation, it also represents the

shadows of the "commodification of teaching and learning" (2017, p.2). Therefore, while facing a highly competitive global professional and learning environment, universities and employers are seeking capable global citizens adapting to innovative systems, perhaps higher academic and quality standards (i.e. international accreditation) in many areas, involving creativity and innovation as part of the skills required in the 21st century. Good education, on the other hand, is often understood as providing essential skills and knowledge to students that are necessary for them to participate successfully in a particular subject (Biesta, 2015). Excellent education is typically defined as providing an educational experience and reaching a higher standard than what is generally offered in a traditional academic setting. It could include providing a more comprehensive and in-depth look at a subject, which might be done through more advanced coursework and higher-level research while gaining a positive outcome (Astin, 2012). Real-world education is a type of education that is more focused on preparing students for the real world, such as the workplace. This type of education focuses on building skills and knowledge necessary for success in the professional world, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. However, one might argue that a connection between these different quality indicators and a link between global standards and local realities is required to ensure an education that creates effective learning journeys.

Mexico's high school education system is characterised by limited resources available to students and teachers, a lack of creativity and innovation in teaching, and a largely textbook-based approach. This environment can lead to students and teachers feeling disengaged, as there are limited opportunities to explore skills relevant to their needs (Cimoli, 2013). Additionally, the quality of education may be affected because many students enter the system with lower literacy and numeracy levels, which can lead to lower overall academic performance.

The education quality in Mexico largely depends on the type of school a student attends. Private schools tend to offer a higher education rate due to the increased availability of resources and more experienced teachers who are better paid. Private schools also have more access to technology, which helps with teaching and learning. On the other hand, public schools face resource constraints and often have a lower quality of education due to the lack of

materials, outdated textbooks, and teacher training (Berry, 2011). Additionally, public schools in Mexico have a reputation for having a higher rate of absenteeism and lower student achievement levels.

The role of private and public schools in Mexico is to provide education for children and young people. Both types of schools, however, are expected to provide a safe and stimulating learning environment that encourages students to reach their full potential (Adeyemo, 2012). Private schools may also offer additional services, such as extracurricular activities and a global approach, while public schools are only expected to provide essential educational services. Ultimately, the role of both private and public schools in Mexico is to provide quality education and prepare students for their future while closing the gap of higher attrition rates and widening participation towards higher education focusing on policy, leadership and infrastructure.

The goal of a meaningful education according to Biesta (2015) is not only limited to skill development but also involves self-empowerment (subjectification) and fostering a community at a local and global level (socialisation). Therefore, we have to bear in mind the question, what is the purpose of education? What does it mean to have academic quality without delivering a one-fits-all education system?

Biesta agrees that learning and education have their own voices and tensions, both with different ways of doing things. Moreover, quality of education is a set of high standards of intentional actions that are part of a process.

Biesta (2015) differentiates the tensions between these two, inferring that learning and education do not relate to each other, as everyone wishing to learn does not need to have an education per se. On the other hand, he argues that the purpose of education is not to make learning possible but to engage in the process with different realities. Biesta points out a significant gap between learning and education. In this process "the risk of education" only appears to be a negative result when it is seen as a predictable process, in other words, when students are perceived as objects instead of active participants or subjects leading their own life with an open mind during the process. In his philosophy of education, he focuses on a three-

dimensional perspective of subjectification that means taking the initiative of their own experience or events in life, while enhancing human aspects within a community.

Figure 1. The purpose of Education (Biesta, 2010)
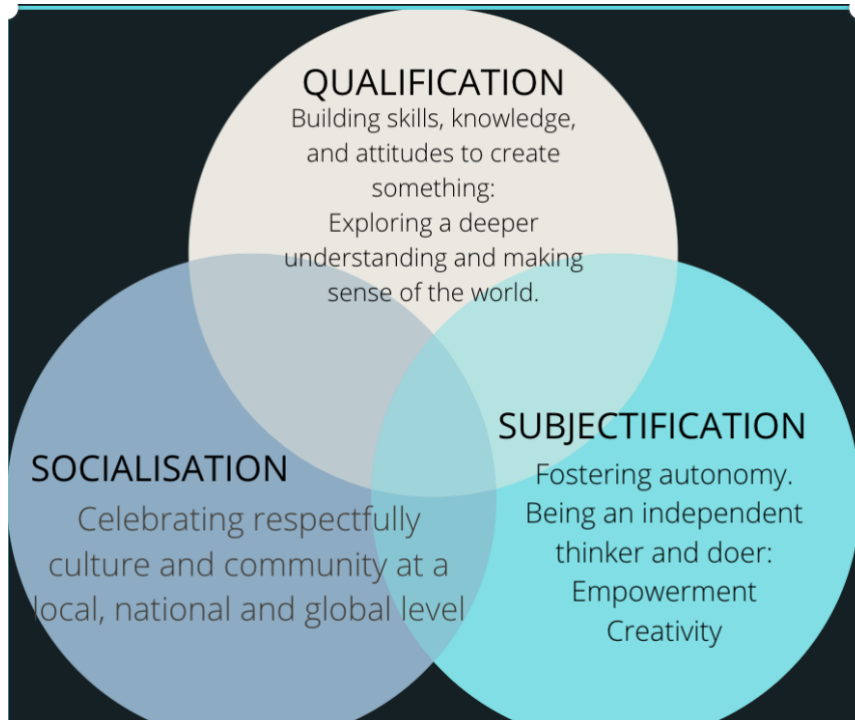
It might be simplistic to look at this investigation only in the light of student skills development as every institution, professional practitioner, teacher and student is different, while the context of educational settings also varies in a complex global world (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Therefore, considering stakeholders' perceptions towards quality in a wider sense than skills might help close the gap in standards in the private school sectors in developing countries. This would mean that research should also take into consideration the professional development of school directors, teachers and administrators in order to infuse a more cutting-edge educational culture to foster what Halliwell (1993) calls 'inventive flexibility" to close the gap of best practices. Inventive flexibility starts with a sparkle of imagination followed by organised ideas to address a need in a specific situation getting into the comfort zone to finish with a suitable evaluation of these risk-taking experiences in the creative process (Halliwell, 1993, p.71).

Working in the private education field, it is sometimes difficult to implement higher quality standards when institutions are very concerned about increasing yearly enrolment while attaining prestige and a better reputation. In Mexico alone, quality may be overlooked when trying to fit into the elite group of global schools without necessarily raising academic standards. Moreover, private sectors face highly competitive markets, with a greater infrastructure, lower costs and easier access to international universities (Altbach,2009). As a result, these entities are being forced to create new strategies to compete and deliver a 'plus' to their 'customers'. However, as Mexico demonstrates significant social and economic contrasts, quality development should be culturally relevant, and take into account not only issues required to survive in a highly competitive global market but also the support of local needs (Knight, 2004).

This means that the implementation of the standardised US International Accreditation process might impose the skills and organisational values required to thrive and become part of the elite educational group. Nevertheless, the institutions' uniqueness and identity might be at risk as this systematic and rigid process could terminate creativity and other cultural attributes. (Knight, 2004).

1.6 What is quality assurance and quality of teaching in higher education

Quality assurance is sought by thousands of higher education institutions to guarantee the return on investment (Yorke, 2002) to demonstrate their overall accountability to cater to external expectations. As mentioned before, the definition of quality has different meanings and connotations that are infused from different cultural, economic and social perspectives, where the role of stakeholders such as teachers, administrators and government agents participate actively in this encounter.

According to Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008) teaching quality in higher education remains difficult to describe and assess. Moreover, new teaching methods and diverse learning platforms and environments have forced education to reflect on what the difference is between good and excellent quality teaching. Quality teaching for this particular education system of private high schools in Mexico connects the relationship between the teacher and the student

with innovative teaching strategies, effective communication and real-life content (Ramirez Abdala, 2023).

The teaching quality in the private high school education sector should include a purpose to better prepare students for higher education with a global outcome while helping students discover their talents to achieve their fullest potential (Ramirez Abdala, 2023).

1.7 Research Context

This research took place in Mexico and aims not only to inform educational practice but (re)design quality standards to promote creativity, innovation, accountability and compliance in teachers as well as identifying the gaps between good education, excellent education and real-world education by exploring student, teachers and administrators perceptions of quality standards. Good, excellent and real-world education are often based on different personal, cultural, social and economic contexts. I personally have experienced living, studying and working in both cultural and professional worlds between Mexico and Canada, where I have encountered multiple challenges in these areas that have made me the teacher, administrator and person I am today. As a researcher it is very important to contribute to transformational educational outcomes, taking into account stakeholders' voices while using their experiences to gain real-world solutions and maintain academic excellence for future generations.

My context refers to a group of high schools in the private education sector in four different cities in Mexico: The Headquarters are in Mexico City, then the second school was founded in Cuernavaca, the 3rd one is in Cancun, and the latest campus is in Merida. The Mexico City campus was founded in 1974, one of the unique features is that they are not regulated by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), instead, they are one of the few institutions incorporated to a higher education system called the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) the second-ranked university in Latin America and ranked as one of the top 100 universities in the world. The vision of the school is to contribute to global leaders with the skills and competencies needed to flourish as human capital and provide better

opportunities for graduates nationally and internationally. Among all of these schools, there are approximately 900 students, 100 teachers and 25 administrators that include Directors, Coordinators and counsellors that took part in this study. This group of schools involved in the research setting have become a very prestigious group for almost half a century, preparing thousands of students to enter numerous universities around the world with the support of matter-expert teachers with a robust professional experience. At a personal and professional level, as a dual citizen, being born and raised in Mexico where today I reside and work as a teacher and administrator of Modern Language and International Programs Coordinator in a private high school. Also, I teach English to grade 11 students with a focus on University preparation approach, so when students graduate they can qualify for their IELTS Certification through the University of Cambridge to test their language skills and allow them to prove their English level to enter higher education. Before this job, I spent fourteen years living in Canada, where I witnessed a more structured, standardised and systematic perspective on quality controls, policy reinforcement and a highly innovative process implemented across departments with plenty of support for teachers and administrators. However, the North American and Mexican contexts are substantially different. To initiate creative and innovative practices when not connecting with the global competencies and perspectives that best adapt to the particular local context is challenging (Gutek, 2006).

Some of the main differences between Canada and Mexico relate at a teaching level method, whereas in Mexico a more deductive than inductive approach is used to generate knowledge. On the other hand, Canada focuses more on the application and specialisation of useful content and knowledge, rather than focusing on testing and memorising content. Nevertheless, Mexican students are more comfortable sharing their learning experiences and interacting with other students, therefore socialisation is an active element in Mexican education. Another difference perceived at a sociocultural level is the "power distance" (Hofstede, 2011) between the teacher and the student. In Canada, for example, students feel more comfortable challenging authority and solving problems, instead of following orders and

being concerned with losing face while fitting in when interacting in today's highly specialised and competitive world.

Seeking international accreditation in a developing country presents multiple obstacles when trying to align academic standards that differ from the local context. While embarking on this project with multiple challenges, different contexts and expectations have arisen. However, I am hoping Mexican institutions and accreditors gain new insights about considering and practising quality in private high schools to better prepare students for higher education. For example, one of the most valuable learning experiences as an administrator has been being part of the leading team in a US/Mexican accreditation project. The steering committee initiated the process with the Accreditors in Atlanta, Georgia while being at the forefront of compiling the information, the participants and data required to become accepted and achieve the accreditation in 2022. The Accreditation application is under examination by SAIS (Southern Association for Independent Schools) for all of the 8 groups of schools from K-12 in Mexico, which is according to SAIS the first time ever a group of schools are being accredited at the same time. Therefore, the goal is to seek international accreditation as an innovative way to foster academic excellence and enhance academic quality throughout the group. Moreover, recommendations on how to overcome multiple challenges during an accreditation process in Mexico for another private organisation will be suggested in this research study.

According to Zamarripa et al. (2020), the Mexican private sector performs a far more significant task at the higher levels of learning than the public institutions. These private schools in Mexico represent nearly half of the student body (46%). Alternatively, according to Perez-Brena et al. (2017), Mexico's schooling structure has grown to the point that more than 260,000 institutions from elementary to higher education employ more than two million instructors, and 33 million students.

In Mexico, some of the main differences between the public and private sectors are funding, infrastructure and governance. In public settings, schools often have teachers that are gifted their positions from a family member, or they purchased them from another teacher. The

budget is mainly funded by the local or federal government, while private schools are guaranteed students' tuition and registration fees. However, it seems multiple systems and procedures are not being implemented properly, nor are there quality standards, manuals or policies in place dictated by the United States. Yet, the institution is growing every year and is becoming an important private organisation in the country using lower-cost systems seemingly in a more organic and eclectic way than is the norm in the U.S. due to the lack of organisational policies and funding (Mayer-Foulkes, 2008). Therefore, perhaps such an investigation will help the perception of quality in the Mexican educational context.

 In addition, several schools in the private sector in Mexico have a shortage of collaborative engagement, institutional assistance for successful instructing, evaluation, and responsibility for their instructors (DeMathtthews, 2018). These are significant elements, and investigation on their impact on school success has been conducted locally and internationally.

In summary, it is my aim with this research to carry out an assessment of Mexican perspectives on quality standards using international accreditation (Gutek, 2006) to acknowledge the current global interconnectedness of countries, especially Mexico and the US, and then as a second step to meld it to national and local contexts from several perspectives (social, political, affordable, cultural). In particular, openness towards creativity and innovation at the organisational level will be used in the diagnosis, analysis and change process in addition to professional growth to find out if it could lead to academic excellence and eventually to celebrate uniqueness in quality teaching and education that could serve (higher) education while increasing student satisfaction, retention and preparedness to the real world. Biesta (2015) warns educators not to only focus on excellence as it can lead to an over-competitive paradigm among schools while losing sight of the real purpose of education (p.81).

Therefore, based on the previous aspects, the proposed research study can inform private institutions in Mexico that are seeking to gain international accreditation to pay attention to the relevant local standards to prove quality assurance and accountability but also to focus on the real purpose of education based on their own cultural, social, political, economical context of each educational entity.

Instructional innovation is critical in schooling since it has a significant impact on how to improve teaching and learning activities and how to build the institution's innovative capability. The potential for invention has been viewed as an active approach to boost an institution's ability and resources to uncover prospects (Molero et al., 2019). The term "innovativeness" will not just relate to the tangible outcomes of technology but also to the possibilities and processes that result from it (Molero et al., 2019). Instructional strategies and school administration guidelines that encourage creativity help to foster the level of creativity in the school setting.

Additionally, leadership impacts learning by defining the potential of institutions to increase academic achievement via the establishment of structural operations. Instructor and learner decision-making talents and behaviours, for instance, constitute leadership attributes. As a result, institutional leadership generates environments that encourage professional training and ability advancement (Molero et al., 2019). There is a link between transformational leadership attitude and student learning atmosphere. Management and the ethos of classroom instruction also affect creativity tendencies (Molero et al., 2019). A learning tradition can be created and maintained by school heads using a bottom-top approach.

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1.8 Improving Quality in Education in Private Schools in Mexico

An important role as a private high school institution involves not only preparing students but empowering and attending to the needs of the stakeholders while providing access to quality learning environments, effective professional development while implementing high academic standards to help students reach their academic and personal goals (Ramirez Abdala, 2023). A transformation in teachers' mindset is a critical aspect of optimising the resources accessible to them throughout their professions. Such transition entails a movement away from concentrating on their instruction and emphasising the education of their learners (Elizondo-Garcia et al., 2019). Educators should learn to consider the effect of every instructional action on learners' development. Furthermore, educators are progressively being asked to prove public responsibility by demonstrating the impact of their pedagogical choices on learner achievement metrics (Elizondo-Garcia et al., 2019). On the other hand, quality of education relates to multiple dimensions, the main one has a direct effect on students by enhancing and discovering new skills, aptitudes and attitudes at a cognitive, mental, social, cultural and technological levels towards reaching their future goals and fullest potential in society (Ramirez Abdala, 2023).

The link between quality, the purpose of education, and 21st-century skills lies in the need to create an educational system that can prepare students for success in the modern world. Quality education should be more than just the acquisition of knowledge; it should involve an experience that allows students to develop the skills and knowledge to think creatively, solve problems, and work collaboratively (Hoyle, 2012). Additionally, 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and digital literacy are essential for students to navigate the modern world successfully. Moreover, quality education should focus on developing these skills and providing students with knowledge. Furthermore, quality education should also consider each student's individual needs and abilities and the cultural context in which they are learning (Lewin & McNicol, 2015). In the Mexican context, teachers need to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences that allow students to explore their skills

and for universities and employers to set high academic and quality standards. Instructors who have exposure to the best standards of other educators are more likely to recognize and resolve significant modifications in their professionalism. When everyone seeks similar attributes in new educators, the expected results are more probable to be realised (Perez-Jorge et al., 2021). The shared vision of partners with responsibilities for educator recruitment gives guidance, and that purpose develops as the screen for candidate choice (Perez-Jorge et al., 2021). A school district's recruiting strategies may help participants handle the complex process of recruiting instructors who guarantee learner training.

1.9 Overview of the thesis

The purpose of my study was to examine the perspectives of students, administrators and teachers on academic quality for the purpose of international accreditation organised in five chapters using a mixed methodology approach and Appreciative Inquiry as a theoretical framework to focus on the strengths and positive aspects of the institution to counteract external quality standards during international accreditation. My study has the potential to contribute to the following aspects in the profession: a) a focus on a more contextualised framework of academic excellence for Mexican private high schools, b) inform teachers and administrators of innovative practices to promote student success and academic excellence and c) define local academic standards when seeking international accreditation in the private education sector. The research questions that will shed light on this doctoral study are:

What are the perspectives of teachers, students and administrators on international accreditation standards and quality in education? Are creativity and innovation integral components of international accreditation? If so, how?

Some sub questions to get to the issues at a deeper level:

1) Do perspectives differ across teachers, administrators and students?

2) What are the challenges and opportunities faced by administrators, teachers, and students when quality standards change in private education in Mexico?

3) How do teachers, students and administrators conceptualise academic excellence?

The following chapter will review the literature about the Mexican education context, educational reforms, policy, expenditure and the current situation on professional development in schools in Mexico. The third chapter encompasses the research methodology with the philosophical assumptions and the research design implemented for this study. The fourth chapter illustrates the findings of the research followed by a diagram based on the findings to contribute to higher academic standards and finally; the fifth chapter discusses the research findings and the interconnectivity with the literature to make recommendations and to finalise the study with the conclusion pointing out the limitations and opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1   Introduction; The Challenge of the Education System in Mexico

While Mexico has made substantial progress in stabilising its macroeconomic environment since the 1995 financial crisis, there is a need for further educational reform. The extent of economic improvement lags relative to the experience of the advanced OECD countries (Airola & Juhn, 2005; Guichard, 2005; López-Acevedo, 2006). Policymakers have the challenge of raising the potential growth to the levels enjoyed by the more advanced OECD countries. Low labour productivity in Mexico is a major contributing factor to the current income gap in Mexico (Lustig, 2001). Low level of human capital is one of primary factors facilitating the persistent low labour productivity (Guichard, 2005, Guichard, 2008). Countries such as Korea and Spain have demonstrated remarkable progress relative to Mexico (Guichard, 2005). The low level of human capital is attributable to the quality of education in Mexico. The education system is characterised by high rates of repetition, school dropout and low levels of student achievement at the national and international levels. While repetition and dropout rates have been decreasing in the recent past, Mexico has not registered significant improvement in such literacy surveys as the PISA standards (Guichard, 2005). These factors demonstrate the necessity of improving the quality of education in the country.

2.2 Mexican Educational Context

In Mexico, there are three main levels of schooling: primary (Grades 1-6), secondary (Grades 7-9), high school (Grades 10-12) and higher education. High schools in Mexico traditionally have been closely connected to universities since they are seen as stepping stones to higher education. This connection is vital because it helps ensure that students have the necessary background knowledge and skills to transition to university (Krstikj et al., 2022). It also helps foster a sense of continuity and support for students as they transition to higher education.

Furthermore, high schools should be working to foster connections between students and universities, such as creating access routes by closely working with universities, and

providing information about scholarships, internships, and other opportunities like relocation as well as international opportunities for further education. These ideas will help ensure that schools provide learners with the necessary support and connections that can help bridge the gap between high schools and higher education in Mexico.

2.3 Students' Perspectives on Quality of Education

As indicated earlier, there are varying perspectives of the term quality as people define the term based on the variables they value. Research on the quality of education indicates that it is a stakeholder relative (Abidin, 2015; Telford & Masson, 2005; Sandmaung & Khang, 2013). In this sense, the perspectives of students on quality differ from those of their teachers or administrators. Jungblut et al. (2015) indicate that students exhibit multifaceted perceptions on quality of higher education. On the one hand, the students agree that quality in higher learning can indicate transformation and added value. On the other hand, the students do not agree that quality can be seen as fitness for purpose. The conceptualisation that quality can be described as value for money polarised the participants in this study (Jungblut et al., 2015). Walling et al. (2017) indicate that medical students consider active learning as a major component of quality. They believe that active learning broadens their learning and is appropriate for life-long professional development. These variations demonstrate the complexity of the meaning of the term quality.

2.4 Faculty Perspectives on Quality of Education

While there are convergences between the perceptions of students and teachers on quality, there are instances of variation. The faculty members consider quality as provision of consistent feedback and delivery of up-to-date content (Dicker et al., 2019). Alexitch and Page (1997) indicate that professors have different perceptions of quality of education as those in science-based fields consider teaching that is career oriented as quality, while those in humanities rate practices which facilitate the development of literacy skills as quality. Therefore, the field in which a professor belongs affects their perception of quality. Nonetheless, all faculty consider teaching that meets the needs of a learner as quality.

In summary, an assessment of Mexican perspectives on quality standards (Gutek, 2006) it is necessary to establish the interconnectedness of countries in a highly competitive and globalised world. Moreover, additional support is needed to redesign the national and local context which requires to analyse academic quality from different lenses (cultural, social, political), while considering creativity and innovation as part of the process to make positive changes to increase education success without losing sight of our real purpose and identity (Biesta, 2015).

2.5 Definition of Quality Teaching

Quality teaching results in the realisation of the needs of learners as the learning environment is appropriate, the teacher boasts the necessary skills, and it is learner-centred (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008; Henard & Roseveare, 2012; Quinn et al., 2009; Tsinidou et al., 2010; Welzant et al., 2015). Institutions need to support their teachers to deliver learning content in ways their learners understand.

The definition of the term quality is relative as people understand and describe it differently. HJungblut, Vukasovic and Stensaker, (2015) acknowledge that the definitions of the term quality vary and reflect different perspectives of an individual and society. The potential areas of focus when defining quality in education includes the process and its outputs. Therefore, the definition of the term should reflect various features. Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008) appreciate and acknowledge the lack of a definitive definition of the term *quality teaching*. They insist that definitions of quality teaching are relative as each stakeholder describes the term in a manner which suits their goals. Even though defining quality teaching remains problematic, its variables include learner-centeredness, teacher skills and competence, conducive learning environment.

Quality standards in Mexico have raised multiple problems and differences with other countries. For instance, in the public sector, one of the issues associated with the role of the SNTE in the hiring and promotion of teachers was chronic absenteeism for many decades. This governance style has infused part of the education outcomes as a country for many decades. Reforms were necessary as they have contributed to the return of many teachers to their

teaching positions (Bonilla-Rius, 2020; Keck, 2015; Tatto & Vélez, 2019). The unscrupulous practices facilitated by the union affected the quality of education in Mexico as some learners did not receive instruction from qualified teachers. The consequences of the negative practices include poor academic performance and missed learning opportunities for many learners (Bonilla-Rius, 2020). For instance, a 2017 survey on academic outcomes indicated that the performance of 64 percent of the students in mathematics fell in the lowest performance level (Bonilla-Rius, 2020). Such research findings indicated that many of the students leaving secondary schools struggle to progress with their careers. The problems with the sector demonstrated the necessity of systematic reforms to improve the chances of success for students leaving the Mexican education system.

While there has been significant progress and improvement in the public and private sector in the selection and training of teachers, weaknesses that affect the overall quality of education in Mexico persist. It is fair to note that Mexico is taking appropriate steps towards the improvement of the quality of education, however there are multiple social, political and economical challenges that need attention.

2.5.1 Determinants of Quality Teaching

While a definitive definition of quality teaching remains elusive, the teacher is a crucial determinant of the realisation of the needs of learners. Teachers play a crucial role in the promotion of quality education (Ten Dam & Volman, 2004; Woods, 1990). The factors determining the effectiveness of every teacher are internal and external (Pas et al., 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Many factors both related and unrelated to the teacher determine their effectiveness in the delivery of instruction (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Labone, 2004). The factors interact to influence an individual's commitment to their job (Fresko et al., 2008; Woods, 1990).

2.5.2 Teacher's Commitment

Even though teachers undergo similar training to facilitate the education of learners, they exhibit different levels of commitment to their job (Karakuş & Aslan, 2009). The differing levels of commitment affect teaching efficiency as the effort expended is dependent on an individual's motivation as a teacher (Anari, 2012; Heinz, 2015). Aspects of a teacher's personal life can affect their effectiveness in the classroom (Woods, 1990). One has to be in the right state of mind to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

2.5.3 Levels of Support

Teachers need different levels of support to meet the needs of learners in their classrooms. The levels include institution-wide, programme level, and individual level support (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). All the levels of support are important and interdependent as they provide the necessary resources for quality teaching. They are crucial to the realisation of the demands of the student population. Policies and procedures are necessary as they support good teaching and assessment in an academic institution (Biggs, 2011; Price et al., 2011). Institutions should cater to the needs of the diverse student population as they enter the school system expecting to receive quality education (Biggs, 2011). In the context of higher learning, fostering quality teaching is crucial to an institution's reputation in terms of contribution to the development of employable candidates (Čepić et al., 2015; Jackson, 2013). Students and employers demand education programs which result in the acquisition of skills and

competences which ensure gainful employment (Carnevale et al., 2013; Lowden et al., 2011; Schomburg & Teichler, 2007). Consistent production of employable candidates puts institutions of higher learning in better positions to influence innovation and business development. Therefore, the three levels of support are crucial to the realisation of an institution's ability to produce graduates who can create new employment opportunities or support economic development in meaningful ways.

2.6 Policy Focus

While education has been one of the policy priority areas in Mexico, the government has persistently focused on quantity rather than quality. In Mexico, past governments focused on increasing school enrolment in primary, and secondary education (Creighton & Park, 2010).

Education reform in Mexico has been a central focus for the government in recent years, aiming to improve the quality of education and increase access to learning opportunities for all. The Mexican government seeks to allocate more resources to the education sector. It has made several policy changes to increase access to education and improve the quality of learning. The Mexican government has increased expenditure on education, with public spending per student increasing by more than 40% since 2006, and education expenditure accounted for around 18% of total public spending and about 4.5% of GDP (Education Policy Outlook Mexico, 2013). The public sector has also sought to increase the share of resources allocated to the education sector, focusing on primary and secondary education (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). Most importantly, the government has also sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the public education system by increasing salaries for teachers, improving teacher training, and introducing incentives for teachers to engage in professional development.

In addition to increased public spending, private investment in education has also increased in recent years. Private sources of financial accounts have increased its total expenditure on education, most of which is spent on private schools (Robertson et al., 2012). Private spending has been used to finance higher education, which has resulted in increased access to universities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The Mexican

government has also introduced some initiatives to improve access to education, including providing free textbooks and uniforms to students, subsidising transportation costs, and providing free meals in schools. The government has also sought to reduce the educational gap between rural and urban areas and indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Overall, the Mexican government has firmly committed to education reform, focusing on increasing access to education and improving the quality of teaching and learning, yet there are multiple challenges that affect Mexico's education towards socioeconomic development and workforce advancement.

Literacy levels have increased following an increase in the number of children enrolling into primary and secondary schools. The law targeting expenditure of federal funds to the education sector does not focus on improving the quality of services learners consume.

2.7 Allocation of Resources

A characteristic feature of education spending in Mexico has been the disproportionately focus on current expenditure (Schwellnus, 2009). Teachers' salaries take up a large proportion of the funds allocated to the education sector (Guichard, 2005). While expenditure on teachers' salaries is higher, on other current expenditure-related obligations such as teaching materials it is lower than in other OECD countries. While teachers in Mexico deserve competitive salaries, paying them more does not guarantee quality education. Increasing the allocation of funds to non-wage expenditures can contribute to quality education as teachers and learners will have access to important resources (Guichard, 2005). Additional funding to the education sector should focus on the non-wage current expenditure and focus more on establishing higher quality standards to prepare teachers and administrators following a culture of care.

2.7.1 The Selection and Training of Teachers

The selection and training of teachers in the Mexican education system has traditionally been one of the areas of concern due to the complications associated with the processes. At the public sector, the participation of the National Teacher Union (SNTE) in the allocation and promotion of teaching positions was identified as one of the primary sources of the inefficacy of the education system in terms of producing a highly competent workforce (Bonilla-Rius, 2020;

Leon Garcia, 2011; Santiago et al., 2012). The union participated in the hiring and advancement of teachers in the education sector (Bonilla-Rius, 2020). It abused its position through the introduction of dishonest practices such as selling, renting, and inheriting teaching positions (Bonilla-Rius, 2020). The unethical practices decreased the integrity of the hiring system as possession of the required skills and competencies did not guarantee individual employment and promotion. Employment and promotion opportunities were available to the people who could pay huge sums of money (Bonilla-Rius, 2020). The system created a situation in which many people seeking teaching and administrative positions had to pay fines or bribes of between US$5000, and US$30,000 (Bonilla-Rius, 2020). Such figures indicate that only those with the ability to facilitate the unethical practices had an opportunity to teach or serve as school principals, which diluted the overall academic quality. Moreover, in the private education sector closer attention is necessary to recruit and train faculty while paying attention to continuous performance evaluation to establish better management control regarding organisational quality controls to foster a world-class education system (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011).

2.8 Reforms Promoting the Professionalisation of Teaching

The knowledge and skills of a teacher are crucial determinants of their effectiveness in teaching. Reforms attempting to professionalise the practice of teaching focus on improving the knowledge base of teachers, the certification of the professionals, and the structure of career opportunities.

Furthermore, the government has started a series of reforms to encourage teacher collaboration and promote school autonomy. These reforms include the development of networks of schools, the introduction of school evaluation systems, and the adoption of standards for school leadership. These initiatives are intended to foster a culture of collaboration among educators and promote the professionalisation of teaching.

The Mexican government has implemented various initiatives to promote professional development in education. These include the development of a National Training System for Educators (Sistema Nacional de Capacitación para Docentes, SNCTD), which is a formal

system for the continuous professional development of teachers and school leaders (Paredes-Chi, & Burguete, 2021). This system allows teachers and leaders to access various courses and activities, including in-service teacher training, workshops, conferences, and certificate programs. Despite the progress made in promoting professional development, there are still challenges to be addressed, as world-class professional development is limited in Mexico. Moreover, teachers in the public and private sectors do not have the support or funds to attend specialised training sessions. Therefore, the urgency to increase the investment in teacher training, better strategies for engaging teachers in professional development activities, and the need to ensure that teachers have access to quality professional development materials are needed to raise the overall quality in education (Goldrick et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is a need to improve school leadership quality and ensure that school administrators are well-equipped to support teachers in professional development efforts. Finally, there is a need to ensure that all teachers have access to quality professional development materials and opportunities. Clearly, still much work to be done!

2.8.1 Equity-Focused Reforms

Many countries including Mexico have diverse student populations in terms of nationality and ethnicity. Persistent achievement disparities among learners from different backgrounds indicate a need for changes in education sectors to improve completion and success rates for all student groups (Little, 1993). Equity-focused reforms attempt to reduce the impact of a student's background on their academic achievement as some ethnicities are disproportionately associated with low achievement and graduation rates (Little, 1993). A diverse student population increases the demand for culturally competent teachers for all learners to have an equal chance of succeeding. Mexico's education reforms intended to promote equity in the sector focus on ensuring equitable education outcomes despite differences in students' socioeconomic status, their gender, and ability (Bonilla-Rius, 2020). The reforms intend to create a learning environment in which all students have equal chances to succeed in school and transition from education to the workplace.

2.8.2 Reforms Promoting Authenticity in Student Assessment

Reforms intended to promote authentic assessment of learners encourage teachers to consider alternative testing strategies to give all learners an opportunity to develop their skills and talents (Little, 1993). Biggs (2011) argues that a valid authentic assessment should include the total performance rather than aspects of the process. It should consider all elements being assessed for educational systems to meet the intended benefits of reforms. Alternative student assessments are needed to adapt to the needs of the learners and promote higher order thinking skills (Dikli, 2013).

2.8.3 Reforms Focusing on the Social Organisation of Schooling

The members of a school community make up social settings which include learners, parents, teachers, and administrators. These members of the school community interact to influence the experiences of learners (Hedges & Schneider, 2005). Policies focusing on the social organisation of schooling attempt to promote collaboration among teachers to facilitate knowledge for effective teaching and increase opportunities for students to learn.

2.8.4 Standards, Curriculum, and Pedagogy-Focused Reforms

As previously mentioned, Mexico has recently implemented several education reforms in the last few years to help improve the quality of education. One of the main reforms was the 2013 reform of the General Education Law (Ley General de Education), which aimed to improve the quality of education in Mexico. This reform attempted to modernise the education system, reduce regional disparities in educational quality, and provide a consistent educational framework across the country (Goldrick et al., 2012). The reform included many initiatives to improve teacher quality, such as providing additional training and certification, introducing new teacher evaluation systems, and offering higher salaries for teachers. By 2019, a new education reform changed the standardised teachers´evaluation, adjusted the hiring and teachers and administrators promotion initiatives, and a new national database to compile students' personal and performance information based on geographical location was created. It also established a new system for accrediting schools and universities and introducing stricter quality standards (Parra-Perez, Gloeckner, Valdés-Cuervo, Addo, & Harindranathan, 2022). In addition to the

reforms to teacher quality, the reform also included initiatives to improve educational infrastructure, such as investing in school buildings and technology and introducing new curriculum standards. The new reform of 2022, enforced by the current president includes measures to reduce educational inequality, such as providing additional funding to rural schools and introducing new scholarships and grants for students in the country (Parra-Perez et al., 2022). Moreover, this promotes academic freedom for teachers, and autonomy in students with distance education, and includes the development of social skills as a component of the curriculum. In terms of evaluation, it suggests students' self-evaluation criteria and the use of PISA international evaluation standards and dictates that students with low academic performance must not fail any courses, with the intent of reducing attrition rates. Overall, the educational reforms in Mexico have met with some success, though there is still much work to be done to improve the country's education quality. Challenges include reducing educational inequality across different regions of the country, infusing education with a more humanistic approach and updating the content with increasing access to quality education for all, and improving teacher professional development (Parra-Perez et al., 2022).

In recent years, Mexico has strengthened and reformed its education system. These reforms' main objectives are improving education quality and providing equal educational opportunities. The reforms cover different aspects of the education system, such as increasing access to preschool, focusing on quality and equity, modernising the curriculum, and integrating technology into teaching and learning (Bruns et al., 2011). In 2015, the OECD published an Education Policy Outlook report which focused on making these reforms happen. This report highlighted some critical reforms implemented in Mexico, such as increasing access to preschool for kids, providing additional support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and improving teacher training and professional development (Martínez-Rizo & Silva-Guerrero, 2016). In 2020 the Mexican government also introduced a new education law (Ley General de Educación) which set out a comprehensive plan for the reform and modernization of education; this law is intended to ensure that all students in Mexico have access to quality education (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Also, the Mexican government had previously launched

the Global Partnership for Education in 2018, which focuses on providing more up-to-date resources for students and teachers, such as digital literacy and access to technology, to help improve the quality of learning (Robertson et al., 2011). These reforms are essential for improving the quality of education in Mexico and providing equal opportunities for all with a more personalised and innovative approach that assists and equips future generations of Mexican students to contribute to the social, economic and political development of the nation.

2.9 Professional Development

The relationship between the skills and competencies of a teacher and quality teaching indicates the need for professional development. While many factors determine the experience of students in an institution, the quality of teaching is a crucial determinant of decisions to drop out of school. Yorke (2000) acknowledges that the quality of a student's experience is less likely to result in non-completion in cases of humanities, social sciences, and education. The finding indicates that students can fail to complete their studies due to the quality of teaching. Professional development can be crucial to the reduction of the risk of non-completion (Shore & Shore, 2009). In their study, Sultana et al. (2009) identify the quality of faculty and curriculum standards as some of the crucial determinants of the quality of higher learning education. Such findings indicate that the development of professionals is one of the essentials of retaining students in their programs until completion. The reputation of an institution will be dependent on its ability to meet the needs of its learners.

2.9.1 Challenges in Promoting Professional Development

The need for effective strategies for training teachers is a goal of many educational researchers (Hatton & Smith, 1995). While investigations on this subject have resulted in volumes of knowledge on the strategies for making teaching effective, a gap between theory and practice persists. The persistent failure in translating available knowledge to practice has resulted in interest in the ways teachers acquire their skills and competences. Identifying the means through which teachers learn has been identified as a crucial step towards linking theory to practise in teacher education (Korthagen, 2010; Korthagen, 2011; Korthagen, 2017). The

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persistent failure in influencing the behaviour of teachers reinforces the need for understanding on how the professionals learn (Korthagen, 2007; Korthagen, 2010). In an attempt to reveal the means through which teachers learn in school-based teaching research groups, Zhang and Wong (2018) indicate that teachers actively develop implementation-oriented and experimentation-oriented processes of learning. Implementation-oriented learning is also known as exploitation learning as it assists teachers to create appropriate environments for the acquisition of knowledge and norms of practice of a school. Experimentation-oriented learning is also called exploration or exploratory learning as it offers teachers a platform for new knowledge creation to improve existing practices radically. These processes of learning indicate that teachers need different kinds of resources and support systems to acquire relevant knowledge for practice.

The two types of learning indicate the utilisation of different strategies of acquiring knowledge and motivations of teachers. In the case of exploitation learning, teachers focus on assisting learners to meet their achievement benchmarks. A teacher's awareness of school-based practices in the delivery of content motivates them to plan for lessons and deliver instruction in compliance with the established guidelines for accountability purposes (Day & Sachs, 2004; Valli & Buese, 2007). A teacher's focus is on the promotion of learning based on established standards of practice. On the other hand, experimentation learning involves the consideration of new ways or possibilities of delivering instruction to promote discoveries. Teachers are open-minded when using the experiential approach as their goal is to identify the best way of discharging their duty. The trial and error process enables them to learn and use new information in their teaching. The findings of Zhang and Wong (2018) demonstrate that teachers are likely to be effective in environments which allow them to explore rigid systems of assessing their ways of teaching limits learning and effectiveness in the delivery of instruction. Even though there is a need for further research in this area, the study provides important insights in how teachers learn, and its findings can be useful in promoting professional development for effective teaching.

In view of that, the utilisation of bureaucratic approaches in the development of teachers is a risky endeavour, as high-quality professional development is not always available for

Mexican teachers. Moreover, it tends to be expensive, and most of the time teachers do not have the time, nor the money to gain better training. Talbert (2010) warns against the implementation of state-mandated reforms without consideration of the input of the teachers as the intended implementers. The author insists that successful creation of professional learning communities should be dependent upon collaboration to improve teaching and learning. School administrators and change agents fail to consider the ways teachers learn and the environments which support their learning when promoting policy changes (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Talbert, 2010). The failure to acknowledge the role of the social, technical, and organisational conditions of flourishing professional learning communities promotes negative reactions from teachers even when educational policies are well-intentioned (Harris et al., 2017; Newsome, 2012; Talbert, 2010). School administrators and change agents should consider the norms of collaboration, students and their performance, access to a variety of learning resources, and mutual accountability for the success of students as the building blocks of professional learning communities (Hord, 1997; Talbert, 2010). Undermining these conditions makes it difficult for schools to enjoy the intended benefits of professional development.

2.10 Innovating teaching strategies and organisational culture

While experimentation is crucial to the introduction of new teaching strategies, utilisation of evidence from exploratory activities is not always considered as ideal or necessary in education. Awareness of the practices that have been effective in promoting quality teaching is crucial to the realisation of intended objectives. Biesta (2010) argues that knowledge of effective practices enables practitioners to identify the new ways of understanding problems they encounter. However, practitioners should appreciate that availability of knowledge does not necessarily indicate sufficiency. Biesta (2010) states that knowledge base for practice is not enough for taking necessary actions in education. The teleological nature of education demands the prioritisation of the intended outcomes (Biesta, 2010). While information on the actions that work is important, it is only considered after outlining the priorities of educational practice. In this regard, information collected through experimentation should not be considered as

sufficient to inform decisions in the education sector. Practitioners should acknowledge its value and identify the appropriate areas of utilisation after clarifying the intended outcomes of educational practice (Kvernbekk, 2017). Biesta (2010) argues that there are instances in which decisions are not based on evidence even when utilisation of available knowledge would result in the best outcome. The case of punishment is a good example as evidence might indicate that its application results in the realisation of a teacher's objective (Biesta, 2010). Consideration of the negative implication of the practice informs the consideration of other options. In this sense, value judgement does not always guide decision-making in education. Only information that results in educationally desirable actions should be considered in decision-making.

2.10.1 Innovating teaching strategies and organisational culture

Another challenge to the promotion of teacher learning behaviour is the organisational culture. Cardoso et al. (2016) acknowledge that an organisation's culture facilitates or hinders the adoption of practices which ensure quality. The types of organisational cultures influencing teacher learning behaviour include adaptive, result-based, clan, and bureaucratic (Hassani & Ahmadi, 2015; Somprach et al., 2015). These types of cultures have different effects on a teacher's motivation and support for professional development. In their study, Somprach et al. (2015) find that the clan culture is the most significant predictor in improving a teacher's learning behaviour. They insist that the clan culture encourages teachers to be effective learners. The potential determinants of this effect on the teachers' learning behaviour is the climate of the working environment. Clan cultures are associated with workplace cultures in which employees engage with each other as family members (Aldahdouh et al., 2017; Daft, 2014; Gimenez-Espin et al., 2013; Kampf et al. 2017). Leaders in such Organisations encourage employees to collaborate with each other and consider the needs of both employees and customers (Daft, 2014). The avoidance of status differences between employees and customers encourages the former to focus on meeting the needs of the latter. Organisations with bureaucratic cultures affect a teacher's learning behaviour as they emphasise stability. Such organisations are not conducive for teachers to continue developing their skills and competences based on their terms as leaders establish strict guidelines for them to implement.

2.11 Motivations for Quality Teaching

The institutions must adapt to establish and sustain their competitiveness in international environments. They need to demonstrate that their instruction delivery strategies are culturally sensitive and appropriate to the proper level to engage and motivate their learners, providing the proper learning environment to contribute to real world outcomes.

2.11.1 The Need to Motivate Students

Many students transiting from high school to the tertiary level of learning intend to acquire skills and competencies which enhance their employability. Universities and high schools, particularly, should offer quality education since the expected outcomes of higher learning are the driving factor for students' decision to select an institution to further their studies (Sogunro, 2017). Mediocre instruction which fails to inspire students is a waste of their money and time in an institution (Sogunro, 2017). The students expect to receive instruction from a competent instructor and the content should demonstrate consideration of cutting-edge research (Sogunro, 2017). Such demands indicate that the instructors should prepare adequately for lessons as the students can determine their preparedness to teach a course. In this regard, instructors should adapt to the demands in terms of the relevance of content, adequacy of the information, and delivery strategy. Institutions should ensure their instructors update their skills and competencies from time to time for sustained motivation of the student population

2.12 Meaningful Teaching-Learning Experience for student success

While Mexico lags behind many OECD countries in terms of achievement in the education sector, raising standards has been an area of interest. Stakeholders in this sector acknowledge the necessity of good quality education. In their study, Lopez-Acevedo (2004) indicates that students receiving instruction from teachers who boast many years of practice register higher scores in mathematics. The finding indicates a positive relationship between a teacher's experience and students' academic outcomes. It shows that practical experience and training are crucial determinants of effective teaching (Lopez-Acevedo, 2004). The importance of a teacher's experience is demonstrated in their ability to handle learners' questions comprehensively and effective monitoring of learners' challenges and performance (Lopez-

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Acevedo, 2004). These arguments indicate that equipping teachers with relevant skills and competencies does not necessarily translate into better academic outcomes. The Lopez-Acevedo study demonstrates that continuous learning is crucial to the development of effective teachers to contribute to a meaningful learning experience. A teacher's time in practice exposes them to different challenges which instigate changes in their teaching approach to suit the needs of the learners. While research demonstrates a link between experience and positive or better academic outcomes, only a small portion of students are privileged to be taught by experienced teachers. Therefore, a culture of continuous development of teachers is crucial to the improvement of academic achievement among learners.

The nature of the teaching profession requires teachers to participate in continuous learning processes and activities. Day (2002) argues that teachers should engage in continuous professional development to meet the changing demands of the profession in the 21st century. Professional development is crucial to sustaining and improving the competence of teachers as well as the administrative capabilities of those in leadership positions (Day, 2002; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). It is a means through which teachers survive turbulent times, become competent, and improve their effectiveness in teaching (Day, 2002). Day (2002) demonstrates the necessity of continuous professional development through the argument that the acquisition of the credentials required to teach is not enough for one to have a successful career. Continuous professional development ensures a teacher updates their skills and competencies to match the changing needs of learners and comply with the demands of the profession.

The internationalisation of higher learning has increased the demand for intercultural competent faculty members. Institutions of higher learning consider internationalisation as a means of integrating diversity into their student population (Altbach & Knight, 2007). internationalisation introduces institutions to new conditions as they operate outside their national boundaries. For instance, establishing a foreign campus creates opportunities for international students to apply for places and introduces the demand for faculty members with skills and competencies to teach the students effectively. While hiring foreign faculty members allows an institution to educate its foreign learners with relative ease, the new staff may need

development to adopt institution-specific teaching and assessment strategies. The opportunity to internationalise introduces new demands that require institutions to adapt quickly to remain competitive. Smith (2009) argues that transnational education is an opportunity for staff to take up the challenge of responding to new issues. They need to leave their comfort zones and consider new perspectives to meet the needs of students.

Accordingly, quality teaching is crucial to transforming societies throughout the world. The introduction of this literature review identifies the human capital gap as a consequence of weaknesses in Mexico's education system. It shows that improvement of aspects of education, such as quality teaching can be a step towards a competent talent pool for the country in the future. In their study, Akiba and Liang (2016) indicate that teacher-centred collaborative learning activities on mathematics teaching and learning are more effective in improving student achievement in the subject than such sessions as individual learning and university programs. Drawing on this, the professional development of teachers is necessary as teachers have opportunities to receive feedback and guidance on their performance. Indicators of the role of teacher professional development in developing a competent workforce for the future include their impact on student achievement. High-achieving students have numerous opportunities to develop further through the education system as their scores facilitate enrolment into high-quality institutions of higher learning. The positive impact of professional development on student achievement demonstrates its importance to the teaching profession.

2.13 Internationalisation for Higher Learning

Private institutions of higher learning identify new opportunities in foreign countries to continue creating value for their shareholders. The profit-driven universities tend to establish campuses internationally to meet their financial obligations (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The institutions recruit students and charge higher fees for their education. However, those institutions without profit ambitions consider internationalisation as an opportunity to enhance research and knowledge capacity and promote cultural understanding (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Both cases indicate that institutions of higher learning consider internationalisation as an opportunity to advance their mission and objectives internationally. The advancement into

international environments introduces their staff to new challenges as they are not used to the cross-cultural aspects of education.

While enhancing the skills of faculty members is crucial to promoting teaching quality, it is not sufficient in facilitating the development of a competent workforce internationally. The internationalisation of higher learning makes it difficult for faculty members to address all issues of quality effectively. Nevertheless, several challenges were encountered before and during the accreditation process varies from country to country, acknowledging international initiatives while filling the gap to improve internal and external aspects of the organisational identity is also influenced and enhanced by considering the management, teachers and students perceptions in the process (Hatch & Shultz, 2002).

2.13.1 International Accreditation Standards for Private Schools

According to the International Accreditation of the Southern Association of Independent Schools, six different standards are necessary to reflect evidence and compliance of quality when following different indicators derived from a previous self-study process and finalised with a peer evaluation with educators from different institutions based on the Mission and the values of the private schools. In the following figure, the six different accreditation quality standards are presented in order to prove the academic quality intertwined with the school´s history, mission, and values to determine the institutional goals towards quality enhancement and ongoing educational advancement towards the institutional goals.

The first standard refers to the alignment of the school's Mission and the daily activities within the different departments. The second standard evaluates the quality of the governance (shareholders) and the relation of power with the stakeholders. The third core standard relates to academic protocols and procedures followed in teaching and learning. The fourth standard evaluates the human relations, systems and procedures to guarantee the proper functioning and accountability of the school. The fifth standard focuses on resources and support, and the last standard evolved as a result of the pandemic to foster innovative teaching resources and technology in teaching and learning.

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Figure 2. International Accreditation Standards from Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS, Accreditation Standards,n.d.-b).

2.14 Quality Assurance in Education

Since the 90's Mexican authorities have been promoting quality assurance initiatives towards higher education, very little has been done to promote quality assurance in private high schools to strengthen the collaboration towards widening participation and higher academic standards (El-Khawas & El-Khawas, 1998). Stakeholder concerns about the quality of education offered by internationalised universities motivated governments to establish and improve quality assurance systems mostly in higher education (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). The systems were put in place to ensure quality within and outside national borders, yet it is necessary to better prepare students to enter tertiary education, in order to create progression routes for learners. The governments require the institutions to respond to external concerns of stakeholders regarding the utilisation of their resources to maximise student preparation and retention when graduating from high school (El-Khawas & El-Khawas, 1998). Universities must demonstrate compliance with established standards to continue their operation as governments control funding sources and choices (Štimac & Katić, 2015; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). It implies that the institutions of higher learning are no longer independent, and the external stakeholders use the quality assurance system to ensure the accountability of universities. Nevertheless, promoting accountability in high school is also necessary to sustain

academic quality in a highly demanding world (Becket & Brookes, 2006, Hoecht, 2006). In this case, governments can take action against an institution which fails to meet the established standards of quality assurance and make accessible evaluation criteria for private institutions to achieve their organisational goals. Governments and society use the international quality assurance system to ensure accountability and value for money as students and their parents pay larger amounts of money for their education, therefore, a greater return on their investment is necessary (Huisman & Currie, 2004). Quality assurance systems with a contextualised guiding framework for accountability in institutions are suggested for private Mexican high schools to be in alignment with the demands of global academic and professional demands.

The quality assurance system has evolved to include student learning outcome assessment to indicate a shift in focus from the need for institutions to account for the resources to attention on student outcomes. At the moment, universities use student learning outcomes to demonstrate the quality of the education they offer (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). The advancement in quality assurance systems demonstrates the necessity of establishing and sustaining a quality culture for their actions and processes to be rated as excellent. The institutions demonstrate awareness of the value of effective internal quality assurance systems. Even though the continuous progress in the development of quality assurance systems improves the reputation of institutions of higher learning, the systems indicate a loss of autonomy of the faculty members and trust in the institutions (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Moreover, the constant adoption of quality assurance policies as demanded by external stakeholders can result in the development of quality cultures where institutions focus on compliance rather than student learning outcomes (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016).

Elassy (2015) identifies different stages for improvement as part of the administration of quality framework (i.e. quality control, quality assurance, quality enhancement and transformation). According to Biggs´ the vision of quality assurance establishes a judgement followed by accountability based on past, present or future actions, whilst quality enhancement is the series of steps taken to achieve organisational change that lead to achieve institutional goals (2011).

In such cases, the institutions will limit their focus on promoting creativity among their faculty members and students (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). The positive and negative implications of quality assurance in higher learning indicates the need for stakeholders to consider balancing their interests for effective utilisation of the faculty members and challenge institutions to support innovation and value the importance of the institutional rankings as a high perception of quality.

2.14.1 **Issues with Institutional Rankings**

The first issue arising from the ranking of institutions of educational organisations is associated with what is measured. The primary sources of information for many rankings are government agencies or organisations which fund research, the universities being ranked, and surveys on the experiences of various stakeholders (Çakır et al., 2015; Daraio & Bonaccorsi, 2017; Kehm, 2013; Shehatta & Mahmood, 2016). These sources of information indicate that university ranking fails to measure quality in higher education objectively. The same can also be said of private high schools in Mexico. Consider the case of using data which participating institutions collect themselves. It is difficult to demonstrate with certainty that the information provided is truthful. Organisations relying on the rankings to select potential employees can be misled to believe that candidates from certain institutions have been prepared adequately for the job market. While some data might be truthful and beneficial to employers, there are instances in which the rankings can mislead employers.

Discrepancies associated with the weighting methodologies put some high schools and universities in a position of unfair advantage over others. Soh (2013a) identifies the addition of unstandardized indicators for the total scores used in the rankings as a source of misinformation that could mislead the consumers of publications on university rankings. Standardisation of the indicators used for weighting should occur before utilisation (Soh, 2013a; Soh, 2013b). While some indicators are related in nature, others are completely different (Bougnol & Dulá, 2015; Soh, 2017). Assuming that a low score for one indicator will be compensated by a high score for another can result in discrepancies, especially where the indicators do not relate.

The other issue associated with the ranking of institutions is the biases in the data used in the process. The biases in the collected data include prioritisation of natural sciences and medicine at the expense of social sciences and humanities and language bias (Kehm, 2013). One appreciates the negative effects of this approach when one considers that some high-performing institutions will never appear at the top as they do not offer specific programmes such as medicine or natural sciences. Institutions which specialise in humanities and education, for example, are unlikely to be considered by prospective students. Questions about universities attempting to achieve a better position through the distortion of their performance data remain.

Furthermore, the utilisation of various sources of information can result in the measurement of different things. For instance, surveys targeting students in one private institution and stakeholders in another will result in different findings as the two types of stakeholders have different experiences. Even if the data collectors decide to consider the number of research publications within a certain duration as the variable being measured, institutions with a small number of publications are likely to miss out on top positions regardless of the quality of their studies (Kehm, 2013). In view of that, information concerning the quantity and quality of research publications is not relevant to such stakeholders as potential students and their parents. These stakeholders cannot benefit from such information as it does not reveal the effectiveness of teaching in a discipline they are considering pursuing (Kehm, 2013). The one-size-fits-all approach used to rank institutions leaves out other high-performing institutions as the measures used are not the same (Goglio, 2016). The biases associated with rankings sustain the problem of the unavailability of a conclusive definition of quality.

2.14.2 Issues with Quality Assurance and Accreditation

A lack of regulatory systems that determine the quality of cross-border institutions, particularly in Mexico and register them to offer their services makes it easy for rogue foreign providers to operate. The problem is associated with a lack of political will or capacity to

establish regulatory national quality systems (Mayer-Foulkes,2008). Governments with the capacity to regulate their education sector face the challenge of being considered as protective, as education might be perceived as a transaction (Knight, 2007). The countries receiving the service have to establish policies that are not considered as restrictive by their trading partners. Such considerations can lead to compromises that can affect the quality of education in the receiving nation (Blanco Ramirez, 2015). The need of blending international standards is necessary to enhance quality education and to be interconnected across countries, and between high schools and universities, rather than following a specific set of "generic" standards. Therefore, it is important to inform the world about how quality education is perceived in the local context, how we share what we do, our main purpose and the relationships we foster in the process (Biesta, 2015). Differences in the meaning of quality from one country to another are another source of problems with quality assurance and accreditation. Imported programs certified by the exporting country could be inappropriate for the receiving country. The risk of bogus programs being imported into a receiving country increases in situations where the accrediting bodies fail to acknowledge the possibility of the importation of low-quality programs (Knight, 2007). The bodies which certify international entities should collaborate to ensure the integrity of the institution is not compromised during the cross-border transfer of programs and educational levels from high school to higher education.

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Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The current chapter focuses on the philosophical foundations of social research, the assumptions, the methodologies, and the rationale for conducting this study. It presents a comprehensive analysis of ontology and epistemology that are at the foundations of the methodologies selected for the proposed research. The analysis is necessary as the credibility and authenticity of research findings are based on sound rationales, which justify selecting certain methodologies and methods of data collection and analysis (Antwi et al., 2015). The discussion also clarifies the ontology and epistemology used in this educational research. It includes the justification of the methods selected for the proposed research project. It begins with a detailed discussion of ontology and epistemology and reveals the associated assumptions and rationales. The final part of this chapter presents the preferred approach for the proposed study. It lists the proposed research design, methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the limitations and ethical implications.

3.2 Overview of Methodology

The current study focuses on the methodological approach of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) embedded within the assumptions, methods, and rationale for conducting this study. Cooperrider, Watkins, and Srivastva (1987) developed the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework in the early 90s, which has its main focus on systems and institutional development by taking a reflective attitude to determine the best from the past to create a more sustainable and innovative future. Therefore, as a researcher and educational program developer, I believed that this approach was suitable for this study within this educational setting of a group of private Mexican high schools, that were in the process of being evaluated by an American external agency, to avoid "colonisation" of quality standards by blurring the institutional identity and stakeholders' own perceptions of academic quality to impose "power and control" from the Global North in developing countries (Blanco Ramirez, 2014, p. 121).

Therefore, the rationale for the adoption of AI was used as my methodology to understand the perspectives of learners, teachers, and administrators regarding academic

quality, academic excellence and the international accreditation process based on their experiences during a critical point of self-evaluation process followed by American views and standards. Thus, this critical stage made me focus on the positive aspects of our daily practices, as the lived experiences and conditions of the participants tend to differ from each school, depending on the different school settings and geographical location. Furthermore, it was intended to facilitate collaboration between the researcher and participants to find opportunities to identify best practices that will lead to suggestions towards an organisational positive change. Moreover, for this particular Mexican educational context, using the AI approach allowed me to focus on the strengths and what is working well in educational practice, to enhance and promote and achieve transformational growth in a more flexible and uncontrolled way without any predictions of outcomes.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework chosen for this particular study is based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and uses a 4D model (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) and will be useful for this particular educational setting. Utilising AI dimensions which are described in the following figure and explained in detail below explain my research aligned with the AI 4-D cycle process and my research questions. The first is about Discovery to determine the living factors and perceptions of international accreditation, academic quality and academic excellence. Additionally, it includes participants' views on creativity and innovation relevancy within international accreditation. Secondly, the dream phase involves a self-exploratory process towards the way participants envision their institution's academic excellence in 10 years to predict aspects that might work well in the future. Thirdly, in the design phase, an ideal framework based on what is important to address in this educational context intertwined with challenges and opportunities towards academic quality to set the direction for the future is suggested. Lastly, focusing on the destiny or the delivery of a positive change will make suggestions and recommendations to empower a more sustainable educational model in a highly competitive private Mexican educational context.

Figure 3. Appreciative Inquiry Framework: International Accreditation and Academic Quality
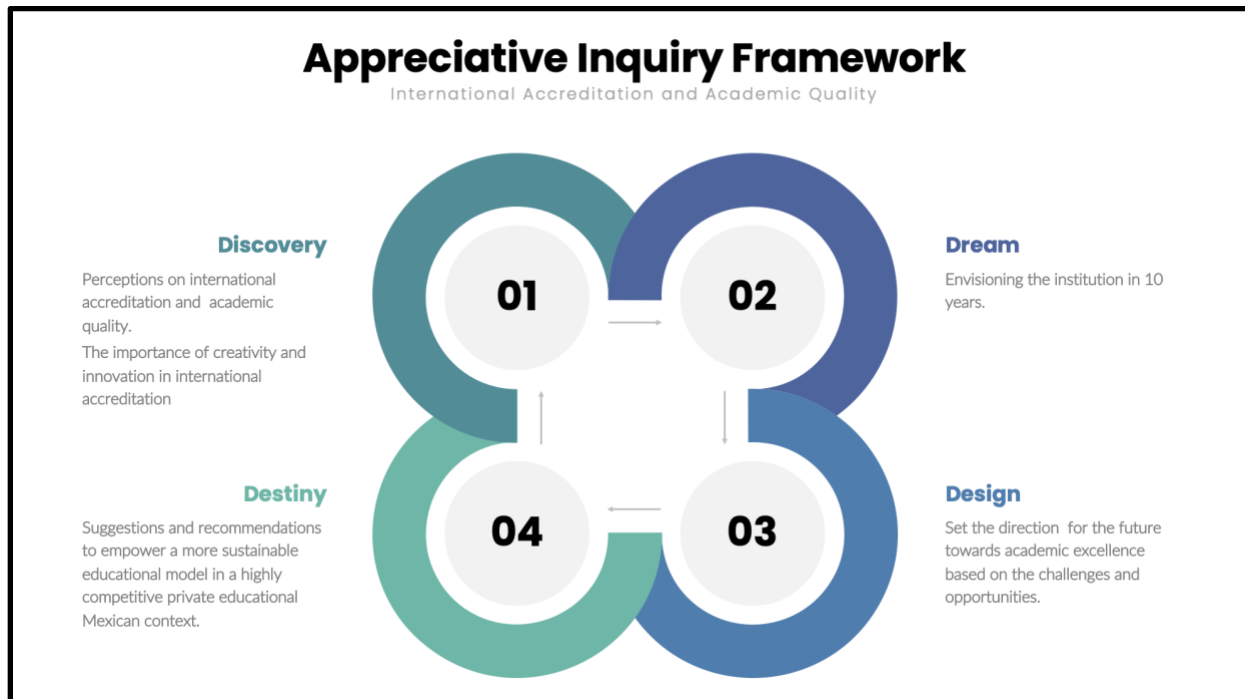
In their view of the methodology, Clouder and King (2015), insist that the approach was developed to promote the revelation of the positive aspects of experience, the generation of new theory, and anticipate new realities. Therefore, using an AI framework emphasises collaboration, positivity, aspiration, and transformation among stakeholders. Choosing this framework over others helped to discover perceptions, qualities and values in alignment with the mission, which is what international accreditation is based on, as a way to look at the institutional strengths from the inside out rather than the outside in. The goal of using AI framework was intended to enhance commitment, foster enthusiasm, from stakeholders to engage in the community they serve and develop self-talk in a constructive way as well as encourage the institution to bring out the best qualities to promote positive change. Thus, generating a positive image of the past and present will directly influence our behaviour in the future, promoting innovative solutions that adapt better to our own teaching and learning environment, from those who live and work within them. Even though AI has been criticised for being overly positive, nevertheless focusing more on a holistic approach based on what the organisation does well might help ignite the collective imagination of what might be in a more flexible and authentic way.

3. 4 Research Design and Methodology

This research was designed using a mixed methodology approach encompassed a survey and semi-structured interviews to identify administrators, teachers and students' perceptions of academic quality/excellence, the importance of international accreditation, creativity and innovation in the private sector within a group of four high schools in Mexico.

This research was examined through the lens mostly of qualitative research framed by subjective constructionism and constructivism based, by utilising open-ended questions in a survey and semi-structured interviews. Moreover, a small quantitative aspect was included with a couple of close-ended questions about the importance of creativity and innovation during the international accreditation process. Therefore, I believe that using this methodology was adequate especially when using mostly qualitative research using Appreciative Inquiry to enhance a positive collaboration to promote a positive organisational change.

3.4.1 Research questions

The research questions that lead this research study are the following:

What are the perspectives of teachers, students and administrators on international accreditation standards and quality in education?

Are creativity and innovation integral components of international accreditation? If so, how?

Some sub-questions to get to the issues at a deeper level:

1. Do perspectives differ across teachers, administrators and students?

2. What are the challenges and opportunities faced by administrators, teachers, and students when quality standards change in private education in Mexico?

3. How do teachers, students and administrators conceptualise academic excellence?

3.5 Philosophical assumptions: Ontology and Epistemology

Social constructionists reject the notion that objective truth exists and insists that science falls short of effectively explaining human behaviour. In this paradigm, meanings of reality through their engagement with other members of society. Psychological states such as desire, motivation, recall, and emotion are consequences of constant interaction in different situations (Given, 2008). As a researcher, I ensured that the methodology employed was determined by the culture of social actors specific to the study subjects' needs and demonstrated cultural sensitivity (Given, 2008). For example, practices that are appropriate and suitable for the American population might not apply to a population in Latin culture. Social constructionists believe that a person's experiences and perceptions can prevent them from appreciating or understanding other people's understated perspectives (Given, 2008). Researchers take different approaches to research based on the assumptions they hold on an area of interest they want to explore, based on their ontology It concerns the assumption a researcher makes regarding the things which exist in society. As a researcher, reflecting on the local situation I was able to identify the issues from a particular group of private high schools in Mexico to determine whether there is a reality that exists independently from the traditional

conceptualizations of quality in Education. My ontological stance as a researcher includes the fact that reality cannot be measured, reality is dependent on social constructions. In other words, what is considered reality for one group of people in one school may differ from another social group. Interactions with others influence in different ways what reality is, therefore reality is subjective to the experiences of different people infused by lived experiences and social and geographical location.

The ontological perspectives that I am drawing from in this study are based on constructivist and constructionist paradigms to help me construct stakeholders´ meaning on international accreditation which involves a self-evaluation by the members of a particular Mexican education community. This idea of international accreditation is understood within a particular context of these private high schools in Mexico, which are also affected by the policies or the lack of policies and multiple social inequalities in the education sector. Therefore, I can argue that quality standards and policies differed from other parts of the world compared to our own sociocultural context, thus this study is interpretative in nature as it gathered the perspectives of the students, teachers and administrators in four research settings in Mexico and how they make sense of their own experiences and realities. As a result, my goal was not to measure, correlate or predict their responses about quality in education. Since I based their responses on perceptions, therefore, I did not predispose to any particular outcome from the stakeholders' results. In fact, I was welcoming different perspectives from the participants and not predicting, correlating or judging any particular outcomes (Given, 2008).

3.5.1 Epistemology

Using a constructionist lens with social interactions and paradigms related to these ontological views, I was able to rely on my research questions while taking into account the group of participants within the private education sector.

As a teacher and administrator working in this private sector, I also acknowledge that the construction of knowledge about academic quality is influenced by the dynamics and the different professional and learning experiences, therefore, my goal was not to impose a particular view or outcome.

My positionality, as my world view (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) as a research disciplinary context involves teaching English as a second language to grade 11 students. I teach 10 hours a week and one of my goals is to prepare students for their English Certification to enter higher education, while supporting teachers to deliver high-quality programs by promoting international professional development to help us promote academic excellence as an international accreditation coordinator. I appreciate and acknowledge the four schools participating and acting as the settings for research variants in terms of context, demographics, and situations. As mentioned earlier, I am coming as a researcher, avoiding single realities to let people construct their social reality actively. Even though I have an active role being the International Coordinator in the Cancun Campus, as a researcher I took an inactive role in the data collection process to allow participants to contribute without interference (Scotland, 2008). The belief in multiple realities and subjective meanings and interpretations was welcome. Even though during the interviews I prompted the participants, I let them contribute freely with minimal interruptions. My goal was to promote understanding of a subject matter based on the participants' perspectives.

The other philosophical position relevant to this research is about representing the views of those opposing the application of the scientific approach to studies in social sciences by interpretivism (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivists use a relativist ontology as they believe that a single phenomenon can exhibit multiple interpretations following observation. Antwi et al. (2015) reinforced this point by indicating that interpretivist or constructivist researchers use methodologies sensitive to the context and facilitate the collection of detailed data. Such methods include interviews, observation and focus group discussions (Antwi et al., 2015). Therefore, an interpretive approach to research facilitates exploring the social phenomenon and was relevant to my research choices in order to discover new knowledge on the research issue.

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3.6 Mixed Methodology Data Collection

The current study utilised a mixed method approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) which collects, analyses and mixes qualitative and quantitative data in the same study in order to answer the research questions under investigation.

The study employed a pragmatic data collection strategy using different types of data collection tools to facilitate the collection of appropriate data types. The primary data collection tools used in the study were interviews and questionnaires. These tools promoted the collection of primary data on the issue under investigation as perceived by the participants. Only those participants that agreed to participate in the study were considered to take part in the study. As the current study involves multi-paradigm perspectives evolving from the participants' assumptions, therefore Mixed methods were selected to conduct the research.

3.6.1 The Interview

The interview was one of the primary data collection methods as I held a series of interviews in four different schools. Interviews with invited participants were scheduled to aid the collection of qualitative data. Participation was voluntary and only consenting candidates were admitted as participants. Interviews only occurred with those candidates with an expressed desire to contribute to the study. Authorising the informed consent form to confirm an individual's willingness to participate in the study (Appendix E). Interviews were conducted in both parts of the proposed investigation. The interviews were semi-structured to aid in in-depth coverage of the topic under investigation. Moreover, semi-structured interviews online occurred, reaching the participants remotely due to the pandemic and COVID-19. As a result, this qualitative study generated a large volume of data, and transcription, translating and analysis of the data was time-consuming and cumbersome (Scotland, 2008).

3.6.2 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was the other data collection tool that I used to collect data. The tool allowed for the collection of data in a logical format for the realisation of reliable conclusions from responses. However, the challenge was to get all the members of the targeted sample to respond to all the questions. An online platform (Survey Monkey) was used to deliver the

questionnaires to the targeted sample population to develop and present the data collection tool

to the target population. The online software tool facilitated the creation of surveys and

transmission to the target population as intended. The approach allowed flexibility and reduced

the risk of errors associated with data entry. Moreover, this research tool ensured sustainability

as it did not need to distribute questionnaires to every participant physically. While these

advantages of the data collection tool exist, the approach relies on the availability and

accessibility to Internet-enabled devices. Some participants might not have accessed the survey

due to inaccessibility to the Internet.

The Figure below represents the stages for the purpose of this research.

Figure 4. Data collection process

Data Collection Process

SURVEYS	ACCEPTANCE	EXECUTION	INTERVIEWS	CLOSURE
1	2	3	4	5
◆ Send expression of interest to 400 students, 100 teachers and administrators	◆ 385 students ◆ 74 teachers and administrators responded and accepted to participate	◆ Email PIS and Consent form ◆ Conducted the survey using Survey Monkey	◆ Emailed 40 invitations and expression of interest. ◆ 15 students and 4 senior administrators accepted ◆ Email PIS and Consent form	◆ Conducted interviews ◆ Transcribe, translate and store information in a computer with a password-

3.7 Sampling

The study participants were selected through the purposeful convenience sampling and

maximum variation technique to ensure the selection of informants that might provide rich

information for the study and a wider range of perspectives. As a researcher, I decided to use

this sampling technique based on the context, availability, conditions and access to the

participants in the four different cities to gather their own experiences, values, and knowledge

pertinent to this study. Moreover, it was appropriate to use while international accreditation was

being conducted in these institutions during that time. It involved the identification and

selection of individuals who were knowledgeable about a phenomenon under investigation

(Palinkas et al. 2015). The selected participants reflected on their ability to express their experiences and opinions in an expressive and reflective manner. The non-probabilistic sampling technique helped to facilitate the generalisation of findings by minimising the potential for bias through comparison (Palinkas et al. 2015). However, the challenge associated with this method was justifying why certain candidates were suitable to participate. It was difficult to offer a credible rationale for selecting certain candidates over others (Palinkas et al. 2015). This study used this approach to select the study participants to ensure the selection of candidates with appropriate information and also with experience with accreditation. The selection of students, teachers, and administrators from four private high schools in Mexico: 2 located in central Mexico (Mexico City and Cuernavaca) and the other 2 in the Yucatan Peninsula (Cancun and Merida), which facilitated the identification of candidates who would understand the phenomenon under investigation through experience and could express themselves freely. The selection of three categories of respondents from four schools is in line with the pragmatist paradigm, guiding the implementation of the study. As the researcher, I appreciated that the experiences of the participants were context-specific lived experiences and narratives. The approach let the participants express themselves based on their experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. Diverse samples ensured variation in the perceptions of the participants' responses to the research questions.

Participants

3.7.1 Participants

A total of 478 participants accepted to take part in this research study. The first part of the study was a survey conducted through survey monkey that took place in the four institutional settings and invited 400 students, 100 teachers and administrators to take part in this research. Only a total of 385 students, 74 teachers, and administrators answered the first part of the investigation. This pool of participants responded to a survey collecting data on their perceptions of quality and academic excellence in their institutions. The collected data was translated and analysed to create the findings as sought by the research questions. Anonymization was used to reduce the risk of inappropriate use by unauthorised parties. The

first part of the research was followed by a second of semi-structured interviews involving 4 senior administrators that are also teachers and 15 current students from the 4 city settings across Mexico. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews ensured comprehensive insight on the students' and administrators' perceptions of quality and academic excellence in teaching and learning at their schools.

3.8 Data Analysis

Once the qualitative data was retrieved, a thematic analysis approach was used to identify themes with embedded ideas that manifest repeatedly in the responses. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this process as a procedure to organise the data freely and without following a specific ideology or theory. The data analysis using themes allows the researcher to identify patterns in the data selected by codes and themes to express the relevant meaning of the responses. The thematic analysis was used to analyse the data for this research study, the surveys and semi-structured interviews. After being collected, the responses were transferred into a table spreadsheet, in which after reading the results carefully and familiarising myself with the data, I coloured-coded the most relevant aspects of the data keeping the research questions in mind. Afterwards, I identified patterns in the responses with keywords that were expressed more frequently than others, which led me to carefully review and identify the themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that well-evidenced ideas emerged from identifying carefully the themes followed by a brief description to proceed to the research findings and research results.

The two quantitative yes/no questions included in the survey to measure the importance of international accreditation, creativity and innovation in the Mexican education system were analysed by participants´responses about the importance of creativity, innovation and intercultural accreditation for stakeholders.
Using quantitative and qualitative data allowed me to support the diversity associated with the educational setting researched.

3.9 Research limitations

One of the limitations of this research is associated with the advocacy for multiple realities, as it fails to demonstrate whether realities are constructed or it is only a conception of reality. The failure to identify the socially constructed element might be problematic (Lee, 2012). Lee (2012) argues that people can construct different interpretations when engaging in similar situations.

3.10 Ethical Approval and Ethical Issues

While studies promote understanding of a subject matter, researchers should ensure the safety of participants. The procedures employed in the collection and publication of results should not harm the participants. The proposed study required ethical approval before it began as it was a necessary step towards implementing the project. The potential issues to look out for in the proposed study were associated with the promotion of the study's purpose, consent to involve students in the study as participants, and the generation of useful evidence from the collected data (Creswell 2002). A potential issue involved was maintaining the authority to interview participants and use their data as some may withdraw before completing the project. Additionally, I faced the challenge of ensuring that all participants understood the study's purpose, as some were not interested in participating or accepted the invitation before understanding.

Accordingly, all the participants completed a release and informed consent letter to demonstrate compliance with the ethics review procedure assigned by the ethical committee at the University of Liverpool. While participants were at liberty to worry about potential risks associated with participation in the study, I reassured them of no potential harm. Their identities and data are protected through anonymization and data protection throughout the investigation. As a Language Coordinator, I excluded from the study any of my students or the English teachers to avoid any ethical issues. I took the necessary precautions to ensure that no third parties had access to the collected data. The use of pseudonyms and storage of the key is maintained in my password-protected personal computer to ensure the protection of the collected data from access by third parties (See Appendix F). The ethical considerations were

submitted and approved by the university. Afterwards, I received a letter of confirmation to conduct the research. Even though there was no formal ethical approval within my institution, authorization from the CEO (Appendix G) was granted to do the research in the form of a signed letter, and there were no unexpected ethical issues during the research.

3.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, during this study, I acknowledged four private high schools participating and acting as the settings for research variants in terms of context, demographics, and situations. Using different data collection methods for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data supported the diversity associated with educational research and the educational setting being researched. The AI approach was selected due to its use of the constructionist principle in the involvement of knowledgeable participants in research and advocacy for policy directions.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings

Introduction

Every year, thousands of dollars are spent on professional development, to improve curriculum maps, teaching strategies, and educational pedagogy to reach high standards in education to inspire students to learn, and improve the academic quality of the schools and educational institutions. Yet, the education industry has struggled to concretely define the concept of *quality*. As stated by Harvey and Stensaker (2013) the definitions of the term quality vary and reflect different perspectives of an individual and society. Therefore, when evaluating quality this concept may vary depending on the cultural context of the group of people involved and cannot be generalised with a "one fits all" standard. Therefore, a broad purpose of this study was to focus on the local interpretation of quality rather than a generalisable one. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I have researched issues around quality in four private educational settings of one institution in Mexico. In this findings section I will highlight the issues around quality identified by participants. In this chapter, the results from the surveys and interviews of students and administrators ´in these private educational settings are presented.

4.1 Survey results

A total of 478 participants including students, teachers and administrators, accepted the invitation to take part in the study and answered the survey online using the Survey Monkey digital tool. The rest of the participants were disqualified by non accepting the invitation with supporting documentation.

There were 8 questions in the survey, 6 open-ended and 2 yes/no questions. The first 3 questions were about their own perceptions of academic quality, international accreditation and academic excellence and the relevance of international accreditation in Mexico.

Then 2 questions about the importance of creativity and innovation in learning and why, Followed by the importance of accreditation to improve the education system and lastly where they see the institution in 10 years.

4.2 Description of the data

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Instructors of the 4 different private high schools sent the invitation to participate to 929 students enrolled in grades 10 to 12. The response rate for the students represents 52% of the total population of 929 students distributed in four different cities between the ages of 15-18 years old. In the following table, the demographics divided by total participants and the geographical location are presented.

The students who completed the survey (n=387) were spread across grades 10, 11, and 12 and there were 210 students from the Mexico City site, 40 from Cuernavaca in Morelos, 101 from Cancún in Quintana Roo, and 36 from the Mérida, Yucatán site.

Students Survey Demographics:

City	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
Mexico City	66	65	79	210
Cuernavaca, Morelos	16	12	12	40
Cancún, Quintana Roo	31	31	39	101
Mérida, Yucatán	18	13	5	36
Total	131	121	135	387
%	34%	31%	35%	100%

4.2.1 Teachers and Administrators Survey Demographics

Another survey was distributed to administrators and teachers; 100 teachers and administrators were invited by an email of the Language Coordinator in their school to take part in the survey. From those emails, 74 total participants responded to the survey. In which, 73% were teachers (n=54) and 27% (n=20) administrators accepted to participate in the study. The following table describes the demographics of the teachers and administrators. It is important to mention that in this organisational context, all administrators are obligated to teach 1 to 4 courses per year on top of their administrative duties as advisors, coordinators, or directors as divided below:

Survey	Teachers and Administrators	Mexico City	Morelos	Cancún	Mérida

Total Participants	74	20	14	16	24

Survey	Teachers	Mexico City	Morelos	Cancún	Mérida
Total	54	15	9	14	16
Survey	Administrators	Mexico City	Morelos	Cancún	Mérida
Advisors	5	1	2	1	1
Coordinators	9	2	4	2	2
Directors	6	2	1	1	2
Total	20				

4.3 The Meaning of Quality Education for students

The purpose of this research question was to explore the perspectives of teachers, students and administrators on international accreditation standards and quality in education. To address this, I as the researcher utilised open-ended surveys. The most relevant survey item was that which asked participants to explain what quality meant to them as a school and also as a student for the student participants, whereas the teachers and administrators were asked the same question but with different wording for teachers and administrators.

The student participants expressed a variety of themes related to academic quality and its importance. The primary themes that emerged related to quality among students were: 1) Providing integral development of life skills and real-life outcomes, 2) The importance of personal development and wellbeing in learning, 3) Enhancing students' learning through cognitive and social skills and 4) Having passionate and well-prepared facilitators that develop meaningful student relationships.

One of the most valuable aspects defining academic quality in the voice of the students was conceptualised depending on the cultural group of people which made it hard to generalise it with a "one fits all" standard. Investigating the "local" meaning of academic quality was evident from the responses proffered by the participants.

For students, the essence of quality education was contextualised as a type of education to better prepare them with the skills needed to compete in the global world. It follows that quality education is both based on inputs, being the contribution of the teacher and output, being the unlocking of the potential of the students by turning them into better individuals in the future. Moreover, the responses mirrored the view that quality education should focus on not only learning but values and continuous training that keep developing skills for teachers and students. In the words of a student from Mexico City, academic quality means: "Prioritise quality, in its multiple senses: values, learning, and comprehensive training". One of the most intriguing aspects of the study coming from the responses of the participants was the variance in what constitutes quality. In both Cancun and Merida, the meaning of quality education was to provide the overall development of institutional life skills with content aligned to real life.

4.3.1 Providing integral development of life skills and real-life outcomes.

The first theme that emerged described academic quality and underlined its importance connected to the benefits of the academic quality of life outside of school. This theme was defined by preparing students for life rather than only acquiring knowledge to gain credits. The main codes that evolved from this theme were "real life education, skills for life and education with values. When asked what does "The benefits of academic quality of life outside of school" mean?, for example, a student in Mexico City indicated that "the academic quality of my school is very important to me, not so much in its level, but in how it trains its students for life." This sentiment was echoed by several other student participants including another student in Mexico City who stated that academic quality promotes "that we as students learn skills and prepare for life in general when we grow up". The notion that academic quality considers a life outside of school was also reported by a student in Cancun who mentioned that "well, they teach things that really serve for daily life, whether they are values or things that can help us solve some kind of situations." As for the student's academic quality, in Cancun and Morelos what was mentioned most was "learning not only academic content but also real-life content,

that fosters positive student behaviour and performance using content mixed with their own experience in the real world".

Beyond preparing students for daily life outside of school, students reported that academic quality also involved using authentic teaching materials in addition to textbooks or traditional school curriculum resources. That is, several of the student participants described the benefits of materials or activities with real-life applications as more meaningful to academic quality than the standard teaching materials like textbooks that required simple memorisation but had little application outside of the school setting. This aspect was highlighted by a student in Morelos. "Academic quality as a student is learning things in class that have value in real life".

4.3.2. The importance of personal development and well-being in learning

The second theme derived from the data referred to the relevance of not only cognitive and intellectual development but also the emotional well-being of the students. The codes that led to this theme were related to personal growth, students' well-being and empathy. Students who responded took part in the survey during the pandemic of COVID-19, where the following perceptions were addressed to foster self-development in order to achieve life skills. A student from Cancun revealed that before the pandemic quality was more about achieving good grades. However, during the pandemic, their perception of quality education shifted to a more sensitive approach mainly valued by "socioemotional skills and overall well-being". "The academic quality as a student has changed my perspective a lot since the pandemic began, before it was like only having good grades, studying, etc. But now I realise that it is more about mental health, physical and emotional well-being that makes it possible to meet academic quality as a student." It was prominently stated that students in Cancun were feeling vulnerable from being in a global pandemic that perceived quality with socioemotional attributes as important elements for quality. "Quality is reflected mainly from our teachers by their interactions through socioemotional exchanges while delivering relevant content in the classroom". Students from Merida also raised the importance of prioritising mainly on their "mental health".

Additionally, for students in Morelos"it is important that the school listens to what we want to be able to understand our needs with empathy". Thus, students, when heard, considered empathy to be shown towards them to ensure higher academic quality.

4.3.3 High academic standards: Enhancing students learning through cognitive and social skills

The third theme that emerged from the data collection was focusing on developing hard and soft skills useful for students' future. This theme referred to the essence of joining a prestigious institution that has high academic standards, in order to gain academic quality, to gain the skills needed to compete in the global world. This involved, in the words of a student from Morelos, "the teacher's input and students' output that unlocks their potential, that will lead us to transform into better individuals in the future". According to the findings, the students from Mexico City, Cancun and Merida often used perspectives to represent quality related to skills development, high academic standards and prestige. This was echoed by a student in Merida who mentioned that academic quality "is what happens inside the classroom with relevant content, preparation for future, and the opportunities provided through the faculty and institution". Moreover, in the words of a student from Mexico City, "The academic quality of the school signifies the high standards that the school sets for teaching and learning".

This student also mentioned the importance of " implementing several actions to follow high academic standards like to evaluate the teachers to maintain quality in teaching as well as the students' performance". This differed from a student in Morelos, who described academic quality by being a good student gaining the proper academic skills to succeed, describing a good student as "someone who pays attention in class and is always up to date with assignments". In Mexico City and Merida on the other hand, a good student is "more focused on personal growth and self-development".

In both Mexico City and Merida learners expressed the importance of developing soft skills, which meant to them "being creative while thinking but at the same time enhancing our personal and social skills through group projects" According to these students, quality education cannot be perceived in the absence of looking into how it is capable of evoking soft

skills such as critical thinking, creativity as well as meaningful interactions and collaboration among the learners.

4.3.4 Passionate and well-prepared facilitators that develop meaningful student relationships

The fourth theme emerged from the data around students' perceptions about how academic quality relates to highly committed teachers that possess the vocation to foster positive relationships with the students to provide meaningful learning experiences.

For students in Merida in order to experience academic quality, it is important to have well-prepared and passionate teachers in the school that support students with relevant content and are able to transmit professional experiences while fostering motivation and student engagement. This was echoed by another student from Merida who also described academic quality in correlation with quality teaching. "A good teacher promotes motivation and values to support them to become great people above anything else." Whilst a student from Morelos reflected on "good teachers have the ability to positively transform the behaviour of a person by moulding it with the support of academic subjects to make women and men whole and happy". Additionally, a student from Cancun expressed that academic quality depends on "not having a teacher but more like a mentor with enough expertise and also the one that shares their passion with students to help them discover their own potential and vocation for the future".

Another important aspect mentioned by students in Cancun was the relationship between students and teachers, which should bring meaningful interactions, open communication and respect. A positive teaching and learning environment was prominently mentioned in Mexico City in comparison with the other campuses, with mentions of looking for a friendly, enthusiastic, healthy and friendly learning environment. The students prominently echoed the importance of "developing quality as teachers without forgetting about the enthusiasm that they bring to the classroom", students from Mexico City and Cancun mentioned that it is important for teachers to have a specific professional profile, but most importantly, that their personality helps students to learn better and "develop critical life skills for the future through a positive bond between the teacher, the content, the world and

themselves". One student from Mexico City, also mentioned the importance of a good relationship with their teachers and the world they live in to achieve academic goals. "Using a more dynamic and different way of teaching by implementing other materials related to their own professional experience "to make classes more personal and fun that helps us learn quicker…someone that we like and trust". Students' perceptions also value smaller classes with meaningful content, however in words of a student from Cancun, "it's not what the teacher's say in the classroom, but how he speaks to us that has a profound impact", so when it comes to student-teacher relationships, verbal as well as non-verbal communication can have an impact in a positive or negative way with the students and the quality of teaching.

Another way to better the student-teacher connection from the point of view of a student from Merida was through school events:

"Events that focus on student-teacher relationships can strengthen academic and personal connections and inspire students' right skills and aptitudes, because "when events involve students and teachers, it helps us create relationships beyond just the classroom". Students in Cancun also felt that having more freedom during school projects and prompt feedback from the teachers, "help to pay close attention in class and get more from the experience" as they appreciate a professor that creates meaningful interactions with them.

4.4 The Meaning of Quality Education for Teachers and Administrators

The teachers' and administrators' perceptions about quality were organised in the following themes that emerged from the data collection regarding academic quality. The first theme about quality education relates to students' development and preparation for higher education, followed by the skills enhancement to fulfil the employability needs in today's global age. The main themes that evolved from the data analysis are as follows: 1)Creating successful leaders: Preparing students for the real world for a fructiferous career path, 2)Using 21st Century skills to meet global expectations for personal and professional success, 3) Acquiring Innovative pedagogies for effective teaching and learning process. The following themes will be described more in depth below.

4.4.1 Creating successful leaders: Preparing Students for the real world with a fruitful career path.

This section encompasses the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding academic quality. The importance of providing students with the proper tools to become competent leaders for the future was a relevant aspect of the survey. In their responses, teachers and administrators in Mexico City alluded to the importance of academic quality reflecting in learning from "inside-out". In other words, experiencing the real world outside of the classroom promotes the reality of student success in the future. Similarly, a teacher from Morelos expressed that academic quality means "going outside of the classroom…we should take them out more to know what is being done in universities, take them to visit different companies or organisations to learn about what they do". Several teachers and administrators perceived that knowledge and academic quality are not only seen inside the classroom teaching them lessons, but rather it is seen in a very meaningful way "by taking our students to different environments where they can bring real life into the classroom to practise and go way further".

Moreover, teachers from Merida and Cancun reflected on the importance of academic quality by guiding students towards a career path: "We need to work with them more towards professionalisation and give them the best of us". A teacher in Morelos mentioned the importance of aligning this goal to the mission, values and vision of the school to educate "competitive leaders in the process to better serve the society" and concluded that teachers' academic quality was about educating by example while "enjoying the classes, and preparing ourselves better day by day".

4.4.2 Using 21st Century Skills to meet global expectations for Personal and Professional success

Digging deeper into the perception of academic quality for teachers and administrators around the development of 21st-century skills was important to find out how to provide continuous support to assist students in reaching their fullest potential as well as to develop the necessary skills required for the 21st century. For example, in both Mexico City and Merida, teachers reflected on the importance of acquiring the proper skills to better navigate a highly

competitive world. "The relevance of the development of critical, creative and meaningful thinking is necessary to prepare students for the global world". This is similar to what an administrator in Morelos expressed about the importance of gaining extra skills and preparation to be successful in a highly competitive 21st-century workforce. From the request for information, this administrator suggested creating awareness in the classrooms, as part of the school agenda, as a way for students to think about solutions and understand what actions they could perform, such as "finding ways to include global issues into the curriculum and making them easily understood will encourage students to solve the issues and find new and innovative solutions".

The aspect of quality education was perceived in Cancun as the importance of being capable of preparing students for the demands of society, particularly the labour market. Anticipating the challenges and rapidly adapting to new ways of learning and socialising.

4.4.3 Acquiring Innovative Pedagogies for an effective teaching and learning process.

This section highlights the professional and social responsibility of teachers and administrators to provide students with a quality educational experience utilising new technologies and teaching strategies. To demonstrate this, a teacher from Merida expressed that academic quality means "not only teaching human beings with values but also the teacher must continuously train to learn innovative teaching strategies". Another teacher in Merida mentioned a similar perception: "It is the achievement of the expected learning in the students, as well as the constant pedagogical training of the teaching staff". Moreover, an administrator in Morelos reflected that academic quality is intertwined with the "formative and professional quality of the teacher, in such a way that both are a "mirror effect" in terms of the commitment to personal growth and teaching innovative pedagogies".

Meanwhile, a teacher in Cancun echoed this by involving the school management in charge of making sure the proper curriculum is developed and delivered in a "Comprehensive

and innovative way with the proper teaching techniques to give confidence and transmit knowledge to students".

For an administrator in Mexico City, the institutional commitment to the stakeholders guarantees an integral and comprehensive quality experience to reach academic goals. "The commitment of both teachers and students to get the most out of each course, which will be reflected not only in the evaluations but also in the long-term application of knowledge". Another teacher from Mexico City referred to the quality of education as an "endorsement, which means a gold seal of quality bound by properly trained teachers" to foster lifelong learning and teaching with ongoing support.

Finally in the words of a senior leader administrator from Cancun, academic quality meant to "prepare and update the academic content to the different grades". This means constant course revisions and executing them appropriately "so students have the most comprehensive learning possible in order to continue to postsecondary education".

4.5 International Accreditation Standards in Mexican Private Schools Students

In order to analyse how important international accreditation standards were in the Mexican private educational organisation in which the research was held, questions were asked on the meaning of international accreditation for students, teachers and administrators. To address this matter, the researcher administered an open-ended question in the surveys to all participants. The item prompted participants to indicate if in fact, international accreditation was relevant to improve the overall Mexican education system. This survey item requested that participants justify their response by saying "why it was important" and also providing further detail. The themes that emerged from these research questions for students were: 1) The importance of transferring credentials beyond borders to assure academic quality, and 2) The importance of graduating from a highly ranked and prestigious institution.

4.5.1 The importance of the ability to transfer credentials beyond borders to assure academic quality.

The first angle describes international accreditation in the voice of students and refers to the importance of gaining validation not only in Mexico but in other countries to gain more opportunities for the future. Students highlighted the importance of transferring their credentials to other parts of the world to gain access to different universities outside of Mexico.

For example, a student from Mexico City described international accreditation as the "academic quality of the school being recognised not only in your country but internationally". Validating the credentials in other countries was mentioned by another student from Mexico City, stating that "our school is seen as recognised by other countries for its teaching/learning methods deliveries". Moreover, a student from Morelos reflected on the importance of validating the credentials in other parts of the world to gain better opportunities than the students that gain their high school diploma abroad.

Additionally, a student in Cancun stated that international accreditation gives them "global competency" and this adds value to their education. While another student mentioned that becoming accredited holds more value in finding better options for universities worldwide and "this will allow you to study and work in other countries".

Lastly, a student from Merida perceived international accreditation as a good return on their investment "It is a way to know that your hard work will pay off eventually". Moreover, several students from Merida referred to International accreditation as a way to "enter to different institutions and with a good average and apply for scholarships".

The international accreditation for students from Merida and Cancun was perceived as a guarantee of continual evaluation of their teachers to meet academic standards: "Teachers are constantly evaluated to ensure the quality of the school".

4.5.2 The importance of graduating from a highly ranked and prestigious institution.

Another aspect that was seen to be important by students was the relevance of school rankings to "open more doors" internationally. In general, the perception of the quality of education in Mexico for students is underestimated, therefore, for most of them gaining international accreditation will provide them with a career path "with more and better options in the future". Thus, for a student in Cancun international accreditation was a synonym of "prestige to show the skills of Mexican students around the world" which will present more opportunities and benefits when they graduate from an internationally accredited school. While another student mentioned the value of international accreditation reflecting on their "efforts and education" at a different level, by getting official transcripts in English.

Another student from Morelos stated that " as we live in a globalised world, it is also important to stand out from the rest of the schools that will enhance our personal growth". One of the students from Mexico City, however, did not find international accreditation necessary to succeed in the future: "Mexico could stand out on its own, also international accreditation is not available for everyone, it is only accessible to the privileged students, so there are only a few who could strive for it".

International Accreditations for Teachers and Administrators

Additionally, the teachers and administrators also highlighted some aspects in this regard: 1)The endless urgency of Organisational support and accountability for teachers and 2) Promoting quality assurance across campus to warranty internationalisation and better opportunities

4.5.3 The endless urgency of Organisational support and accountability for teachers

Some of the perceptions of international accreditation for teachers and administrators around the continual collaboration as an institution to achieve a common goal were highlighted.

This first theme that proves the meaning and perceptions of international accreditation for administrators relates to ongoing organisational support and self-assessment by the different departments to continuously evaluate the different protocols in each school to raise accountability among the different areas.

In the words of a teacher from Cancun: "testing and improving the internal processes and procedures is necessary to be able to understand local standards, before suggesting other external standards or new protocols". Therefore, these teachers considered it necessary to "test out the internal or local procedures before suggesting other external or new protocols." Other teachers from Merida and Cancun were of the view that it was essential to improve Mexico's education system from within first and without being internationally accredited. "International accreditation gives the students an added value as the education system aligns with the international standards and allows them to compete worldwide, however, we need to be responsible to implement and improve processes first without being internationally accredited as it has to do with what happens inside the institution".

As expressed in the interviews with an administrator from Mexico City it was mentioned that: "International accreditation is important to gain ongoing support in place by departments to continuously evaluate the different protocols in each school to raise accountability among the different departments and to keep improving the integral development of the institutional skills to maintain academic excellence for years to come".

For Mexico City, a director stated that "schools should be able to be responsible and provide students with a variety of external opportunities…in fact, if more schools were certified and accredited, more students could take advantage of international and standardised education with certain levels of quality", which suggest that proper support is necessary "to move them faster towards preparation and deeper learning".
Moreover, the administrators and teachers in Cancun felt that international accreditation will give them support of an international agency to have continuous support towards an "educational path with higher standards to better assist our students". This was echoed by an

administrator from Morelos that perceived the benefit of international accreditation as a stepping stone to academic excellence and prestige with a more institutional approach related to the accountability shown by the school and how it can guarantee the development of responsible citizens as demonstrated in its educational standards. "A school should be able to provide students with a variety of external opportunities.

4.5.4 Promoting quality assurance across campus to warrant internationalisation and better opportunities

The second aspect related to quality that emerged from the data regarding international accreditation for teachers and administrators refers to the necessity of gaining a deeper understanding of the internal education system to promote quality assurance across campus by a peer visit with international educators every 3-5 years to maintain the certification. For example, the importance of international accreditation was reflected in the surveys with several administrators expressing the need for a constant and ongoing evaluation of the educational quality and educational process within the Organisation and institutions. While a teacher in Merida described international accreditation as a " differentiator and a rating from an outsider to approve and have an ongoing evaluation of all the processes to gain better results". Another teacher in the same city articulated that international accreditation is a "recognition of compliance with standards of excellence" to demonstrate higher education standards" to benefit the school community. In the words of an administrator from Mexico City "the globalised world needs well-trained and qualified human beings who can move forward and compete worldwide to improve the education system". Furthermore, another teacher from Merida mentioned that "by having this accreditation, it allows us to have more activities abroad, it gives us the opportunity to give our students an added value to their education and to move on to the global world with more academic and professional opportunities".

Administrators and teachers in Merida mentioned that international accreditation creates a differentiation among the schools and adds more prestige by evaluating our daily work to

promote quality. "It is important to differentiate and provide added value among the other schools because it will prepare students better for the world".

Another teacher from Morelos amplified this view about international accreditation as a way to be recognized, "it distinguishes not only the school but also those that collaborate here so students have a better chance to be recognised where they come from and where they are going professionally".

International accreditation for administrators relates to ongoing support and self-assessment by the different departments to continuously evaluate the different protocols in each school to raise accountability among the different areas, as expressed by an administrator from Mexico City. However, it was suggested by a teacher in Cancun that testing and improving the internal processes and procedures before suggesting other external standards or new protocols is necessary to be able to understand local standards.

Administrators and teachers in Merida mentioned that international accreditation creates differentiation among the schools and added more prestige to a particular school as it showed quality.

Moreover, international accreditation is seen to be necessary to improve the education system and promote quality assurance across campus. Therefore, in order to improve Mexico's education system, it was reflected in the surveys and interviews with the administrators that there should be a constant and ongoing evaluation of the educational quality and educational process within the Organisation and institutions in relation to international standards to ensure high quality standards at all levels. In the words of an administrator from Mexico City it was said that "the globalised world needs well-trained and qualified human beings who can move forward and compete worldwide… Mexico needs specific accreditations to train its human resources and improve its education system".

An administrator from Morelos perceived the benefit of international accreditation as a stepping stone to academic excellence and prestige with a more institutional approach related to

the accountability shown by the school and how it can guarantee the development of

responsible citizens as demonstrated in its educational standards. "A school should be able to

provide students with a variety of external opportunities… once more schools are certified and

accredited there will be more students with the ability to use the international and standardised

education that will provide them with higher levels of quality".

4.6 Are creativity and innovation integral components of international accreditation?

Students' Perceptions

To find out if creativity and innovation were important aspects related to quality and

accreditation, I administered a closed-response survey item to all participants. The item

prompted participants to indicate if innovation and creativity were important to the general

student learning process. This survey item requested that participants indicate "yes" if they

think that creativity and innovation are integral and "no" if they do not think that creativity and

innovation are integral. After the yes or no item, participants were asked to explain their

responses in more detail.

The survey results from students indicated that almost 100% of them located in four

different cities, agreed that creativity and innovation are important to have in the learning arena.

This compared to about 90% of the responses in favour of a greater impact of international

accreditation to improve Mexico's education system at a macro level.

Of the 387 students, only one student indicated that creativity and innovation were not

important to their learning, and this student was from the Mexico City site. In contrast, the other

386 students indicated that these concepts were important to their learning. After students

indicated that they almost unanimously agreed that creativity and innovation were important to

their learning, they were given the opportunity to explain the reasoning behind their affirmative

responses. Based on the thematic analysis of these responses two main themes were identified.

These themes were: 1) Generate new solutions and progress promoting dynamic and self-

expression for learning. 2) Enhancing the learning experience through motivation to achieve student success.

4.6.1 Generate new solutions and progress promoting dynamic and self-expression for learning

In terms of creativity and innovation students from Merida believed that these are necessary to maintain the learning process "alive and in a vibrant environment that helps them to think out of the box and step out of their comfort zone". For a student in Cancun, creativity meant "learning in movement" to avoid feeling bored in class and added the following statement: "if we do not innovate we will not be able to learn the topics in a clearer way and if we do not use creativity, the students do not want to learn by pleasure but only by obligation". This was echoed by another student in Morelos who mentioned that "projects and exercises would be more effective in a happy and creative environment that can motivate us to find new ways".

A student in Cancun valued creativity as a way to "not limit yourself" during the learning process, as the world is constantly changing and evolving, therefore students would also be transforming constantly and applying creativity will allow them to question those changes that lead to new solutions.

Meanwhile, students from Morelos focused on fostering creativity to celebrate their own identity: "Creativity is important because it motivates you to keep going, and it does not focus only on your knowledge, but on your own personal qualities of who you are". For students, creativity refers to a celebration between identity and experiential learning. In the words of a student from Mexico City, "It makes me develop new skills, it makes me think of new options of how to do certain things and make it my own with creativity which makes it more personal because ideas can´t be massively manufactured".

In Mexico City a student mentioned that there is not only one way to learn things, in fact, creativity shows "different intelligences to adapt their own way to do things" by nurturing their own interests and helping them unleash their human potential in creative ways.

4.6.2 Enhancing the learning experience through motivation to achieve student success

In this theme students reflected on the opportunities to feel motivated to achieve better results towards achieving their academic and personal goals when being creative. For example, a student from Mexico City mentioned that creativity in the classroom helps them pay more attention and learn better as it keeps them engaged in the learning process, which "allows us to move forward and be successful". Students from Mexico City were more prone to motivation than the other schools in Morelos, Cancun or Merida.

However, a student in Morelos felt that when they are creative they get close to developing their own talents "to define where you want to be, so your future will be successful…you need to see yourself inside and see what you want, and do not want to do".

Students from Mexico City mentioned that it is a very important aspect towards a "successful education, this way the students who graduate will be able to overcome any obstacle positively and tackle it in an innovative and creative way". While students in Cancun referred to this aspect of research as a way to encourage them to learn better and "do not forget" to keep their interest in learning alive.

A student in Merida, referred to creativity and innovation as a way for teachers to find new ways to implement evaluations, "So instead of taking long exams they can grade us differently to allow us to develop and explore new ways of learning for the future".

Overall, students implied that creativity and innovation are important to keep the learning process fresh and promote attentiveness with a vibrant spirit to achieve their goals towards the future.

Creativity and innovation for teachers and administrators

All of the 74 teachers (n=54) and administrators (n=20) who participated in this study indicated that creativity and innovation were important to learning, in general. Next, the researcher examined the responses to the follow-up question that asked teachers and

administrators to explain their reasoning for their responses to the yes/no question. Based on the thematic analysis of these responses, the researcher identified two themes among the teachers and administrators. 1)Encourage positive change with creative collaboration among stakeholders 2) Innovative technologies to inspire curiosity in learning

4.6.3 Encourage positive change with creative collaboration among stakeholders enhancing learning

The advantages of working effectively and collectively to achieve better results were shown in the data in several responses. Administrators from Morelos revealed, for instance, that creative learning cannot be achieved in the absence of critical and creative thinking that renders them capable of making decisions and solving day-to-day issues. This supports the responses, in which 100% of the participants in the survey responded that creativity and innovation are vital for a high-quality education process.

The data suggested that from the perspectives of teachers and management teams, there is a need to come together to create a positive environment to promote creativity during academic events for social and emotional growth. On the other hand, for teachers in Morelos, it is essential to ensure effective collaboration within the academic community to assess and design different projects that foster students' creativity. Thus, administrators in Morelos mentioned that "communication and closer collaboration with other campuses or meeting other teachers in academies could help to focus on creative activities and projects that also improve our school identity by identifying different types of learning and applying creativity while implementing technological innovation at the same time to achieve a common goal".

It was mentioned by the majority of administrators from Cancun that innovation is perceived as essential for the school to continue to grow and improve effectively and efficiently as an academic institution.

4.6.4 Innovative Technologies to inspire curiosity for meaningful learning

One of the most relevant responses among participants was that the institutions need to make themselves able to adapt, improve and innovate so as to be at the forefront of organisational success. In the words of an administrator from Cancun, "Student success implies continuous innovative training and curiosity".

Furthermore, the importance of creativity and innovation for teachers in Merida highlighted the use of new and updated technologies to assist teachers in keeping up with the next generation of students and "to stay updated with what is happening around the world". Moreover, three out of four administrators commented in their interviews on the importance of enhancing the curriculum with innovative strategies:

"This innovative pedagogical method is what makes these groups of private high schools unique, as it ensures academic quality in the classrooms". Arguing that continuous technological and pedagogical training is difficult to obtain in Mexico, however, the institution strives for the very best educators. The use of technology for a teacher in Cancun was seen as an innovative tool to increase creative outcomes, as students could link creativity with imagination which might lead to amazing things.

In the words of a teacher from Cancun, the importance of "keeping the practice fresh and vibrant" is to inspire students to stay interested and engaged during the learning process.

4.7 Conceptualisation of Academic Excellence

Student Perspectives

Through the data a conceptualisation of the meaning of academic excellence and its importance among students, teachers, and administrators was sought. I administered an open-ended survey item to all participants. The item prompted participants to identify the main aspects of academic excellence and why it is important. From this question emerged the following themes: 1) For students: achieving the highest performance and academic achievements, 2) The application of high academic standards to achieve student success.

4.7.1 Achieving the highest performance and academic achievements

The initial theme that emerged from the students' survey regarding the meaning of academic excellence was related to the application of academic skills and knowledge in order for students to achieve the highest results. For example, a student from Mexico City conceptualised academic excellence as "excelling at the things you do. Yes, it is important since it reflects the effort you put into school". This was echoed by another student "For me it means having good grades, knowing that they are well deserved and that I worked hard to get them". However, this student mentioned that the importance of academic excellence may vary and could hold some subjectivity depending on students' goals and expectations for learning. "I believe that the importance of this is subjective since perhaps some students want to have good, better or amazing grades to enter university or they simply do it for fun because they are good at school". Another student from Morelos, reflected on a similar idea of academic excellence due to the fact that learning is an ongoing process so, "you can't really become excellent at something, because you are always learning something new, so instead I would call it personal academic performance" allowing this to thrive in school with "your own essence".

On the other hand, for a student in Morelos academic excellence was the result of the knowledge acquired through high school to university successfully: "This means that upon graduating from high school I will come out with all the knowledge (or at least the basics) for the career I choose. This is important to me since it could help me to excel in my studies and facilitate my learning of subjects". Similar to a student in Cancun, academic excellence is achieved when you put into practice learning with "real value while increasing the intellectual value of students". Another student from Cancun mentioned that it is not only achieving good grades but it also entails the effort and the quality of your performance that takes you to that sentiment of "excellence".

For a student in Merida, however, academic excellence had a more holistic approach as it involved personal development in the process, "it is the wisdom towards becoming a better person". Similar to this, another student reflected on being "successful in your relationships,

finances and other things because we can have an impact when we have an educated mind. While students mentioned that academic quality was referred to earlier as an added value in school, academic excellence means for them the energy and effort to obtain the highest results in life. This was supported by a student in Merida that mentioned that academic excellence is having "the necessary knowledge and that you never forget. It is important because most of the time we say that we don't need the things that teachers teach us at school but most of them we like the empathy, their patience, their love and the motivation of the work they've done.

4.7.2 The Application of high academic standards to achieve student success

Academic excellence for different stakeholders was the result of developing cognitive skills among students in the classroom when applying high academic standards. As to why academic excellence is important for students, the most mentioned topic by participants from Merida was that "it helps the student to stand out from the rest, be successful and be prepared".

Furthermore, the application of cognitive skills in students helps raise their potential, highlighting that it is not only what they have learned but what they are able to reflect, create and analyse was brought up by a student in Merida. In other words, academic excellence for a student from Mexico City translates to the use and application of higher-order thinking skills and bringing students to a metacognitive level.

"In my opinion, it is the quality of the knowledge that over the years I have acquired and that forms me as a student because I believe that it is what will help you to transform in the future as an individual capable of bettering the reality that you have in front of you".

Academic Excellence for Teachers and Administrators

The following themes related to academic excellence emerged from teacher and administrator response data 1) Reinforcing pride and recognition through community building and academic events and 2) Promoting ongoing career advancement and expertise in Faculty members

4.7.3 Reinforcing pride and recognition through community building and academic events

Academic excellence for teachers and administrators was reflected in this theme by creating more events and projects that allow students to work and interact together while modelling good quality projects for greater participation among students while promoting experiences with a real-world outcome. For example, taking part in school events provided both students and administrators with external recognition and pride.

Such events give students not only an opportunity to interact with the community during class but in real-life situations. Moreover, it also keeps them engaged with the typical happenings of the world outside school.

A teacher in Morelos mentioned that academic excellence relates to achieving positive results during academic competitions, sports events, and other cultural activities "which are a good source of enhancing their school identity with pride while reinforcing academic excellence and recognition".

One student in Cancun had a similar view during the interviews and mentioned that these extracurricular experiences create pride when compared to other institutions making the school community feel that the school is positioned highly and excelling while standing out from the rest of the schools. "Every time there's an event with other schools or the Interschool from other cities, I feel proud of my school's level and educational quality. . .because you can see the quality of the teachers and coaches through the students". This idea was echoed by an administrator in Mexico City saying that social experiences develop a sense of togetherness between the people and motivate genuine support for each other that reflects in a transformational experience that remains active even after graduation.

For a teacher in Merida, the conceptualisation of academic excellence relates to the "final result of the equation… life as a professional, as it will allow them to open frontiers in the academic and professional field and raise their intellectual intelligence by being able to interact with other schools and teachers outside of class".

The importance of talent management and school pride through community projects helps to develop a sense of belonging, such a move for administrators in Mexico City and

Morelos is critical as it also helps students nurture their talents and abilities in different fields while fostering a sense of community. "For example, competitions and events by schools can serve as a good benchmark of interaction and participation among the students and the teachers, as well as indicate the institution's result of academic quality". Additionally, these administrators mentioned the value to showcase the success of the alumni. "When students come across alumni who have achieved higher goals in life, they feel motivated when attending intercollegiate competitions and related encounters that can improve the school's quality". Moreover, the administrators believed that if the school's academic quality is recognized outside of intercollegiate competitions, it is a moment of pride for them which reflects on the academic excellence of the school.

During administrators' interviews, academic excellence is reflected when students feel more motivated to participate in projects that develop a sense of belonging within the school and outside the community. For example, an administrator in Mexico City mentioned, "What has worked for us is when these academic competitions made by other prestigious universities such as Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM) or Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO), where our students participate, to live an experience, which is very enriching for them, but at the same time it gives us a very good indicator of how much and what level of quality we are preparing the students with".

Teachers for Morelos and Cancun reflected on academic excellence by discovering new talents with multiple learning professional skills: "As subject matter expert teachers we facilitate multiple higher education learning opportunities such as debating, entrepreneurship and research encounters that can help position the school at a higher level when compared to other institutions".

Additionally, teachers and administrators from Mexico City felt that academic recognition enhances students' self-confidence while helping to provide immense satisfaction and pride by attending a prestigious school. Furthermore, the aspiration to participate in these academic competitions usually requires the student to maintain a higher grade point average in order to compete which helps us to showcase and manage talent".

Overall, academic excellence for the participants involved the effort and time spent to achieve great results.

4.7.4 Promoting ongoing career advancement and expertise in Faculty members

For administrators, academic excellence also means the result of properly applying academic standards towards enhancing teaching identity with professional development and specialisation towards career advancement. For instance, an administrator from Mexico City mentioned that "Academic excellence means for me the set of practices, concepts, and values that provide the best teaching experience for the student, from a humanistic formative perspective, in such a way that they provide value to their life experience." Finalised by saying that "it is the consequence of providing good academic standards towards achieving academic excellence, is possible when constant pedagogical training of the teaching staff is delivered". All four administrators during the interviews mentioned that every year, teachers and administrators receive at least 20-hr training from national or international institutions to enhance pedagogical methods to help ensure academic quality in the classrooms. Drawing all Administrators interviewed they valued the annual mandatory training as per UNAM (National University Autonomous of Mexico), which is one of the top higher education institutions in Latin America. Therefore, "as a private high school incorporated by UNAM as our degree-granting institution that issues and mandates policies and procedures at a national level, therefore a teacher from Merida highlighted that "we need to make sure the curriculum is in alignment with the learning outcomes required for entering University".

The overall view of the administrators toward academic excellence guarantees that expert teachers gain specialised professional development to innovate in content delivery, with creativity to help students solve specific problems with a real-world focus in the institution.

"Our school always demands innovative teachers, who contribute to the educational project as we are part of a company that trains us not only in matters of technology but also regarding innovative pedagogy".

Moreover, this administrator mentioned that "it is vital to recruiting a team of highly motivated teachers specialised in their field with a professional profile to foster critical thinking and life skills". The academic profile of the teachers was highlighted by several administrators as another aspect of academic excellence by stating that "60% of teachers among the four private institutions already carry a graduate degree, while it is an institutional goal within the strategic plan to keep increasing the number of subject matter expert teachers with a Master's degree or a PhD by 2024".

4.8 Academic excellence for the school in 10 years from now

To find out from participants how they saw the achievement of academic excellence for the coming ten years the researcher administered an open-ended survey item to all participants.

4.8.1 Shaping Students' Future with an integral education to navigate a complex world

Students expressed their vision for academic excellence in 10 years with a progressive and positive outcome infused with a futuristic approach. For example, a student from Mexico City mentioned that academic excellence in 10 years looked like "the same system we have now, with values, but in a modern way". Several students in Merida referred to continue to have "an education with values" as well as keep inspiring and engaging students "with excellent teachers and better access". Other students from Cancun and Mexico City mentioned that the school will be one of the best and most prestigious schools in Mexico: "This school will continue to be one of the best institutions for learning because of your system, teachers, values, activities, accreditations and so on". However, a couple of students referred to dreaming about education with excellence but with more accessible fees in the future: "It should be excellent, but on the other hand they should not see it so much as a business and try to put themselves in the shoes of other people (due to the current situation covid 19) and lower costs since it may be a good school but if it is not accessible to people, in the end, it will not be of great use to have such prestige if we can't afford it".

The majority of the students foresee academic excellence better than what they experience now, in the majority of the students will hold very high academic standards and

prestige. For a student in Cancun however, he envisioned academic excellence with teachers that are more empathic, that is able to design evaluation according to learning styles and offer an education that can be more adaptable to students' needs to fulfil the global demands of the future. Several students from Morelos and Cancun perceived academic excellence in the future with more innovation, technology and better school facilities.

An important aspect of imagining academic excellence 10 years from now by a student in Merida was to" be able to adapt to changes and life and professional challenges rapidly". This argument was supported by a student in Cancun who mentioned that the school also needs to pay attention to the new generations "Academic excellence will decline if teachers continue to live in the past, we are a new generation".

4.8.2 Internasional education and global skills for future generations

The majority of teachers in Merida mentioned the importance of maintaining a good reputation while maintaining an international accreditation to achieve a higher ranking to better equip students with the skills needed for the demands of a highly technological and competitive environment. While, another teacher in Cancun aspires to provide graduates with global competencies " well prepared and with great potential …forming competent human beings to society, standing out in each discipline that they choose ".

On the other hand, an administrator in Morelos wished to include more subjects in English and offer more international exchange opportunities for students and faculty. Similar to another administrator in Mexico City reflecting on "having a 100% bilingual education with an advanced level of enrollment". Another administrator from Mexico City was hopeful for international accreditation to help maintain academic excellence for years to come. "Thanks to the international certification, we will offer a unique academic program in the country, becoming one of the most exclusive schools for its academic excellence". This was also supported by another teacher that had a similar view about the academic vision for the school in the next 10 years "with international standards that allow our students to participate in the leadership of globalisation".

Overall the vision of the teachers and administrators has a competitive outlook for the future to become the elite and outstanding institution in Mexico supported by international initiatives.

4.9 The challenges and opportunities faced by administrators, teachers, and students when quality standards change in private education in Mexico

In this section the challenges and opportunities faced by students, teachers, and administrators, will be discussed. I administered a semi-structured interview with follow-up questions to gain insight about the type of events in the school that helps to enhance quality. Additionally, a follow-up question was addressed to gain insights about how the school could ensure meeting the goals of higher academic standards.

Challenges and Opportunities for Students, Teachers and Administrators

The following sections are organised in themes that emerged from different participants' points of view addressing challenges, and opportunities to maintain high academic standards and enhance academic quality. The findings below show also similar perceptions from different groups of participants, by showing some intersections and similarities between them.

4.9.1 University readiness preparation to improve student satisfaction in higher education

During interviews with students from Cancun they expressed the need to work collaboratively with activities that foster motivation to maintain academic excellence for years to come suggesting that the "Class dynamics should become more interactive so that students develop the desire to pay attention and learn... Instead of having exams, students should be tested based on the projects given that showcase the application of their knowledge" to help prepare for University.

This was echoed by another student interviewed in Mexico City who advocated having more in depth tasks and assignments by "Including more university content, I mean, the topics that are included in the admission exam for University, so they can better prepare us when it's time to take it". While, another student in Morelos mentioned the opportunity to receive more University counselling towards discovering a career path and less standardised testing preparation which causes them uncertainty, especially during the pandemic. "I am uncertain

about the future due to the health, social and economic downfall we are experiencing due to COVID-19". It was also mentioned by several students in Merida, pointing out the importance of the institution to continue preparing students for University while helping them to discover their fullest potential. "It is important for the Mexican education system to keep up so that Mexican students won't be left behind and won't have lower odds when applying to a college". Students are asking for more guidance to help them choose the right program to be able to apply these cognitive and soft skills simultaneously. Overall, students favoured more University counselling and support in the form of further testing that will assist them to know what their best choices of career path would be.

A similar view from students was mentioned by an administrator from Mexico City confirmed the need to keep developing adequate skills and values for the "real" world to meet the academic standards and academic quality, which are essential elements for real-life education by stating:

"The students need more exposure to the outside world not only geographically but also in a significant way intellectually". This administrator suggested taking them beyond the classrooms to different environments where some experts in a particular field can be invited to interact with the students to widen their horizons and perspectives. "By taking our students to different environments where they have the facility to bring everything, they live in the class to practise and to go beyond the classroom".

4.9.2 Maintaining quality teaching practices to support students' academic goals

A student in Cancun expressed in the interview that in order to meet the goals of higher education standards, it is necessary "to keep teachers technologically advanced for the next generation of students while staying informed with what is happening around the world".

As mentioned by several students in Merida, "quality of teachers is another important aspect for ensuring excellence in education and the quality in the school" as the schools implement several actions to evaluate teachers' performances and to demonstrate it.

Another student from Mexico City also suggested developing more electives towards socioemotional and mental health care in the near future as one of their interests. Furthermore, participants realised that during the pandemic it would have been a good strategy for all the campuses' Socioemotional and Integration Departments (SOI) to carry out a self-assessment to identify better strategies for coping for students and teachers during Covid 19.

A comparable point of view was mentioned by an administrator in Mexico City, suggesting a more humanist education over a traditional one, to develop a meaningful relationship with students while helping them cope during unprecedented times: "living in a globalised world will prepare us for international accreditation, however becoming a competent human being is equally important as it will help improve humanistic education inside the classroom and raise the levels of education".

4.9.3 The benefit of diversity and inclusion as a benefit of social progression

Another recommendation from students in Cancun further addressed the importance of fostering inclusiveness of gender, race and other orientations. Students suggested that the main focus should not only be on academic standards within the courses, i.e. physics, chemistry, and math but focusing more "on extracurricular activities that promote meaningful interactions throughout all the grades". Students also recognized and showed interest in events that allow integration and a sense of belonging within the community. It was recognized that the school has a fairly good number of events planned every year that make the students work and interact together. However, often they are separated by grade or extracurricular activity, instead of integrating all of them with the participation of teachers and administrators.

Also, another student from Cancun recognized during the interview that it is crucial for schools to foster gender diversity. "For example, giving equal space and importance to students from marginalised groups such as LGBTQI+ to avoid demarcations among students based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social or economic status, etc. Even though students accept the school has made significant efforts in this, they are more interested in maintaining high standards for education. "When students feel that they are not being

discriminated against, they feel happier, safer, welcome and attracted to the school". By including everyone in all activities, schools can lower any incidents of discrimination and encourage greater acceptance towards diversity.

After the pandemic students from Cancun reflected that they became more sensitive and aware of the value of empathy as a quality in education during their teaching and learning process: "School needs to listen and be more empathetic with students. Because listening and understanding students' is crucial to feel and be seen that the school and its staff care about creating a better school and environment by being more supportive and accepting. Another student mentioned that even though, "the school does well and does not discriminate, I believe it is not about only accepting diversity but rather appreciating different realities"

4.9.4 Global citizenship and community involvement through service learning

Another theme that evolved from the data from student interviews and was suggested by several students to implement more practical ideas for the classroom to enhance community involvement. Several students in Cancun mentioned during the interviews that a way to enhance quality and raise academic standards for years to come could be " for example in science class, teachers could motivate students to raise awareness on the importance of our environment". Additionally, the following advice was mentioned with subjects like biology, geography, and sciences, in general, to be related "more about the environment we live in". This can also be achieved with different projects and even giving credits for students that are volunteering, "something like service learning or bringing experts to talk about environmental issues to raise consciousness to all the students, staff and teachers about the problems that are being faced globally".

Similar to this view, an administrator in Mexico City recommended gaining a certification or agreement with any non-profit organisation that can help the schools to advance in this area and improve their academic quality. "Schools as environmental organisations can participate in events that support the environment and sustainability to continue and improve the learning process".

There was a genuine interest from students during the interviews to be better informed about the environment to enhance the quality and raise environmental consciousness, therefore students suggested working with a specialist about the environment that could help improve knowledge and understanding of the subject. Furthermore, a student from Mexico City raised the importance of having a conference about global issues to propose new solutions through different non-profit organisations. These associations can also be made to support sustainability by action, "due to the simple fact that there are a lot of organisations and associations that are able to connect with us and have activities with the school community". Similar to a student in Cancun that would like to invite local environmentalists, "this may also motivate students to join these organisations and improve our local ecosystem and maybe create meaningful partnerships with organisations to donate and volunteer with to become active citizens of the world". Similar to the student voice in Cancun, an administrator in Mexico City mentioned that these ideas towards global citizenship not only raise environmental awareness but will also align with the strategic plan while helping students to gain community work experience which is vital for University scholarship applications.

A strong sentiment about the environment was raised by students in Cancun by highlighting that the school excels already in planning a yearly research congress, however having a deeper understanding to open new conversations between experts and students, to suggest solutions to environmental issues with a round table during the conference".

Overall, increasing volunteering activities and more community involvement were suggested by several students in Cancun: "I mean, they're really specific activities that we can do with the school like going to clean the beach, or clean the streets, teach us sustainable energy or teach us how to do it, etc" or "we should keep on doing projects where we have to recycle". Also assign new global issues, and solutions during our research congress "maybe making some projects, like, clean energies or how to reduce trash, or maybe recycle them(...) one example is to start participating in eco-campaigns may be inside or outside the school".

Students showed during the interviews a high sense of environmental mindfulness with global issues, such as climate change and global warming as an opportunity to generate a more impactful positive change not only in the school but in the community to create new solutions.

Some students already have the opportunity to take an elective class in the Model United Nations (MUN) as a great way to develop global skills, through debates towards international diplomacy, however, it was suggested that the school could assign extra credits in other subjects when participating in outside events. With this in mind, students advise the schools to promote service learning, create partnerships, and join local Environmental Organisations. "Our school can set an example by urging the school to use its infrastructure and self-Organisation to grow and distribute food to other communities, or like having a vegetable patch where we grow our own food and the staff members receive the food". In addition to this, students also mentioned the challenge of not having the proper education to recycle on campus, "they need to apply, I don't know, rules about how to separate the garbage, water waste or power saving to support academic excellence for years to come".

4.9.5 Institutional Culture through improving human relations and communication channels

One of the most important challenges mentioned by teachers and administrators refers to Mexican schools implementing the mission, vision, and governance with congruency. Teachers and administrators perceived quality as a misalignment between these factors and made a strong recommendation from several administrators in Cancun and Mexico City: " We really need to set up an area of human resources that can take care of other responsibilities that we are currently doing". Thereby, alleviating the additional workload on the current administrators and teachers to set a fructiferous organisational culture towards teacher retention and better professional opportunities for growth. As another example, a teacher from Cancun mentioned that "in the private school setting, a prospective teacher must participate in a competitive hiring procedure to be hired as a teacher." Hence, in Morelos, it was pointed out that to maintain academic standards requires a formal Human Resources department to assist in hiring and termination by a committee to create an ethical balance towards ethical practices: "the

recruitment of teachers should be much less about the common sense of the administrator and much more organised, planned differently by the HR department". Echoed by an administrator in Mexico City saying that "for the size of the Group, I think we need an area of human resources that will take care of many of the situations that occur in this area of management to systematise processes effectively…as administrators, we already have many other functions, and are sometimes not available to take care of everything". Therefore, administrators suggest having committees to recruit new talent but also foresee the performance review and career development of the current employees.

An administrator in Cancun and Mexico City mentioned that to maintain and improve higher academic standards the need for a formal performance review protocol for Directors and administrators is necessary to gain a deeper reflection, maximise the human capital, recognise their work and award them accordingly.

4.9.6 Deeper interaction and communication among stakeholders to enhance a stronger collaboration

Deeper interaction with the students can foster a better relationship with them and improve school quality as some students said that it is essential for the school to listen to the voices of their stakeholders.

To ensure higher quality standards, most students recommended more interaction with school administrators to locate areas of improvement. In Cancun, a student recommended that "The school should interact more with students by having a student committee to make suggestions to improve school and to have a better relationship with the ones who actually are the clients".

However, improving communication is another aspect that can raise the quality standards in addition to facilities and teacher expertise, as expressed by administrators. As suggested by an administrator in Morelos, having regular meetings and constant communication with stakeholders could help to dissolve barriers and improve academic quality.

Furthermore, several actions have taken place to improve communication such as the use of WhatsApp, emails, and social media. Teachers from Merida mentioned that by implementing effective communication between stakeholders, solidifies the community avoiding barriers and divisions to develop the school as one entity and guarantee academic excellence in the future. However, in the words of students from Merida, "barriers should be removed to develop the school as one powerful unit". Whilst, the majority of administrators from Mexico City and teachers highlighted the importance of communication channels, to deepen and improve human relations. "We still have to improve a lot internally on the subject of communication flow, in that sense, for example, our administrative area is not aware of things that are happening in schools".

On the other hand, administrators from Morelos mentioned that it is also essential to know the institutional culture and norms to communicate clearly with stakeholders. "Overall, the school sets a good example as it engages students, staff, and teachers in different events with the help of good communication and coordination because we feel that when administrators talk to us it makes us feel important". In contrast, in Morelos, an administrator commented on the importance of institutional culture, "to know how to listen, give personalised follow-up, and take care of every detail of our students, begins by knowing their name."

4.9.7 Student decline and teaching burn-out during the economic and emotional crisis in the pandemic

Another relevant challenge expressed during the interviews was mentioned by an administrator in Morelos during the pandemic referring to career advancement opportunities for teachers. "These are granted based on funding and budgeting based on yearly student enrolment, in which as a result of the pandemic has declined about 15-20%, which has forced administrators to take on multiple roles and having to prepare to teach in different ways which has generated for us…we feel overwhelmed". In contrast, for a teacher in Mexico City it was important to reflect on the pandemic with resilience: "This pandemic put us in many situations where we had to innovate and do the same as we did, but in a way, well, with innovation, to

take the challenges forward, and by reinventing itself many times with new programs and opportunities for students."

Additionally, another challenge presented during COVID-19 to prove academic quality was the lack of connectivity with the outside world. As the interviews revealed from a student in Morelos, most students were not well prepared for such unexpected real-life events that changed their lives and impacted their academic performance.

Another challenge that appeared during the pandemic according to an administrator in Cancun, was that before COVID-19, psychologists from the Department of Orientation and Integration were only perceived as bystanders compared to the level of support and intervention that they are currently providing at school. As of now, the level of support needed and the number of interventions delivered to enhance the mental health of the school community has increased significantly. In addition to this, an administrator from Merida mentioned that during the pandemic, the socioemotional aspects have been hindered during the pandemic, and "even with counsellors present in each school, there is still the need to deliver more support to cope with loss and anxiety during the teaching and learning process" to enhance mental health.

4.9.8 Recommendations to keep fostering academic excellence for years to come

Students in Morelos recognized that the school excels by providing more than 60 institutional agreements with different national and international Universities. Moreover, these higher education institutions recognise the school's efforts towards academic excellence and provide several scholarships and awards to students to continue higher education. According to an administrator in this city, 100% of the students enrol in a university program after graduation. "The school offers personalised guidance for us to help with our future studies and assist us with the process of enrolment and university admission preparation. However, during the interviews, a student from Cancun stated that they would like the schools to work closer with universities to give them the skills and expertise in different careers to help them make a decision towards different university programs with more confidence.

Furthermore, a student from Mexico City mentioned the importance of having multiple University opportunities, but a more customised teaching approach was also seen to be important. For example, this student mentioned that in order to obtain student success in the future "we need to have a more personalised teaching method in order to understand what academic success means to individual students; first, they need to understand what is success for each one of us and then try to address it in the way that we feel comfortable with what we're doing in class".

Moreover, a teacher from Morelos was keen on promoting cultural and artistic events for the student community. "Maybe we need to focus more on some art events like galleries or theatre plays because our school does really well in science and sports events"…."The only areas that we would need to enhance within the school is to have more exposure in arts, promoting writing, music, and painting". This would help to create progression routes into Higher Education in different subjects.

According to an administrator in Mexico City, the school can improve by providing more professional experience opportunities to students. This administrator suggested to not only prepare them academically but also "empowering them for the future, dream about what they want to become through placing themselves in different higher education scenarios, such as university visits or gaining early professional experience which is something that as a middle-class Mexican society students lack due to safety and social differences". In line with this, it was suggested …..that the Mexican education system needs to evolve so that students will not be left behind or with lower odds when submitting applications to a University or college.

In terms of providing students with the proper education that is needed for today's day and age, teachers and administrators agreed the school makes a great effort to keep them trained and prepared to tackle the challenges of a global education crisis. However, an administrator in Morelos and Mexico City suggested the need for more personalised professional development opportunities. "Even though teachers and administrators receive on-going professional development opportunities every year, we need more specialised training to enhance academic

quality in teaching in order to better collaborate interdisciplinary with training that is more specific, current and specialised". This custom-made professional development should be more discipline-based to foster new skills and strategies specific to their own area of study (i.e. Math, Language, Arts, Sciences) to enhance deeper conversations and intersections with other faculty members in other schools.

Chapter 5 Discussion

As described in the literature review section, one of the most challenging aspects of learning and teaching is to keep the academic environment positive and students motivated (Anis, Abdullah, and Islam, 2014). Finding expertise in the content areas is one of the top priorities in Education through course revisions, certifications, international accreditations and innovative pedagogies to inspire students to learn and improve the academic quality of the schools and educational institutions. However, the attainment of quality education synonymous with the various facets of quality, as well as fostering a positive and motivating academic environment remains a major challenge. The surveys and interviews conducted with the students and administrators offered great insight into how those higher academic standards can be set and reached as well as inspire the students to reach their fullest potential infused with values to more transformational learning.

International accreditation for inspiration

It was noticeable that after going through an International Accreditation process, more administrators were aware of the importance of the school's mission, vision, and values as they were blended in with the pedagogy.

I have reiterated the research questions here as a basis for the following discussion.

What are the perspectives of teachers, students and administrators on international accreditation standards and quality in education?

Are creativity and innovation integral components of international accreditation? If so, how?

Some sub-questions to get to the issues at a deeper level:

1. Do perspectives differ across teachers, administrators and students?

2. What are the challenges and opportunities faced by administrators, teachers, and students when quality standards change in private education in Mexico?

3. How do teachers, students and administrators conceptualise academic excellence?

For most students, ensuring higher quality standards meant more meaningful interactions with school administrators to locate the areas of improvement. For example, having a closer relationship with their clients and among the stakeholders. Deeper interaction with the students can foster a better relationship with them and improve school quality as some students said that it is essential for the school to listen to the voices of their students (Akiba and Liang, 2016). As a result, the essence of good relationships between the various stakeholders cannot be overlooked.

There was a unanimous agreement among the administration to acquire international accreditation and get information to know where they stand in terms of achievement. In Cancun, the most mentioned aspect as to how the school will be in 10 years was that our graduates will leave prepared and with great potential aiming for positive change along with global competencies as well as forming useful human beings in society, standing out in each discipline that they choose. In order to develop adequate skills and values for the "real" world, it is essential to incorporate elements for real life in education. The students need exposure to the outside world not only geographically but also in a significant way. Administrators suggest taking them beyond the classrooms to different environments. Where experts in a particular field can be invited to interact with the students to widen their horizons and perspectives. Some participants were of the view that the same can be enhanced by taking our students to different environments where they have the facility to bring everything, they live in the classroom to practise and to go beyond the classroom

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It was deemed important to be aware and know the institutional culture and norms. A personalised follow-up was considered necessary in the pedagogical area and parenting programs. It is essential to assess the development and performance of teachers to know if they can connect better with the students and provide quality experiences to them. Relation between peers and human communication was also suggested, especially with most cultural trips, events, and excursions cancelled due to the pandemic.

Even though the participant schools have already accomplished national and international accreditation, there was an opportunity to focus on a more localised academic quality assurance process with a bottom-up approach where different stakeholder groups participated in the process, to promote quality enhancement in a more accurate, effective and real way. A framework for academic quality in Mexican private schools is suggested as follows to encompass students, teachers and administrators' perceptions. This conceptualisation of quality in education represents what the most valuable aspects and features consider in order to achieve a common ground towards academic excellence.

The following diagram represents the most relevant quality themes perceived by students, teachers and administrators during the surveys and interviews based on their own experiences at their local institution to proceed after with a conceptualization of academic excellence. It might seem a little busy, but it includes all themes that were identified and will help in the discussion.

Figure 5. Academic Quality Themes in Mexican Private schools (Ramirez Abdala,2022)

Academic Quality in Mexican Private schools
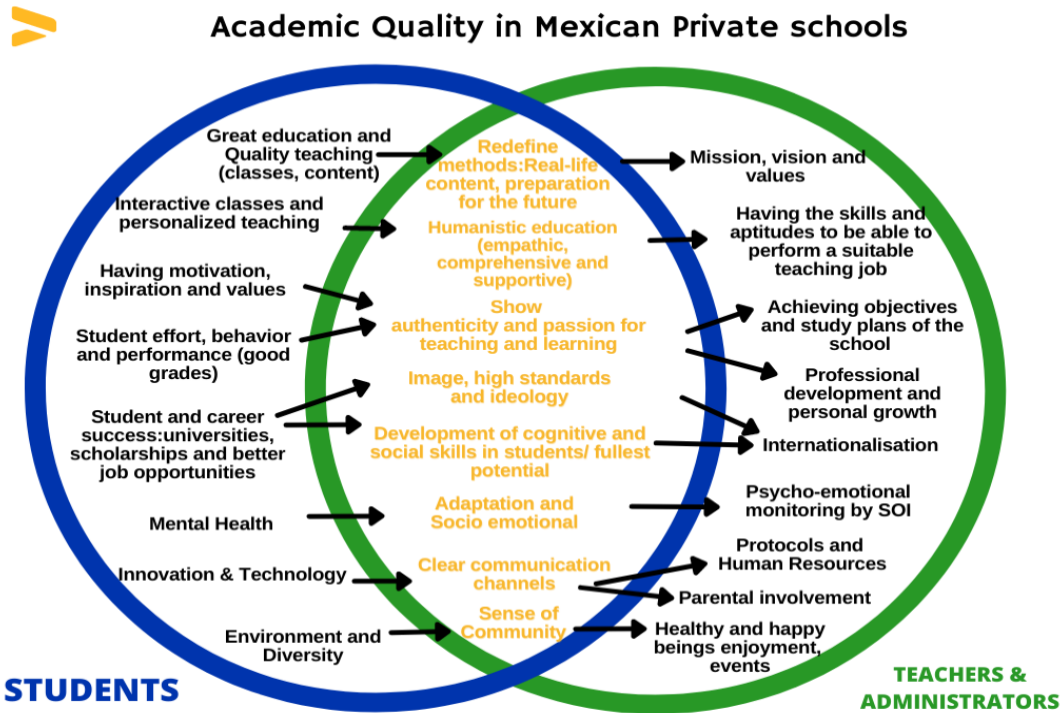
The Mexican educational system is synonymous with numerous challenges that have warranted the need for a serious discourse to address these challenges. Countries such as Korea and Spain have demonstrated remarkable progress relative to Mexico in the development of educational quality (Guichard, 2005). Challenges facing Mexico as a country such as the low level of human capital is attributable to the quality of education in Mexico. The education system is characterised by high rates of repetition and school dropout and low levels of student' achievement at the national and international levels. While repetition and dropout rates have been decreasing in the recent past, Mexico has not registered significant improvement in such literacy surveys as the PISA framework (Guichard, 2005). These factors demonstrate the necessity of improving the quality of education in the country. Despite the fact that Mexico has made significant progress in stabilising its macroeconomic environment since the 1995 financial crisis, there is a need for further reforms particularly in the field of education to level up with the experience of the advanced OECD countries.

Notwithstanding the existence of a general consensus that there is a need to address the issues bedevilling the education sector, there are numerous challenges that tag along with the strife to actualize the same. One of the key challenges is the lack of a clear understanding of the

conception of what constitutes quality education. The term quality in the educational setting has been construed differently from one institution to another, as well as from one stakeholder to another. The difference in opinion and conceptualization of what constitutes quality education was laid bare by Harvey and Green already in 1993 . They noted that the term quality in the educational sector varies ostensibly from one context to another in reflection of the different perspectives of individuals, societies, as well as institutions and other key stakeholders in the sector, including the government. Moreover, true to the views expressed by Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008) that the lack of a definitive definition of the term quality teaching or even education is premised on the fact that the definitions of quality are relative to each stakeholder's description of the term in a manner which suits their goals and context; the participants seemingly emphasised certain attributes that suited their perception. The first theme that came out strongly in the administrator's interview findings was that school academic quality is determined by the integral development of institutional life skills. Accordingly, this provides innovative strategies that support teaching.

Notably, it is an affirmation of the view that defining quality in education always includes the process and its real life outputs (Henard and Leprince-Ringuet, 2008). According to the OECD Learning Compass 2030, it refers to skills as a process to apply knowledge in a conscious and responsible way to accomplish goals (OECD, 2018). Professional development in teachers is important, however in order to foster students´ agency it requires "mobilising knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands. The OECD Learning Compass 2030 distinguishes between three types of skills: cognitive and metacognitive skills; social and emotional skills; and practical and physical skills as described in the figure below (OECD,2018).

Figure 6. The OECD Learning Framework 2030
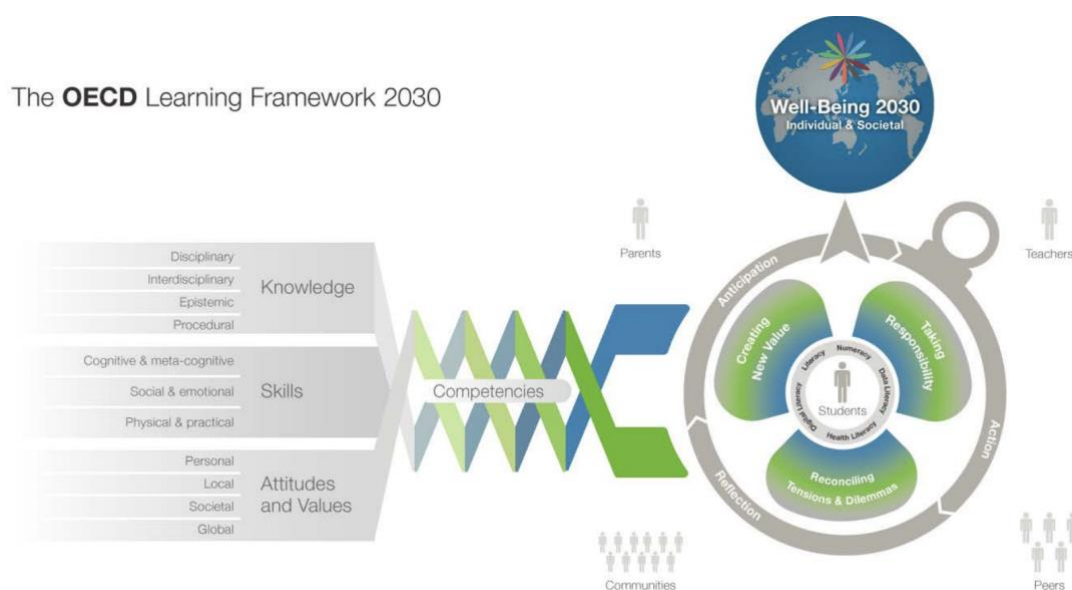
In order to prepare students for the future with real life content and skills to overcome the present, past and future environmental, social, economic and technological challenges, it is necessary that students develop agency throughout their learning process (OECD, 2018). This means, putting the student at the forefront of the learning arena and promoting responsibility to actively put knowledge in action and positively engage at a social level to achieve their goals. This was clearly suggested by students when talking about applying what they learn in a meaningful project with a real-world outcome instead of memorising content for the exam. Fostering co-agency requires educators, families, administrators and the community to support them as with an individualised learning environment to cultivate their motives and passions. Secondly, enhancing literacy, numeracy, physical health and wellbeing are important to better navigate their learning and the world they will be living in (OECD, 2018).

As a result, relevance with the dictates and demands of the labour market and the community at large should be promoted and intertwined in education mainly focused on standardised testing systems and not in real-life skills development. This was clearly suggested by a C1 administrator in the data that supported international accreditation and standardised education to achieve higher levels of quality. Then the question remains whether or not standardised testing is particularly useful or the most effective way to judge learning. There

have been recent discussions in higher education to widen participation by restricting standardised testing to improve learning outcomes in a more formative way (Guichard, 2005). The sentiments acknowledge the shortcomings of general testing, and the need to have the same standardised tests to focus on the objective abilities of the students. Such a stance has been prominently championed by Soh (2013a) who identifies that the addition of unstandardized indicators for the total scores used in the rankings as a source of misinformation that could mislead the consumers of publications on university rankings. The data supports this by comments made from students considering the main benefit of international accreditation being school rankings, as it will be providing new opportunities abroad.

The need to establish a common ground at a macro level in understanding the issue of quality education is precipitated by a series of factors, which render the discussion to be of immense importance. One of them is the value of education in addressing various social, economic, cultural, as well as the political challenges not only facing Mexico but also the world at large. To achieve such an ambitious objective, there is a need to constantly keep the academic environment motivated and positive (Anis, Abdullah, & Islam, 2014). This was also highlighted through the administrators' surveys from Mexico City and Merida that in order to foster an optimal environment for learning, a more holistic approach is recommended to cultivate a culture of joy and growth. Besides, the heavy investments in the educational sector both by the government in designing the curriculum, training teachers as well as investments by parents and students in quest for education epitomises the need to enhance the quality of education. However, attainment of quality education cannot be realised in the absence of a clear understanding of what constitutes quality education. Perhaps, this is one of the scathing issues that have derailed the effectiveness of the numerous reforms aimed at revolutionising the educational sector. This has been confirmed time and time again by teachers and administrators in the research with the suggestion to define their own processes internally while evaluating the meanings and results to encourage accountability. The efforts have ended up bearing too little or exposing a series of shortcomings in the implementation process.

The surveys and interviews conducted on the students and administrators in this research offered a great insight into how quality education can be perceived or contextualised, suggesting focusing first and foremost on students, teachers and administrators' perceptions and the meaning of quality and the positive remarks of the overall educational experience. Before paying the international accreditation membership, which is mainly based on a number of students enrolled, organisations need to be aware that embarking on international accreditation may not lead them to academic quality, as the process is mainly based on numbers, systems and governance (i.e. budget, expenditure, enrolment, profit, board), rather than local improvement in education. Therefore, a previous step with an insightful outline is necessary to identify their own meaning of quality that pays attention to those qualities and experiences that inspires students, teachers and administrators to reach their fullest potential. Putting into consideration the various responses and discussions blended with insights from a review of the extensive literature available on the subject, it is evident that the idea of quality education is greatly intertwined in a series of factors and local indicators that cannot be generalised or standardised. Striving to actualize the ideals of the said indicators would be a step in the right direction that would ultimately push towards the realisation of the dream to quality education. Below is a brief depiction of some of the key aspects and constituent elements of quality education and their attendant value in the educational sector as highlighted in the research and literature.

Clear Communication Channels

Evidently, communication avenues were instrumental in enhancing positive student-teacher relationships as a depiction of quality education and learning at large.

For the students, communication and relations within the classroom can help them prepare better in different areas and higher education (Lopez-Acevedo, 2004). There is an emphasis on having day-to-day discussions and including them in more projects and programs during the class. They should be prepared for the real life ahead but without any anxiety or worrying about admissions. Students asked specifically for professional skills and that the school should teach them about finances, taxes, and more specifically the stock market and

knowledge in professional life. They want to increase the use of technology and online platforms in teaching.

With internal improvement in communication flow the schools are better aware of situations and events changing as they happen rather than being in a reactive stance. As highlighted by Englehart (2009), the quality of the interaction between students and teachers and other relevant stakeholders in the institutional set up is key in enhancing quality education, which was confirmed by students and teachers alike in the research. Since communication is one of the key interaction facets, it would follow that proper and effective communication enhances fruitful interaction that ultimately enhances quality education.

All interviewed individuals emphasised the need to have clear communication channels as barriers exist between the administrative area and the academics. Different departments, staff, and students must always be in constant communication. There are plenty of recommendations among students on how to improve human relations, socioemotional contact between students, teachers, and staff, and students with good communication tools. Social activities that promote a better relationship and trust between the staff and the students are suggested. Teachers should try to integrate the class as a cohesive group and make strong connections with each student. It is essential to prepare an empathetic teacher who can show greater understanding to the students facing any kind of difficulties within and outside the classroom.

Institutional/Organisational Culture

Quality education cannot be understood or attained without having a look at the organisational or institutional culture, which significantly informs the teaching and learning processes, practices, as well as outcomes. Organisational culture refers to the broad collection of values, expectations, as well as practices that are instrumental in guiding and informing the actions of all stakeholders within a given institution or organisation. In essence, it is a collection of the characteristic attributes and traits that craft the identity of an entity and thus are founded

on consistent and authentic behaviours as opposed to policy documents (Nguyen, 2010). As a result, the values of the learning institutions are critical in embodying the aspect of quality education. A rich organisational culture would be synonymous with a quality education while a poor organisation culture would translate to poor education quality. This research has to a great extent espoused what may constitute a good organisational culture in the context of a learning institution as a driver of quality education.

Organisational culture is part of the DNA of the institution, which promotes the quality of teachers but also sets the basic rules of interaction and conduct and thus intertwines them into daily practices for fruitful learning (Cardoso et al. 2016). Cardoso et al. (2016) acknowledge that an Organisation's culture facilitates or hinders the adoption of practices which ensure quality learning and teaching. The types of organisational cultures influencing teacher learning behaviour include adaptive, result-based, clan, and bureaucratic (Hassani and Ahmadi, 2015; Somprach et al., 2015). Such types of cultures have different effects on a teacher's motivation and support for professional development. As a result, the organisational culture must promote smooth interactions between the relevant stakeholders, including the teachers and the students. Arguably, this is in appreciation of the role of organisational culture in influencing teaching and learning behaviour. Cardoso et al. (2016) acknowledge that an organisation's culture facilitates or hinders the adoption of practices which ensure quality. This was confirmed by administrators to expand quality towards professional growth and supportive teaching identity. The types of organisational cultures influencing teacher learning behaviour include adaptive, result-based, clan, and bureaucratic (Hassani and Ahmadi, 2015; Somprach et al., 2015). The aspect of organisational culture espouses the idea of an institutional approach proffered herein.

One of the key characteristic features of a rich organisational culture is the cultivation of open communication channels within the institution, whereupon students can voice their concerns and anticipations. Notably, the same should not be confined to the viewpoint of the students but also to the teachers as key stakeholders, as well as the administrators. There should

be a seamless flow of information and communication across the stakeholder's divide, which would be instrumental not only in curbing incidents of student and teacher indiscipline but also elicit appropriate responses from the administrators. Notably, communication within the realm of education and teaching holds great importance for successful outcomes, which was shown in the research data.

Effective teaching within classrooms requires effective communication, and the teacher should be competent in a variety of communication skills, which includes both verbal and non-verbal competencies (Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour, 2017). The non-verbal communication of a teacher can impact their relationship with the students and the quality of teaching. Any barriers to communication during teaching should be identified and removed or at least limited for improved outcomes. As asserted by Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour (2017). non-verbal communication includes body language and facial expressions that convey a particular message to the audience during teaching. There is a significant correlation between the teacher's verbal and non-verbal behaviours and students' achievement. Communication within the realm of education and teaching holds great importance for successful outcomes. Effective teaching within classrooms requires effective communication, and the teacher should be competent in a variety of communication skills, which includes both verbal and non-verbal (Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour, 2017).

The communication of a teacher, whether verbal or non-verbal, can impact his or her relationship with the students and the quality of teaching. Any barriers to communication during teaching should be identified and removed or at least limited for improved outcomes. Therefore, the organisational culture must embed proper communication channels to amass the benefits of effective communication. Both teachers and administration raise the idea of improving human relations by promoting clear communication channels. Students also stated the value of having positive communication with their teachers, as it was not what they say but how they say it that matters the most for them. Communication within the realm of education and teaching holds great importance for successful outcomes. Effective teaching within

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It would be essential to keep the students positive, happy, and motivated within the classroom to build the social and emotional aspects. In order to achieve the above-listed roles in generating projects and exercises, it is vital to strengthen communication within the school and classrooms. This will lead to the information always flowing seamlessly and transparently to meet the expectations of those goals. More personalised teaching is considered to be crucial by the students for their success. As expressed by a student from C3 that compared student success in alignment with personalised teaching methods in a positive learning environment. When students find themselves in a healthier and happier environment, they would naturally feel motivated to attend the classes and learn. According to Scott, Posner, Martin, and Guzman (2018), over the last 20 years, the curriculum reforms in Mexico have embraced educational needs and modernist assumptions of reliability and validity. International comparisons assess the productivity of individual education systems and examine the teacher-training practices across the Mexican states.

Participants recognized that barriers to communication during teaching should be identified and removed or at least limited for improved outcomes. As asserted by Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour n (2017) non-verbal communication includes body language and facial expressions that convey a particular message to the audience during teaching. There is a significant correlation between the teacher's verbal and non-verbal behaviours and students' achievement. Teachers need to guarantee a positive climate and ensure an atmosphere of success as was highlighted by teachers and students in the research. Surprisingly, in high school parents do not seem as involved and encouraged to get involved with the students to encourage them and promote positive academic settings (Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012). Some suggestions for creating a positive classroom environment include starting with high expectations and making the classroom visually interesting. Students should be encouraged to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility and behave and act

appropriately. An academically structured setting with clearly set expectations and guidelines can help prevent undesirable behaviours (Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012). The academic quality can translate to the quality of the community and foster a unified and more robust community that could have a more humanistic impact. It was clear to teachers and administrators the importance of a humanistic approach that strengthened their values with a highly memorable academic experience while positively impacting their lives and future.

Interaction and Participation

Events and projects that allow students to work and interact together will encourage higher interaction and participation with a real world outcome, as it was mentioned that the subject matter expert teachers combined with the multiple higher education opportunities such as debating, entrepreneurship and research encounters can help position the school at a higher level when compared to other institutions).

Equally for the administrators, academic recognition enhances students' pride providing immense satisfaction and self-confidence, as often students only show a sense of pride for having attended a particular school or institution but this does not promote a long-lasting relationship and connection for the future, even if that means returning to work as teachers.

Such a position speaks to the fact that fostering quality teaching is crucial to an institution's reputation in terms of contribution to the development of employable candidates (Čepić et al., 2015; Jackson, 2013). In essence, the quality of the education is premised on the output in that the quality of the teacher can be objectively measured from the success of the students in various curriculum and extracurricular activities.

Many of the students that were surveyed and interviewed expressed the need to work collaboratively with activities that foster motivation through the task. Specifically, it was stressed that a greater focus on the class dynamics helped it to become more interactive so that the students would focus more on learning the content. Then the summative evaluation Should

encompass projects to demonstrate the application of what they learned instead of having to study and memorise concepts for an exam.

Meanwhile, the government is focusing on increasing school enrolment in primary and secondary education, which should be coupled with the schools preparing the students for the tasks ahead (Creighton & Park, 2010). This would help them make informed choices on their career path and general success by being in a position of psychological preparedness for the expectations and the nature of higher education.

Furthermore, there is a need to weigh the pros and cons when testing or implementing different quality standards to evaluate and analyse if this is what students really need to thrive (Soh, 2013a; Soh, 2013b). However, considering the socio-cultural context in Mexico, it is important to pay attention to our own realities and needs as well, instead of only applying US standards to a one-fits all education system. The question remains, how do Mexican students then better demonstrate their learning level when the metrics and the tool being used to measure their knowledge is not in alignment with their core values of learning?

It was relevant in this study that while teachers and administrators highlighted the importance of Human Resources, norms, skill development, and pedagogy when referring to academic quality. However, students' responses were more infused with socioemotional and career support, values, student-teacher relationships, protecting the environment, real world content, and fostering diversity while avoiding inequalities. It seems relevant that for most participants the academic quality of an institution is based on the equality of education and the kind of meaningful and informative experiences being delivered to the students to develop not only knowledge but also skills and attitudes. When meaningful and informative experiences have combined the ability to use more equality for the students in their education is more probable and recognized. The issue of equality in education was discussed in depth by López-Acevedo (2006), who observed that despite the evolution of education for decades, the issue of inequality remains a key puzzle. As such, it can be posited that the quest for quality education cannot be achieved in the subsistence of inequalities in the sector.

Appreciation of Diversity

In the era of globalisation and internationalisation, the issue of diversity in the classroom setting is gaining traction. Learning institutions consider internationalisation as a means of integrating diversity into their student population (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Internationalisation introduces institutions to new conditions as they operate outside their national boundaries. Measures to achieve diversity in the internationalisation era include to achieve the required levels of cultural competency and interactions through focusing on artistic and sporting events which offer unlimited opportunities for interactions with a non-discriminatory policy. Notably, students' awareness towards diversity reflected that higher standards of education are not possible if there is still gender inequality in education. Thus, students from these schools accept and recognize diversity to attract students and set higher standards for education regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation or status. Students from C3 reassured that by becoming a more diverse campus while accepting different realities intentionally, then a more inclusive, safer and happier school environment will be nurtured.

In appreciation of diversity and cultural competence, there is a need to make efforts to accommodate the various types of learners without any form of discrimination. There should be a sense of equality in all the educational spheres so as to talk of having attained quality education. The issue of equality in education was discussed in depth by López-Acevedo (2006), who observed that despite the evolution of education for decades, the issue of inequality remains a key puzzle. As such, it can be posited that the quest for quality education cannot be achieved in the subsistence of inequalities in the sector. Equality ranges from fair treatment of learners to the offering of equal opportunities for learners irrespective of their age, race, religious affiliation, as well as political views among others. There should be meaningful standards that can help the teachers, parents, officials, local educators, and students to ensure that the education system will offer equal opportunity for all students to learn and develop high levels of the knowledge and critical skills needed. New technologies can help the students meet high international standards in academics and develop competitive levels of performance.

Apart from students with special needs, additional support should be provided for particular students with difficulties based on their ethnicity, gender orientation, and language issues (De Witte, Titl, Holz and Smet,2019). It is essential to overcome any verbal and non-verbal communication barriers in the classroom. The main obstacles are that most teachers are not aware of the deficiencies of their verbal and non-verbal skills. The tutors and educators need to identify the detrimental factors that prevent them from imparting effective communication and resolve them. It was clearly that students from C3 revealed during the interviews that in order to sustain quality through student-teacher relationship, effective communication and interactions are needed to better motivate students with the proper gestures, words and body language. Research shows that if educational activities prevent the students from understanding and learning, it would be difficult for them to achieve educational goals (Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour, 2017).

Teacher Competency and Effective Teaching

In emphasising the nature of the teaching approaches and the content as being instrumental in determining quality education, the students seemingly agreed with the conclusions of Ten Dam and Volman (2004), and Woods (1990) that teachers play a crucial role in the promotion of quality education. The examination of what constitutes quality education from the viewpoint of a student cannot be alienated from allusion to the teacher. This is pegged on the fact that teachers are important stakeholders in the field of education who play a critical role in shaping and influencing the learning discourse (Benavot, 2011). As a result, teachers cannot be underestimated with the examination of quality education, but instead be placed at the core owing to their pivotal role. Moreover, in emphasising the nature of the teaching approaches and the content as being instrumental in determining quality education, the students seemingly agreed with the conclusions of Ten Dam and Volman (2004), and Woods (1990) that teachers play a crucial role in the promotion of quality education. The examination of what constitutes quality education from the viewpoint of a student cannot be alienated from allusion to the teacher. This is pegged on the fact that teachers are important stakeholders in the

field of education who play a critical role in shaping and influencing the learning discourse (Benavot, 2011). As a result, teachers cannot be underestimated with the examination of quality education, but instead be placed at the core owing to their pivotal role.

Additionally, the academic quality of a school is highly reliant on the academic quality of a teacher, and it was mentioned that about 60% of teachers carry a graduate degree . Whereas Sogunro (2017) observed that mediocre instructions fail to inspire students and are synonymous with a waste of money and time in an institution, the motivation of students as depicted in the study is essential. While students from these high schools acknowledge the fact that they expect to receive instruction from a competent instructor while the content should demonstrate consideration of cutting-edge research and practice as elucidated by Sogunro (2017), teachers must be motivated as well. The motivation of teachers is important as it empowers them and pushes them into teaching to the best of their abilities as well.

From the time of the establishment of schools and the education system, educators and policymakers have always debated what kind of skills and education should be given to the students to raise their levels of proficiency. Social norms and attitudes govern the demand for certain goods and services. The same can be said for educational services and their quality. Gender norms and attitudes, especially in developing countries, can impact education quality and standards (Blunch and Bordia Das, 2015). Also, obtaining top-quality infrastructure and updating teaching and learning programs to align with the overall vision and commitment were essential factors mentioned and in agreement with the findings of Akareem and Hossain (2016).

Teachers' skills, aptitudes, and values ensure that the teachers are competent to teach the best curriculum and facilitate effective learning by giving students the necessary tools that could help them develop personally and intellectually. There is a need to deploy teachers who are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also professionally competent to handle the learners. Competency can be attained through raising the training standards for teachers. Notably, teachers who were trained three decades ago and still teaching in the 21st century environment necessarily face novel issues and challenges never witnessed before. As a result, the quest for

quality education should be blended in a call for continuous career development training to keep the instructors updated with the developments in the educational sector. Competent teachers are capable of teaching appropriately in terms of content delivery and also creating a positive learning environment for the learners.

Competent teachers are better placed and appraised with the changing and dynamic role of a teacher in the learning institution setting. The role of the teacher has changed with time, and teaching is no longer simply a transfer of knowledge within classrooms. Today, a lot more is expected from the teacher being more of a facilitator. It is not uncommon to see maths and history teachers working together to impart a more holistic form of teaching. Communication and collaboration between teachers as well as students are now increasingly important (Bodycon, 2017). One cannot ignore the role and importance of communication in teaching and transmitting information. Teachers need to remove any barriers to effective communication for effective teaching. Some teachers expect the students to write down while others prefer to talk. This style of teaching and communication only encourages superficial learning, and the students are likely to forget. In order to help the students learn at a deeper level, teachers should communicate at a deeper level with their students. For example, practical demonstrations and practical aids such as posters can enhance communication skills (Prozesky, 2000). Such strategies cannot be implemented by non-competent teachers lacking the appropriate teaching and pedagogical skills in the 21st century.

However, there is a need to equip the teachers appropriately to unlock their competency levels and skills. As asserted by Gamson, Eckert, and Anderson (2019), how effectively will those high standards set for education translate to practical activities within the classroom will depend on the support and sources made available to the teachers. Educators need to learn from past successes and failures to develop higher-order thinking skills for the future. Today, teachers, scholars, parents, administrators, and local authorities are aware of developing model standards in different subjects. However, it can be challenging to set those higher standards consistent with the latest knowledge about learning and teaching and are based on comprehensive input from educators and others. As curriculum frameworks can vary among

states and countries, it is essential to establish guidelines for adequate teacher preparation and set blueprints for local schools to develop the materials and lessons for the professional development of the students. It is vital to align instructional materials and practices within the education system to create coherence in educational practices.

All teachers need to master the skills of providing effective feedback to promote students' learning (Al-Ghamdi, 2017). There should be suggestions for development with the proper use of vocabulary, and the words chosen should show respect for the student and his work (Al-Ghamdi, 2017). More personalised teaching allows the students to focus on the critical subjects of their interest. Good communication for students strengthens human relations, and those day-to-day events create awareness among students and provide education for real life. Teachers should adopt individualised teaching approaches that put into consideration the needs and abilities of the respective learners. Individualised learning and interventions are significantly important as they serve to bridge the weaknesses of students, which vary from one person to another and build on their respective strengths (Solberg et.al, 2012). As a result, it becomes quite possible for the respective students to attain their full potential in the long run. Essentially, the role of the teacher is significantly elevated as he/she plays a crucial role of imparting knowledge (Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017). As a result, teachers should always be informed and knowledgeable in the quality education matrix. Critically, teachers must be in a position to embark on stimulating and developing cognitive skills, which espouse the image result for cognitive skills, the core skills deployed by the brain to think, read, learn, remember, reason, as well as pay attention among others (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 2012). Yingqiang and Yongjian (2016) subtly alluded to such a dictate by citing that learning institutions should sharpen their focus on promoting creativity among their faculty members and students as one of the constraining demands of adherence to quality standards by external stakeholders.

Furthermore, the recruitment of teachers is equally an important issue that contributes to the enhancement of quality education. Irrespective of the measures used in the recruitment process, the same should be a reflection of competitiveness to get the most qualified applicant.

Such an issue has been appraised in contemporary society, signifying a shift in the hiring processes. In Mexico, relationships are highly valued by groups, therefore the hiring system, recruitment and performance review often depends on hierarchical connections rather than the most qualified or performing individual. Even though, there is now a law that regulates the hiring, promotion, recognition, and the tenure of teachers in Mexican public schools Ley General del Servicio Profesional Docente (LGSPD), this is still a work in progress to bring this fully into practice with private educational sectors (Posner et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2018). It was mentioned by a C1 administrator that a hiring committee managed by Human Resources would be ideal to ensure a fair and effective process to choose the right candidate while following the proper guidelines for the jobs.

Practical Education in Tandem with Real World Issues

Learning professional skills apart from regular academics helps the students to prepare for real life. Students are aware of their weak areas and where there can be an improvement. Educational institutions can show their continued support of the students by showing empathy and consideration and providing them with a caring school environment. In order to create an exciting learning environment, young students should be encouraged to make mistakes by exposing them to the real world and thereby learning from their mistakes (Boddison, 2017). Quality education cannot be isolated from the goal of producing competent candidates capable of addressing day-to-day challenges facing the real world as well as fitting today's labour market demands and needs. Quality education should be in a position to instil values and skills needed to address various issues. The essence of education should not solely be to acquire the relevant certification, but also to be able to translate the skills and knowledge in a meaningful manner. Learning professional skills apart from regular academics helps students to prepare for real life. Students are aware of their weak areas and where there can be an improvement. Educational institutions can show their continued support of the students by showing empathy and consideration and provide them with a caring school environment. In order to create an exciting learning environment, young students should be encouraged to make mistakes by

exposing them to the real world and thereby learn from their mistakes (Boddison, 2017). Quality education should not tag along with a disconnect with the outside world but should rather expose the students to get real-world experience.

Quality teaching should allude to emerging issues and depict a sense of commitment to devising local solutions. For instance, the advice and examples can be given in the classrooms on topics related to sustainability and the importance of the environment. Partnerships can be made with local organisations helping the environment, and students should be encouraged to join these organisations. Specific activities such as cleaning the beach or streets or developing sustainable habits such as recycling, and recycling trash can be helpful. Quality Education has become the cornerstone for achieving sustainable development and goals. Thus, a holistic perspective on education is vital with learning targets and outcomes that can be monitored and measured. Curriculum developers must design relevant school curricula that cover transformative teaching and educational approaches that promote safe learning environments (Ofei-Manu, and Didham, 2014).

Educational programs implement education for real life, strengthen human relations and ensure higher quality standards prepare the student better for higher education and the real world that will bring us closer to the real purpose of education. Moreover, promoting connectivity with external institutions and increased use of technology is something that the students asked for specifically. In private education in Mexico, administrators, teachers and students face certain challenges and opportunities. There is a clear need to improve the infrastructure, teachers' quality and develop deeper connections with the students and families. Due to the raging pandemic, students have been further marginalised because of frequent lockdowns and closed schools.

In view of the orientation towards positive output and usefulness in the real world, teachers should be committed to boldly communicate the same to the students. As a result, there should be common benchmarks to guide the students and what performance standards are expected from them. Problem-solving is absolutely crucial, no matter what specialty or sphere

of work he is in. Whatever subject students are studying in school, they need to focus on developing their problem-solving skills. While the push towards increased use of technology, creativity and innovation strategies in real life is great, one should not ignore the other fundamental skills that might get ignored, such as communication and meaningful interactions between people and stakeholders.

The members of a school community make up social settings which include learners, parents, teachers, and administrators who interact to influence the experiences of learners (Hedges and Schneider, 2005). Quality education should be geared towards ensuring that the social Organisation of schooling attempts to promote collaboration among teachers to facilitate knowledge for effective teaching and increase opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom (Hedges and Schneider, 2005). The participants were of the view that the level and extent of interaction with the community is paramount. For instance, it was expressed by the 3 groups' level of influence when students come across alumni who have achieved higher goals in life.

Learning professional skills apart from regular academics helps students to prepare for real life. Students are aware of their weak areas and where there can be improvement. Educational institutions can show their continued support of the students by showing empathy and consideration and providing them with a caring school environment. In order to create an exciting learning environment, young students should be encouraged to make mistakes by exposing them to the real world and thereby learning from their mistakes (Boddison, 2017).

It is an interesting problem as educational policies demand that students be given a safe environment to learn, and at the same time, they want the students to be ready to face real-world problems (Bodycon, 2017). Finding the right balance between the two sides can be challenging and allow the students adequate exposure to the real world. Innovation was another aspect that the administrators felt was essential to grow and expand as a school. New things should be planned and executed every month, and schools should teach students how to adapt to new situations effectively. C as a general institution has set an excellent example of innovation

during the COVID-19 crisis and taking the challenges forward. It is considered necessary for the students and families to be aware of those changes and adaptations and innovate collectively. The pandemic put schools, students and teachers into many situations where they had to innovate to take the challenges forward, and reinvent itself many times with new programs and opportunities for students.

Creativity and Innovation

Internationalisation of higher learning has increased the demand for intercultural competent faculty members. Institutions of higher learning consider internationalisation as a means of integrating diversity into their student population (Altbach and Knight, 2007). internationalisation introduces institutions to new conditions as they operate outside their national boundaries. One of the key measures to achieve the required levels of cultural competency and interactions is through the focus on creativity, artistic and sporting events which offer unlimited opportunities for interactions inside and outside of the school.

Individualised learning and interventions are significantly important as they serve to bridge the weaknesses of students, which vary from one person to another and build on their respective strengths (Solberg et.al, 2012). As a result, it becomes quite possible for the respective students to attain their full potential in the long run.

It has become more important for teachers, students, and management teams to come together to create a positive environment to promote academic events for social and emotional growth (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Projects and exercises would be conducted more effectively in a happy and creative environment that can motivate the students. In order to do so, it is essential to ensure effective and transparent communication within the academic community. Thus, communication within the community could be strengthened to create a sense of belonging, which would create a positive environment (Hedges & Schneider, 2005). In relation to the cultivation of a sense of belonging. One student yearned for an environment

where regardless of gender or race when the students can compete as equals, they will connect and learn with a more solid foundation for the future.

The aspect of creativity in the classroom and technological innovation were considered instrumental elements for consideration among all the participants. Ideally, the classroom projects that focus on integration and creativity were considered to be relevant unanimously across all the surveyed schools, while upgrading the academic quality of the institution. On the other hand, students and teachers mentioned that diverse learning activities infused with creativity and technological innovation allow students and teachers to connect in a better way. Students are highly connected to the world through technology, therefore, using technology and creativity in the classroom helps foster a beneficial environment for learning and this helps to deliver creative outcomes, and students can link creativity with imagination and can do some amazing things (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Additionally, for them, it is important that the school listens to what the students want and is able to understand their needs as a way of creating an ample enabling environment for learning. The findings are in line with the views of Bonilla-Rius, (2020) who noted that Mexico's education reforms should promote equity in the sector by ensuring equitable education outcomes despite differences in students' socioeconomic status, gender, and ability.

It is not surprising that after 18 months of the pandemic, students are more sensitive and value empathy as a quality in education during their teaching and learning process. During difficult times like this, it is crucial for the students to feel seen and heard about their individual situations and feelings. This enhances the view of a more caring staff thereby creating a better view of the school itself in the minds of the students. Being more supportive lends better flow in the virtual and face-to-face arenas.

According to students, a positive classroom environment leaves a positive impact on student behaviour and achievement (Zhang & Wong,2018). As mentioned by S11, when the classroom projects and learning will allow a student to use creativity inside the guidelines and

by allowing them to take control of their own learning or topic, this will help the student to feel more accomplished.

The pandemic brought some economic downfalls. Another noted aspect, as we have already mentioned earlier, was the student's awareness of family financial struggles, As the students felt that they should not be penalised for the financial downfall of the family. They should be allowed to take exams and classes as well and not be penalised. As pointed out by the students, having academic rigour is as valued as fostering a positive relationship between the students and the teachers to promote emotional stability was considered essential to follow an emotional approach within the educational goals to better prepare the students for real life.

Relevant findings show great pride from students and administrators to be recognized academically and as an institution. Some forms of this recognition come from intercollegiate competitions such as the Olympiad Research. External recognition has always proven to be a source of pride and student success. Furthermore, it is often a source of pride for the administration when the academic quality of the school is recognized. For example, The Research Congress committee is formed by widely recognized scientists and researchers from basic and applied research from all disciplines. This encounter allows students to create research projects or prototypes with the assistance of faculty and high-calibre researchers. Students from elementary to high school present at a young age their contribution to knowledge, while researchers recognize the quality of the research projects through different stages first in the state and then a national research event a few months later where only the winners of each category have the opportunity to compete with the best to then taking their research project to other countries. It is interesting that events like this motivate students to transition into higher education and graduate school. Another example is the Olympiad organised by UNAM which is the "Olympiad of Etymologies", where schools have accomplished for 3 consecutive years top rankings and first-place awards. The findings are in agreement with the inferences made by O'Keeffe (2013) that developing a sense of belonging

improves student performance, and increases student retention while reinforcing student success.

Regular Monitoring and Assessment

New management schemes, testing policies, and other special programs have been tried to improve student achievement. However, the schools' commitments can make those schemes and policies effective or ineffective. Such programs need appropriate support, resources, time, and opportunities to develop teacher expertise and student achievement. Successful learning takes place in positive environments here; there is a closer collaboration between the teacher and the learner. Instructors often face a common problem among students, and it is related to their lack of crucial prior knowledge and skills needed to take on the more advanced course. It remains an essential issue in curriculum design and a challenge for students and instructors aiming to reach high standards in education. It is possible to identify students who are struggling with higher education with an assessment at the beginning. Feedback on their performance after assessing prior knowledge can help the instructors become more aware of each student's academic level and give them special attention to bridge the gap. Prior knowledge assessment can help students become more aware of their own shortcomings and what they need to do to fill the knowledge gap before moving forward to a different topical issue (Hailikari, Katajavuori and Lindblom-Ylanne, 2008).

Setting and reaching high standards in education aims to develop useful strategies to ensure that each and every student can achieve the desired performance and achieve the knowledge and skills expected of him. Higher and better standards are the foundation for the model of academic excellence. However, institutions face a dichotomy between teaching excellence for a higher academic purpose to achieve outstanding results and the use of "excellence" to marketise teaching and learning relationships among stakeholders (Saunders & Blanco Ramirez, 2017).

Therefore, the Mexican evaluation and assessment framework should comprise teacher appraisal, student assessment, school evaluation, and system evaluation. Teachers take the prime responsibility of assessments of students based on internal and external examinations. Standardised assessments are followed for formative assessments in the classroom (Cohen, and Bhatt, 2012). Moreover, the element of self-evaluation and self-assessment should also be construed as a key determining factor in quality education. As asserted by Pham et al (2020), self-assessment processes have a positive impact in the improvement of the quality of teaching, learning, and management, as well as enhancing student support in education

Supportive technology pedagogy

Students should be provided with new educational strategies and experiences to develop and grow as a good human being. According to Boddison (2017), the two essential skills that need to develop in the learning process are problem-solving and finding the right balance between people and technology skills. As there is a direct relationship between teachers' knowledge and the performance of the students, it is essential to focus on teacher education and professional development. Teachers' methodologies and practices have a direct impact on the achievement and knowledge of the students. Thus, the first step towards the improvement of schools is the recruitment and retention of good teachers. It means that teachers need to be experts and experienced in their field and enrol for ongoing learning to teach well. Teachers may need further training to teach high standards and meet educational goals. Among all the school resources, it is the teachers who have a significant impact on student achievement and progress. The quality of teachers and their specific positions and roles can have an all-encompassing impact on the school environment and learning. Schools are careful about hiring teachers and seek only higher-quality candidates. They tend to remove poorly performing instructors and reward the exceptional ones (Donaldson, 2011).

The Mexican school system must embrace pedagogies and learning approaches that are inspired by technical rationality and behaviourist thinking, as argued by Scott, Posner, Martin, and Guzman (2018). As asserted by Ofei-Manu and Didham (2014), the future direction of

quality education should carry quantitative and qualitative inputs at the practice level. The learners must be provided with the necessary capacities to understand and face the world's emerging challenges. Therefore, the recruitment of teachers should be carried out carefully based on the kind of teachers needed.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

The relationship between teachers and students is critical in embodying quality education as it can enhance communication and the ability as well as a willingness to learn. According to Al-Ghamdi (2017), teachers' feedback and praise for students can positively and negatively affect the learning process. Students are directly influenced by the comments of their teachers and may or may not become motivated. Thus, the teacher should be aware of how their assessments can influence students. Teachers need to foster a positive relationship with the students as an effective teaching tool. There are some valuable strategies for providing effective feedback and motivating the students to achieve the level of performance expected. The government's commitment, better infrastructural facilities, qualified and trained teachers, regular assessments of the students, and up-to-date curriculum are the basic factors that impact the quality of education. Any scarcity in any of the listed factors can lead to poor learning outcomes and little progress in the quality of education (Ahmad Chatha, Saeed and Zahid, 2016).

Verbal communication in teaching is achieved through conversation, and therefore, the teacher must use the words carefully and focus on following specific emotions when using certain words. A successful educator is one who is not only careful about choosing the right words but also aware of the impact of his words on the students. He expresses his opinion with proper words with effective and penetrating comments to convey his message (Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour, 2017). Thus, the use of appropriate tone and words is significant when teaching and communicating with the students. Words and sentences used by the educator should be expressed clearly and eloquently. Ambiguity in the teacher's speech can hamper the relationship between teachers and students.

The objectivity of the learning activity and the interaction between teachers and students can leave an ever-lasting impact on the learners' behaviour and motivation to study. The more effective the communication, the stronger the mutual relationship, and the more stable and effective is the learning. Thus, a teacher can work on her verbal and non-verbal communication style to strengthen her relationship with the students. Proper communication between the teacher and students is one of the most critical skills in teaching. As non-verbal communication is often subtler than verbal communication, it often goes ignored (Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour, 2017).

The focus should be on how to help the student to learn and improve their weaker areas, instead of judging them or categorising them based on testing. Proper training and professional development of teachers can help to assess what progress students have made and what areas they are weak in (Boddison, 2017). Educational standards within a subject describe the knowledge and skills imbibed by a student to develop a higher competency level in the subject matter. When establishing high standards, there are common expectations by the students, parents, and teachers as to what is expected of them.

Improved Relationships

Students find that improved relationships with their teachers help them to foster academic connections, and they feel motivated to learn and prepare for higher education. Students acknowledge that partnerships with international universities are to their advantage. Knowledge gets transmitted and transformed at the pedagogic site and relies on the representational mode, the pedagogic relationship, and relations with learning objects. The relation and feedback mechanism are fundamental components of the learning process (Scott, Posner, Martin, and Guzman, 2018). According to Gomendio (2017), teaching professionals need to recognize that not all students are at the same academic level, and they all face different challenges. The students were of the view that their relationship with teachers can be improved by allowing themselves to have out-of-class-topic talks, ones that are relaxed and more personal

to gain trust and comfort; by taking time from the class to talk about their personal lives, nothing related to school; through which they can know each other better not just among classmates but also teachers and staff. It is through such engagements that topics about the circumstances of life or whatever topic but so the mood can be a relaxed situation, to foster trust and confidence within the classroom among the students as well as the individual teachers.

The main goal of education is to ensure that the student's performance is never hindered based on his background, gender, or socioeconomic status. Every student needs to explore and develop cognitive and socio-emotional skills to realise their full potential. Different students may carry different abilities and aspirations, and thus, the education systems must be flexible and sensitive to manage diversity in the classroom.

Teachers should develop a close rapport with their students to learn about their deficiencies and pose them as a challenge. Educators must focus on the overall development of the students and transform their lives for the better. The school administration needs to listen to the students, show empathy and assess their interests and learning experiences.

Infrastructural Support

Despite the availability of best practices, the quality of educational instruction and outcomes can vary. What can impact the quality of education is the lack of infrastructure, a decentralised system, and the quality of teachers. There have been certain reforms within the educational system based on human capital, accountability, and comprehensive school reforms (Cohen, and Bhatt, 2012). The above discussion shows that teachers, administrators, and students' perspectives do not apply to a great extent. Students' success relies on how well they are prepared in a broad category of areas.

The various stakeholders, including the states and locals, should come together to improve the infrastructure and implement reliable ways for school empowerment and improvement. It is essential to study any discrepancies among state resources and human capital to assess the education system. As schools' resources and human capital can vary, the students'

performance is likely to reflect those differences (Cohen, and Bhatt, 2012). Education policymakers should consider innovative learning approaches in educational reforms to integrate standard educational policy. To achieve measurable learning targets, they should facilitate well-informed educational policies, teaching pedagogies, curriculum design, and learning environments. It is essential to support and adopt a new global educational framework along with strengthening the monitoring and evaluation process (Ofei-Manu, and Didham, 2014).

Many of the curriculum initiatives in the country have shown lacklustre results at the classroom level for multiple reasons. The main reason is implementing a constructivist curriculum that clashes with the administrative and managerial culture of the Mexican education system. Moreover, there are a series of flaws in the understanding of curriculum, learning, and pedagogy. There is a need to abandon the centralised and authoritarian educational setup (Scott, Posner, Martin, and Guzman, 2018). According to De Witte, Titl, Holz and Smet (2019), students with disabilities and special needs should be taken into consideration in both primary and secondary education. One can expect students with severe mental handicaps or behavioural issues or with a physical, visual, or auditory handicap. Many students carry severe learning disabilities. Mexican schools should organise a special educational institution for these disability groups which are often overlooked during the teaching and learning process.

Factors responsible for improved quality of education demand professionally qualified teachers, interactive classroom activities, better infrastructural facilities, and scope for further improvements in the education system. Good quality education requires federal and state commitment for the best learning outcomes. In many countries, scarcity of textbooks and resources and low quality of teachers' training remain a hurdle in the path of improving the quality of education. However, basic infrastructural facilities and quality learning assessments as per international standards and professionally qualified teachers are not an overnight development. As educational reforms are a combination of very complex factors, one has to

keep both short-term and long-term perspectives. Governments must recognize the inherent difficulties associated with education reforms and support the educational systems so as to prepare students to succeed in life (Gomendio, 2017).

Teachers, students, and administrators need to come together to conceptualise academic excellence. It is essential to grant greater autonomy to local schools and authorities to decentralise the education systems. Strong leadership and highly qualified teachers, plus a rigorous curriculum and regular evaluations can effectively make the changes. The educational responsibilities should be distributed and managed well within the overall structure of the education system. Conflicts may arise when setting the teaching quality and professional standards, the stakeholders involved, and the implementation of reforms. Thus, it is essential to have open communication channels to dispel any ambiguities and accurately diagnose the situation in different contexts. It is important to make sure that reforms and efforts put in by the schools are making a positive impact. It would be difficult to monitor student progress if the Mexican educational system still carries weaker traditions of assessing reforms. Policymakers should be encouraged to contain an evaluation of impact from the beginning and concentrate their efforts. Greater accountability combined with decentralisation can help make positive changes in the learning environments (Gomendio, 2017).

It was mentioned by students and administrators that innovation is perceived as essential for the school to continue to grow and improve as an academic institution. School principals can exert a more positive and supportive influence on teacher quality and can provide professional development to teachers. Schools should be given more freedom to expand teachers' skills through regular training and professional development. Any barriers to developing highly skilled teachers or their hiring process should be located and removed. It is essential to build human capital and leaders of schools to improve teaching quality. Cultural impediments, economic influences, and interpersonal challenges are some of the barriers that policymakers should address (Donaldson, 2011). Hiring the right teachers for the school is a

high-stakes venture as often the choices may not be productive regarding optimising student learning.

Those who are responsible for hiring professional teachers should have clear jurisdictional policies to guide their selection process. After all, it can be a challenging task to select the right fit from a large pool of applicants. A single wrong choice could harm the learning outcomes of hundreds of students. School administrators must identify the desirable characteristics in prospective teachers and hire only those teacher applicants who can deliver what is expected of them and can enhance learning outcomes (Maynes, 2013). One of the directors recounted that it was anticipated to elevate the institution to a cutting-edge school that offers the best training to its students, based on academic quality.

The element of self-evaluation and self-assessment, as previously mentioned, was a key determining factor in quality education. As asserted by Pham et al. (2020), self-assessment processes have a positive impact on the improvement of the quality of teaching, learning, and management, as well as enhancing student support in education. To keep improving and maintaining academic excellence for years to come, it is important to have systematic self-evaluation in different areas, to assess the services, the facilities, the teachers, and the learning outcomes fostering metacognitive skills. The call for the improvement of the self-assessment measures already in place is a testament to the student's appreciation of the importance of the component in construing what constitutes quality education. Self-assessments are beneficial as they highlight the points of weaknesses upon which students can improve in their quest to be productive and successful while analysing their progress in a more metacognitive way to make them responsible and accountable for their own learning process.

Finally, a valuable suggestion by students is to have and reach high standards by cultivating environmental awareness in the classrooms and making sustainability a part of the school agenda. As climate change and global warming are global issues, teachers can plan and include such topics in the classroom and motivate the students to discuss and find solutions. Students have the opportunity to take a class in the Model United Nations (MUN) as an

elective, where debating makes an effort and puts forth a solution towards international diplomacy, however, it was suggested to assign extra credits for some of these academic electives. Environmental awareness was an unexpected theme suggested to be an essential subject for all academics, to support sustainability and cultivate a culture of care for the planet, the following suggestions provide valuable information as well as actions. The move is essential in aligning learning and teaching with the issues dominating the global scene such as environmental issues (Bonilla-Rius, 2020).

Recommendations

To conclude the above discussion and findings, educating students means preparing them for the needs of the 21st century. My research and the literature show that there is no single model for success, and education systems need to follow different policies and approaches to adjust and adapt as per their needs to unexpected life events (i.e. covid 19). School improvement reforms should have cultural, economic, and political contexts and carry the prime objective of improving student success with real-world outcomes. The perspectives of teachers, students and administrators point to common issues and areas that need to improve and focus on the quality of education. They are aware of the challenges and opportunities present in the private education sector in Mexico and offer some useful suggestions on how to conceptualise academic excellence. As it is true that there are no universal quality standards applicable to each particular education context, we have to bear in mind a local, bottom-top approach to implement ongoing quality assurance initiatives to avoid the over marketisation of education while commercialising with international quality standards for the sake of recruiting more students and gaining prestige. This study shows different perspectives of students, teachers and administrators with some convergence about the quality aspects of education and while some focus more on global skill development and others in real world educational outcomes with high academic standards to gain deeper professional and personal purpose, we cannot have one without the other.

This research calls for the need for private institutions to better prepare themselves to undertake this intensive, expensive and often exhausting endeavour of international accreditation with a different mindset. Improving and maintaining academic quality and reaching high standards is not only about paying the yearly accreditation fees or about a short-term project that will take a few weeks or months. It can take years to make the changes and see the results, but rather than pursuing a better ranking or external reputation, it is important to acknowledge how stakeholders perceive the institution internally and why they choose to be part of the school community. It is looking beyond the institutional goals to consider self and social empowerment beyond economic power, school rankings and higher enrollments. Acting on behalf of students, teachers and administrators' best interests, should be considered in their own particular quality framework to know how to prepare them for different environments and overcome future challenges collectively while attending to their needs and motives.

Making unreasonable demands or expectations during this process would only discourage the stakeholders and participants within the educational systems and that includes the teachers and the students. It is essential to hire highly competent teachers who can inspire the students to believe that what they're learning is important and how they can use their skills in the real world. School administrators and teachers should focus on classroom practices, teaching methods, curricula, the development of teachers, and the use of technology to achieve high standards and academic quality and continue to inspire students to learn. Regular efforts and monitoring can make meaningful changes in the Mexican education system and create world class learners who are ready to face the challenges of the real world. To keep improving and maintaining academic excellence for years to come, it is important to have systematic self-evaluation in different areas, to assess the services, the facilities, the teachers with real world learning outcomes. The call for the improvement of the self-assessment measures in place is a testament to the student's appreciation of the importance of the component in construing what constitutes quality education with a deeper metacognitive level. Self-assessments are beneficial as they highlight the points of weaknesses upon which students can improve in their quest to be

productive and successful while analysing their progress to make them accountable of their own developmental process and growth in a positive and meaningful way.

On the other hand, students, parents, teachers, and administrators need to be aware of the meaning and value of accreditation and the benefits involved. Encouraging internationalisation can improve cultural levels and understanding among students and showcase their academic quality by affording them the opportunity to see if it meets the higher standards in a creative and innovative way. Moreover, the use of creativity in the classroom is essential to develop the right skills and aptitudes among students and inspire them to learn. The paradigm shifts towards creativity while teaching can help the teacher know the students' qualities and personalities and offer personal attention. Creativity can motivate both teachers and students to think critically and inspire one another to generate new ideas.

Moreover, to highlight the most relevant aspects of the four educational settings explored in this study, the following representations of quality features address which are the most important components that are pivotal to academic quality standards in each particular school's educational context.

Figure 7. Quality Framework in Cancun (Ramirez Abdala,2023)
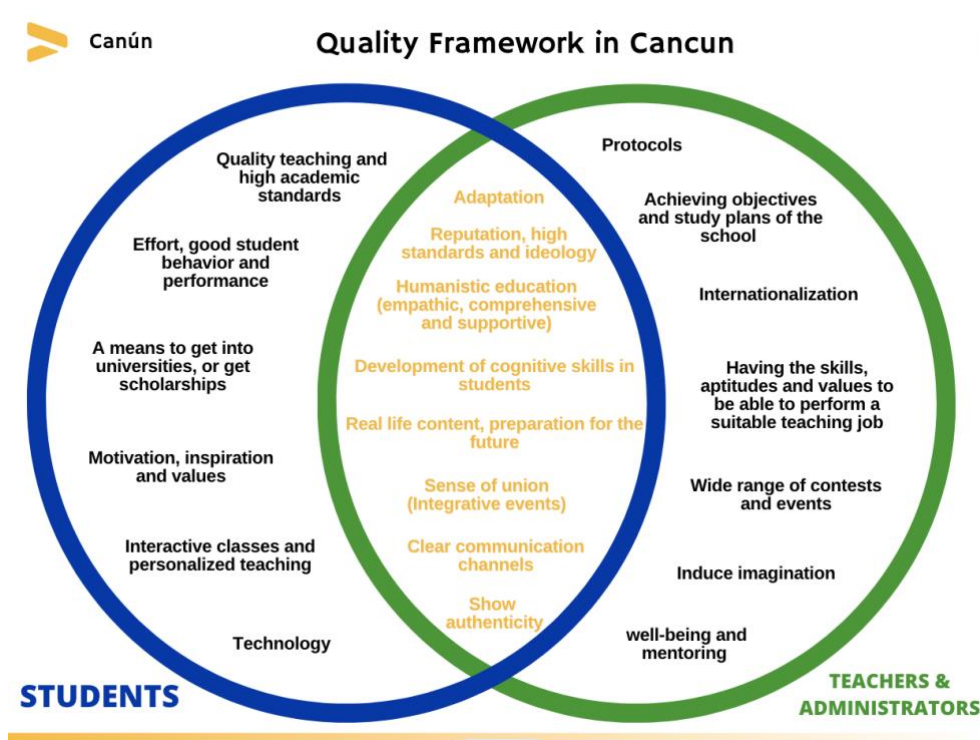
Academic Quality Standards for Students in Cancun

Quality in teaching and high academic standards are critical in ensuring that students obtain an integral education. Academic success for Cancun students, on the other hand, depends on how hard they work and good attitude and behaviour in class. For these students, good grades can lead to university admittance and scholarships, which can open doors to new opportunities in the future. Aside from academic accomplishment, motivation and inspiration by their teachers, infused with values is critical to becoming good citizens of the world. Therefore, interactive classrooms and personalised instruction can improve students' learning experiences and help them build critical thinking skills. They value technology and innovation as a way to improve the learning process to better prepare them for different global landscapes.

Academic Quality Standards Teachers and Administrators in Cancun

For teachers and administrators, education protocols are critical in ensuring that schools fulfil their institutional goals. In today's globalised world, the process of internationalisation is also becoming increasingly vital from their perspective, since it exposes students to cultural diversity and prepares them for international opportunities. To be able to do a suitable teaching

job, educators must have the proper abilities, aptitudes, and values to assist students in developing and growing. A variety of academic events and school activities can serve to create a dynamic learning environment that fosters student participation and engagement. Furthermore, it is critical for schools to focus on student well-being and provide mentoring programs to assist students in navigating challenges in reaching their full potential.

Convergences between Students, Teachers and Administrators in Cancun

In today's rapidly changing world, adaptation is a critical component of education. Private Mexican institutions must preserve their reputation, high standards, and identity, while simultaneously responding to new trends and competing demands in the education field. Moreover, empathic, comprehensive, and supportive humanistic education is critical for the development of students' cognitive and social-emotional skills. A curriculum that contains real-life topics can help students prepare for the future and enforce a positive change in society. School events in this area can increase student collaboration and develop a sense of community. Fostering clear communication channels between stakeholders can help to ensure that everyone is on the same page and that issues are handled effectively and efficiently. Finally, authenticity is critical in developing trust and establishing a positive learning environment at the institutional level.

Figure 8. Quality Framework in Mexico City (Ramirez Abdala,2023)
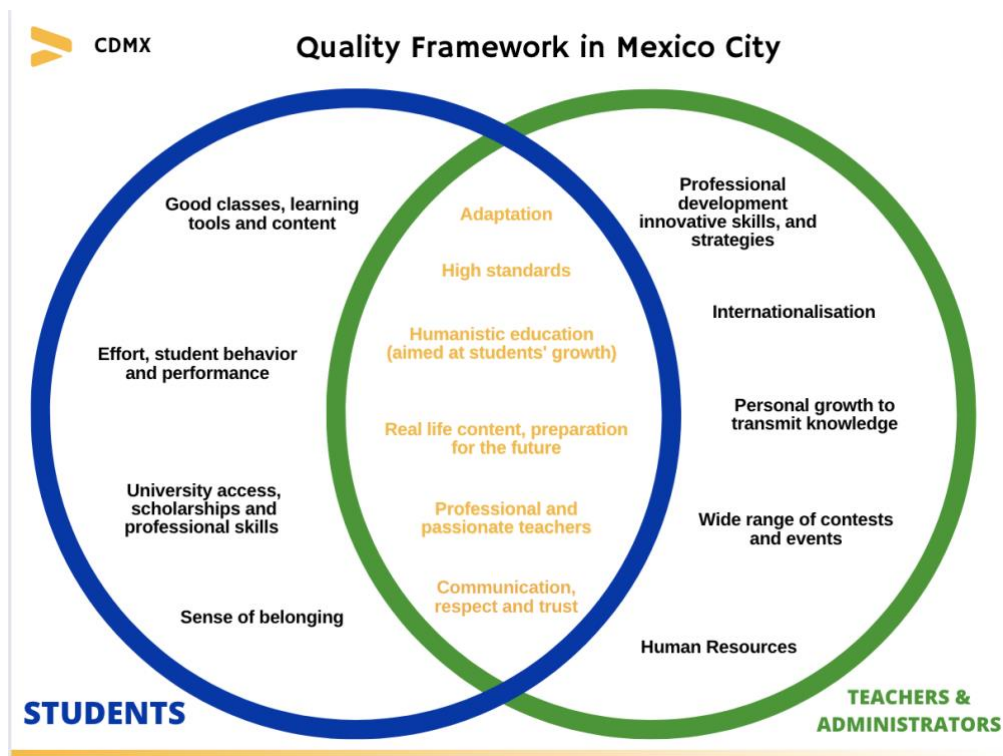
Academic Quality Standards for Students in Mexico City

From a student's perspective in Mexico City, academic quality means having access to good classes, learning tools, and high-quality content. However, academic success is not only about what is offered, but also about the effort, behaviour, and performance of students. A focus on academic achievement can also lead to better opportunities for university, access to scholarships, and the development of professional skills. Additionally, students want to feel a sense of belonging in their academic environment. This includes feeling connected to the school community and having supportive relationships with teachers and peers. By prioritising these aspects of academic quality, students can receive a quality education that prepares them for future success at a personal, academic and professional level.

Academic Quality Standards Teachers and Administrators in Mexico City

Academic quality for teachers and administrators in Mexico City suggests that students acquire the best possible learning experience. They value professional development to stay current on new educational trends and instructional practices, as well as to continuously

improve their innovative talents. Furthermore, a focus on internationalisation can expose instructors to new ideas and practices from the world, improving their capacity to give a global education.

Moreover, personal development is also necessary for teachers and administrators to properly communicate knowledge to students. Delivering a variety of contests and events can give chances for teachers and administrators to display their talents and knowledge while also encouraging student participation and engagement.

Finally, human resources may assist in identifying and hiring the best personnel for the school, as well as providing support and advice to ensure that teachers and administrators are ready to deliver high-quality education. By emphasising these criteria, educational institutions can foster an academic quality culture that promotes institutional positive change.

Convergences between students, teachers and administrators in Mexico City

A variety of essential elements influence academic excellence in the Mexico City campus. One of these is the flexibility to adapt to changing educational trends and student demands in order to give the greatest learning experience possible. Furthermore, implementing high standards are required to ensure that students receive a thorough and rigorous education that prepares them for future success. Another important part of academic quality is humanistic education, which aims to promote students' growth and development.

A curriculum that incorporates real-world topics and prepares students for the future might also improve the educational experience. Professional and motivated teachers who are committed to their job are critical to providing high-quality education. Furthermore, good communication, mutual respect, and trust are essential in creating a pleasant learning environment that promotes student growth and development. By focusing on these essential factors, educational institutions may deliver academic quality that fits students' requirements and prepares them for higher education.

Figure 9. Quality Framework in Morelos (Ramirez Abdala,2023)
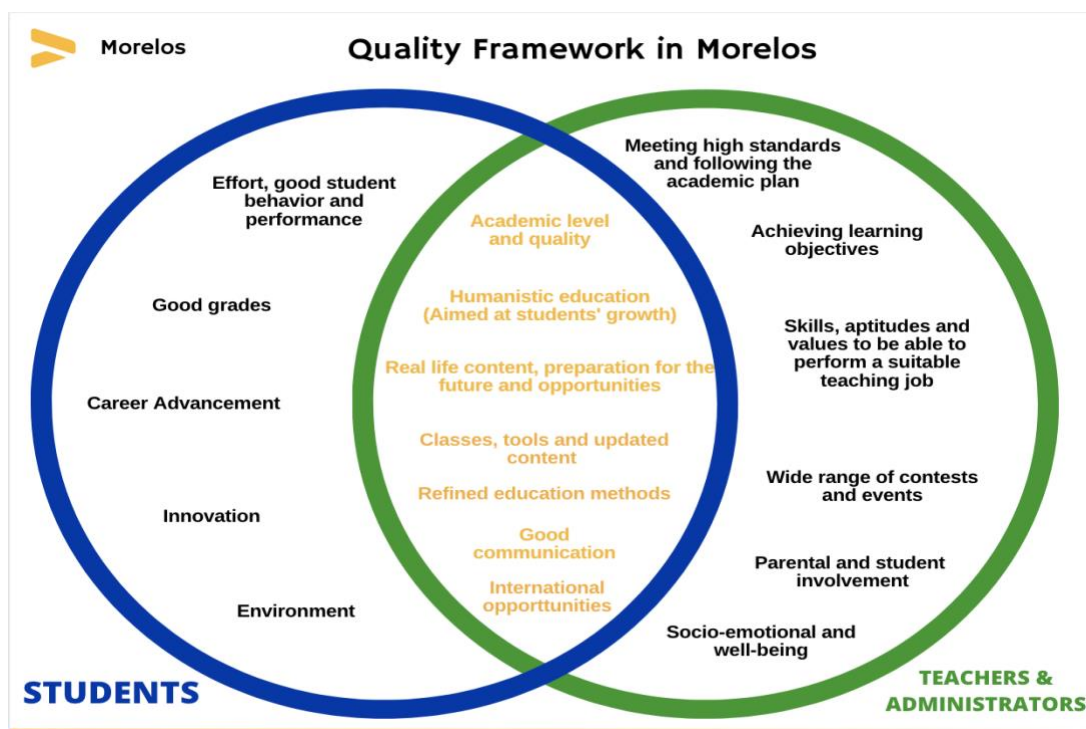
Academic Quality Standards for Students in Morelos

In order to maximise their learning potential, students must put forth the necessary effort, behave appropriately, and perform at a high level. Good grades are a crucial component of academic quality because they can gain better career opportunities in the future. Innovation inspires students to think creatively and solve issues in different ways, which helps to advance academic quality.

Additionally, a key element in fostering academic excellence is the learning environment for students. This entails having access to well-equipped classrooms and resources, a caring student community and advisors, and a society that places a high value on learning and intellectual development. Students expect to receive an education that prepares them for future success.

Academic Quality Standards Teachers and Administrators in Mexico City

Academic quality implies meeting high standards and adhering to the academic plan to ensure that learning objectives are met for teachers and administrators. It also implies possessing the required talents, aptitudes, and values to effectively perform a competent

teaching job. A variety of contests and events can provide chances for professional

development and recognition, as well as inspire teachers and administrators to improve their

teaching tactics and practices on a constant basis. Parental and student involvement is also

essential for ensuring academic quality and fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Finally, socio-emotional and well-being support for both instructors and children is essential for

a healthy and positive learning environment. Teachers and administrators can enhance deeper

collaboration to achieve their goals by prioritising these aspects.

Convergences between students, teachers and administrators in Morelos

Academic quality is critical for schools in order to give students a comprehensive and

high-quality education that will prepare them for future success. This entails ensuring a

demanding and challenging academic level that is both interesting and accessible to all students.

Another important part of academic quality is humanistic education, which aims to promote

students' growth and development. It is also critical to offer real-world content that prepares

students for the future and allows for the practical application of knowledge. Furthermore,

universities must prioritise having updated programs, tools, and content to guarantee that

students obtain the most up-to-date knowledge and training. To improve the learning experience

and assist students during this transition.

Finally, effective communication is critical for creating a positive learning environment

and encouraging collaboration among students, instructors, and administrators. Institutions can

provide higher-quality education by implementing higher standards and activities that

continuously stress academic elements for students' success.

Figure 10. Quality Framework in Merida (Ramirez Abdala,2023)

Quality Framework in Merida
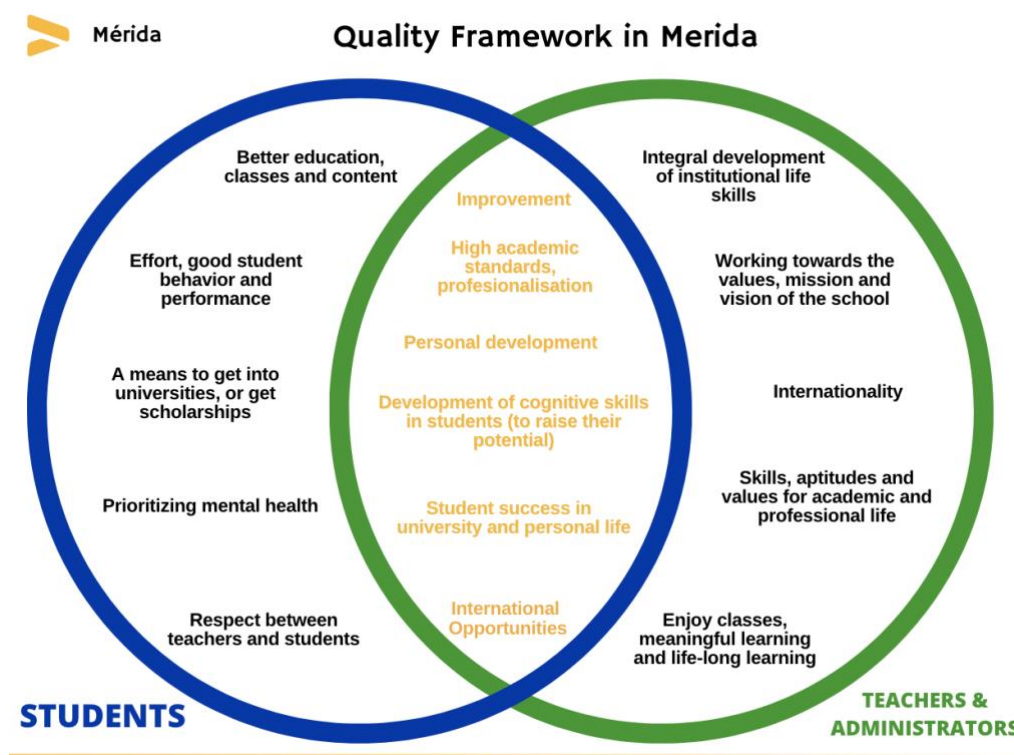
Academic Quality Standards for Students in Merida

Academic quality for students in Merida entails having access to excellent education, better classes, and information to help them achieve their academic goals. Thus, in order to maximise their learning potential, they must put in effort, exhibit good behaviour, and perform effectively. Academic excellence is the result of getting opportunities to be admitted to different universities or acquiring scholarships. Also, prioritising mental health is also an important part of academic excellence since it fosters a supportive and healthy learning environment. Finally, it is critical to foster respect and a positive relationship between teachers and students to enhance collaboration and a better learning environment. With this in mind, students can receive a well-rounded education that supports their growth and development by stressing these factors of academic quality at a personal and academic level.

Academic Quality Standards Teachers and Administrators in Merida

Academic quality, for teachers and administrators in Merida, implies focusing on a holistic development of institutional and life skills. Promoting teamwork, effective communication, problem-solving, and leadership are all part of this important endeavour. High

academic standards mean working towards the school's values, mission, and vision also includes ensuring that all activities are linked with the school's aims. Furthermore, academic quality entails encouraging internationalisation in order to educate students with global values and assist them in succeeding in an increasingly interconnected world. Teachers and administrators must also have the essential academic and professional abilities, aptitudes, and values to effectively advise and coach students toward their goals.

Finally, academic quality entails building a pleasant environment in which teachers and administrators enjoy classes, meaningful learning, and life-long learning in order to foster a good culture of growth and development inside the institution.

Convergences between students, teachers and administrators in Merida

Academic quality at an institutional level requires focusing constantly on improvement to guarantee that high academic standards are met while maintaining professionalism. It also entails promoting personal growth for both instructors and students in order to guarantee that they have the abilities necessary to perform in a highly competitive world. Furthermore, institutions must prioritise the development of cognitive talents in students in order for them to flourish academically as well as personally. This includes encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. Institutions should promote students' success in their future pursuits, whether at university or in their personal lives, by promoting academic quality. International opportunities are a key part of academic excellence since they provide students with a variety of experiences that will help them become global citizens.

Academic Excellence in Private Mexican Institutions

The result of "how well" the application and attainment of exceptional academic quality standards in private Mexican educational settings require five very important components that need to work together, as they are all interdependent and intertwined when seeking academic excellence:

QUALITY STANDARDS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

1. Administrator Visionaries: Senior leaders and administrators should have a clear vision as well as innovative leadership skills to help develop a humanistic, professional and successful learning and working environment. Strategic planning that utilises resource allocation and policy development that are in line with the mission, vision and values of the organisation with professional development as well as personal growth and global academic exchanges.

2. Teacher empowerment and creativity: Teachers play the most important role in developing the students talents, motivations and creativity by encouraging their intellectual curiosity. While fostering the students agency and self-efficacy and celebrating the student identity and autonomy with innovative teaching practices that will fulfil a greater educational purpose.

3. Better student employability and mobility: Often the measurement of an institution's academic excellence is measured by the success of its graduates and their ability to secure meaningful employment or pursue further education. By providing students with the practical skills and relevant knowledge for the current job market, internships or international opportunities the students can increase their employ-ability and mobility with a real world outcome.

4. Emotional support and monitoring: The alignment of a students academic, personal and professional growth will assist them in overcoming obstacles and help them by celebrating diversity. As a result of providing socio-emotional support and mentoring with peer support, we bring them closer to a more accepting community celebrating the differences and values with the realities of the mindset.

5. Self-evaluation and control: With continuous self-development, self-assessment and accountability academic excellence can be achieved. Stakeholders and institutions engaging in these regular evaluations that assess their performance and also identify areas for improvement will allow them to implement suitable initiatives to ready their institutional goals towards the enhanced quality and reinforcement. Furthermore, by holding the stakeholders accountable, such as the students and parents as well as the

accreditation organisations can help to build transparency and confidence in our daily

internal and external lives.

Figure 11. Academic Excellence in Mexican Private Schools (Ramirez Abdala,2023)

Conceptualization of Academic Excellence
Mexican Private Schools

Administrators Visionaries	Teachers Empowerment and Creativity	Students Employability and mobility	Emotional Support Monitoring	Evaluation & Control
Mission, Vision, Values	Motivation, Inspiration and passion	Academic & Career success (University)	Mental Health Environment	Self-assessment
Humanistic approach		Align curriculum with real-life outcomes	Diversity	
Image, high standards	Effort, Performance, behavior	Preparing them for the future	Personal growth	Meta-cognitive
Quality content and curriculum	Promote student agency and self-efficacy	Widening participation & Scholarships	Socio-emotional support	Accountability
Setting goals	Values Communication	Technology	Parental and community involvement	
Interactive classes and personalized teaching	Authenticity	Internationalization	Healthy and happy beings	
Professional development	Identity			
Co-agency				
Policies & Procedures				
Human resources.				

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The research has been significantly insightful and is an eye-opener in various fields of

the education sector. It offered a thrilling experience to me of the way quality education is

perceived, as well as the manner in which it can be achieved. The research has the potential of debunking and challenging personal conceptions on what is quality education, international accreditation in developing countries and academic excellence. It would not be surprising for one to realise the flaws in their understanding and strive to achieve quality education based on this study. Essentially, the centrality of the topic is anchored on the role of education in the society and context in which it is embedded, and hence the need to always focus on offering the best in as much as possible. Specifically, the research has huge implications towards practice level, research level, service level, as well as personal level.

Practice Level

The most interesting aspect of this research was the realisation that the idea of the quality of education is not static. Instead, it is a multi-faceted issue embedded in different viewpoints. True to the views of Harvey and Green (1993) that the definitions of the term quality vary and reflect different perspectives of an individual and society, the same was evident from the responses proffered by the participants. Moreover, one of the most intriguing aspects in the study results from the responses of the various participants was the variance in what constitutes quality. In essence, it is plainly clear that quality education depends on the viewpoint once chosen. Some choose to perceive the issue of quality education from the perspective of teacher competency. Under such a limb, teachers' skills, aptitudes, and values ensure that the teachers are competent to teach the best curriculum and facilitate effective learning by giving students the necessary tools that could help them develop personally and intellectually. There is a need to deploy teachers who are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also professionally competent to handle the learners. Those perceiving it from such a viewpoint tend to consider the teacher as the epitome of quality education. However, this is determined by the way the teacher is trained and how well they are motivated and facilitated to undertake their functions, such as being equipped with the relevant resources. It was evident that students rely mainly on the teachers to define academic quality, based on exemplary teaching with real-life outcomes that supports their socioemotional well-being as the main vehicle to help them achieve their goals and fullest potential. Meanwhile, the teachers focused

more on the leadership, the organisational structure and policies to define and achieve academic quality. They analysed the quality at the operational level instead of identifying student needs to achieve academic excellence. Finally, the administrators and senior leaders perceived academic quality as a combination of the relationship between the student and the teachers. Under such an approach, the ability to create and maintain meaningful relationships is considered as a key determining factor of education quality in Mexican private schools. Students find that improved relationships with their teachers help them to foster academic connections, and they feel motivated to learn and prepare for higher education. Whilst teachers feel the need to improve the relationships with the organisation to feel heard, seen, valued and focusing on performance and not necessarily on the amount of tasks and responsibilities they are able to undertake. The suggestion of a Human Resources department was made to help them navigate the different roles, obligations and responsibilities effectively and fairly. There is a widespread opinion that healthy relationships are essential in the learning process. Knowledge gets transmitted and transformed at the pedagogic site and relies on the representational mode, the pedagogic relationship, and relations with learning objects. Another branch of knowledge suggests that quality education is pegged on the Organisational or institutional culture, and thus the quality of education should be founded on the driving values and consistent practices. Such practices may vary from one context to another depending on the sociocultural dimensions.

It cannot be lost that infrastructural aspects, including the resources are also pointed out to be a major factor for consideration. In doing so, the learning institutions are properly equipped. Other individuals tend to believe that appreciation of issues such as diversity is a measure of quality education while others point out to the relevancy of the education in moulding students who are capable of facing the real world with solutions to the many challenges. On the other hand, students were significantly aware and concerned about promoting environmental awareness. Thus, suggested different electives, conferences and working with different organisations to fill the gap, creating solutions about different global issues (i.e. climate change, gender equality, pollution).   Ideally, the list is endless on what can be perceived to be quality education. The key take-away and reflection from the research at the

practice level is that quality education cannot be measured from a unilateral point of view or external standards. Instead, it should be evaluated first using a series of measures and components depicted in the research including stakeholders personal/professional experiences and means about quality. As a result, any move in practice to attain quality education should blend the various components as much as possible owing to their importance and relevance. Concentrating on one of them and sidelining another one would render the equation imbalanced. Teachers, students, as well as administrators should strive to espouse as many components as possible for quality education.

Research Level

Having established that quality education is a pragmatic element founded on different facets, which have clearly been outlined, there is a need for extensive research to conceptualise and condense them into a workable model or a theoretical approach that would constantly aid in the pursuit of quality education and truly evaluate whether quality standards have been considered from a common ground perspective. Calling for the various stakeholders to pursue each element individually may be problematic and challenging to achieve each of them effectively. However, having a condensed approach that captures all the positive elements at large would be highly beneficial in the long run, as well as easy to implement and administer from a positive point of view. In other words, validating what the teachers, students and administrators have been doing effectively, would be a starting point to foster positive results. Considering the value of existing literature on the subject, looking at the issue of quality education, it is high time the same is consolidated to form a single model and proposal that would act as the guiding pillar and element for individualised sustainable practices that lead to quality organisational and education goals including everyone involved in the process.

By following these recommendations for each group based on what evolved from the findings and literature a series of needs, desires and expectations are needed to move forward towards academic excellence. Firstly, the administrators are required to have a 360-degree vision of the whole organisation, focusing on the institution's "blueprint", supporting and evaluating the right procedures to accomplish the institutional goals while pursuing their

purpose of education. They need to pay attention to the logistics of the curriculum delivery and the specialisation of the teachers, making sure they receive the proper professional development to promote co-agency among the stakeholders. Furthermore, celebrating identity and human qualities may lead to a positive organisational culture, which should be a high priority for senior administrators. Secondly, the teachers are the "oxygen" that students need to have a fresh-air-quality educational experience. While the administrators are the vehicle, the teachers are the engine and the students are the fuel to arrive at the finish line where academic excellence starts. Teachers need to focus mainly on the relationship and quality of the specialised content, to better inspire and motivate students to discover their fullest potential. This relationship should be infused with values, and effective non/verbal communication to celebrate students' identity, and agency while fostering a learning environment supported with values. Thirdly, the students are in constant movement, looking at different intersections with a meaningful and relevant educational experience. This includes guidance towards their future, with the world that brings them closer to a brighter purpose ahead but also ignites creativity, innovation and curiosity. Finally, our "education mechanics" are focused on emotional support and assuring that the educational experience is sustainable and attainable in a healthy manner. Whilst "the air control quality department" avoids the "heating and cooling" of the organisation with regular evaluations. Thus, facilitates a constant check-up for metacognitive awareness, and overall accountability.

Service Level

At the service level, the influence is relatively similar to that of the practical stance. The research is a wake-up call for service delivery in the educational sector that values the element of quality education. The role of education in the world cannot be overlooked, as it shapes the future of the world by unlocking the potential for innovation and in forming a better future for

the coming generations. As a result, each stakeholder in their respective capacity should have a voice while striving to deliver and maintain quality education. International accreditation is a golden seal procedure to show the world that we in our Mexican private school system belong to the elite group of schools striving for academic quality, yet we need to understand that a positive change happens when we consider the local strengths, needs and aspirations of the stakeholders. Having one before the other might not lead to a positive organisational change and might create tension, resistance and decontextualized goals that do not follow the overall education purpose. Therefore, when we refer to academic quality, who do we hear first? The accreditation agency? The administrators, the teachers or the students? It is necessary to dedicate some time before presenting or creating evidence for the international quality standards, to better define what quality means for our stakeholders. Let them be part of the process with a bottom-up approach, so they not only "buy into" the whole process but they will appreciate and commit to the quality enhancement in a more positive, genuine and realistic way.

The best practices espoused in this research can act as a benchmarking position to promote a spirited move to bettering the quality of education across the country and other parts of the world reeling in similar situations and constantly challenging the form and the meaning of academic quality in different parts of the world and at different points in time. This should call for the adoption of a common goal and the determination to ensure that the quest for quality education is not hindered by background, gender, or socioeconomic status, as well as other practical challenges that have proved to be major hindrances today.

Personal Level

At the personal level, the impact and implications of the study is critical. Having noted that there lacks a concrete model for deciphering quality education, I feel challenged and obliged to expand into further research to come up with a theoretical approach through which

the quest for quality education can be pursued with minimal or no confusion arising from the need to strike a balance on what component to pursue best, major on, or even overlook in the face of different approaches. Considering the huge investments in the educational sector, there is a need for a proactive approach and commitment to ensure that the dream for quality education is a reality for all in the respective educational settings and learning institutions. In Mexico, international accreditation is a challenging endeavour as currently only six private institutions have been internationally accredited by SAIS, therefore, filling the gap between international standards and local contextualization of quality is needed for a more effective and positive organisational change. This study has allowed me to expand on my research and leadership skills while disseminating new knowledge of this particular topic that started as a general interest and ended up being one of my greatest goals in my career. As a novice researcher, I am hoping to provide meaningful insights and recommendations to my institution, as well as other private institutions that would like to pursue this ambitious international accreditation endeavour in Mexico. As a teacher, I have learned to listen to my students' voices to attend to their needs and plan my lessons accordingly to inspire them to bring their highest potential. Finally, as an administrator, I have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of documenting and implementing processes towards quality enhancement with a tuned ear and voice towards better collaboration with stakeholders.

Limitations of the Research

One of the limitations of this research relates to the extensive number of participants while using qualitative research methods. A second challenge that evolved from this was the time constraints to collect and analyse the data, as I was not able to capitalise on the geographic scope due to the number of participants. Moreover, the quantitative items should have been expanded to facilitate the analysis and interpretation of findings. These shortcomings were not anticipated, however, a more realistic sample size could be used in the future.

Additionally, one of the constructivists' challenges is to not clarify whether it is about reality or interpretations that occur in multiplicity. Therefore, this research limitation relates to

the possibility of mixing my own perspectives while interacting with the respondents, as this might shape the results depending on my own sociocultural background and positionality.

Lastly, this study did not record the gender of the students or teachers. This was only noted for the administrators interviews, where only one male and three were female. Due to this I feel that there is an exceptional opportunity for further research with participants broken down into the categories of gender.

Overall, I would take these challenges and turn them into opportunities to take these considerations into account for further research.

Future Research

As a future expansion of this research it could be relevant to analyse the recommendations from SAIS after the accreditation visits to intertwine them with these research findings and the school report with commendations and recommendations. Once that evaluation report is revised, designing a future quality model across the institutions will be recommended when both sectors are compared: SAIS and the stakeholders' perspective on academic quality. Even though I was not trying to generalise knowledge with a positivist outlook, I would like to explore a more robust quantitative analysis in a future study to see if there were any convergences. Furthermore, this research study could be easily replicated in different private learning environments to identify students', teachers' and administrators' perspectives towards quality and find the intersectionality between different learning ecosystems towards academic excellence.

Overall, the focus on academic quality, academic excellence and international accreditation should not be addressed unilaterally but rather as a spirited interconnected effort and desire to collectively enhance education, improve the learning environment, motivate learners and teachers, as well as create an ample environment for stakeholders. Working in isolation with any of these particular groups will hinder organisational progress and development. Therefore, recognising the best qualities in the institutions and the people that interact there might bring us closer to achieving higher quality standards, goals or dreams.

QUALITY STANDARDS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Recognising first the living factors the living factors of academic quality, academic excellence, and international accreditation (Discovery phase) Secondly, a self-exploratory stage towards the way participants envision the institution in the future (Dream phase), to then make recommendations for improvement (Destiny phase) to set new goals to trace a roadmap for the future (Design phase).

Figure 12. Appreciative Inquiry Framework for Quality in Education in Private Mexican High Schools (Ramirez Abdala, 2023)

Appreciative Inquiry Framework
Quality in Education in Private Mexican High Schools

Discovery
*Teaching and Learning with real life value
*Skills development and relevant content
*Personal growth, academic and professional advancement
*Education based in values and socio emotional skills and well-being.
*Community involvement, collaboration and communication
*Organisational and human relations with meaningful interactions

Destiny
*Implement a bottom-top approach in a localised quality assurance process
*Apply a quality framework according to the organisational culture, history, mission and values.
*Organisational identity to foster authenticity, creativity and innovation
*Apply policy, quality standards and procedures from a muti-dimensional outcome

Dream
· A highly prestigious institution that brings stakeholders closer to the next level and close the gap of education
· University preparation and early professional experience
· Trustworthy relations among stakeholders
· Developing personal and professional empowerment
· International education and better opportunities
· Prestige and recognition

Design
· Personalised and customised education and professional development
· Metacognitive skills in teaching, learning and leadership
· Humanistic education with empathy and understanding
· International recognition to bound academic programs
· Promote co-agency with a 360-degree organisational vision of the local context

Therefore, considering the beliefs and perceptions of the participants in alignment with the 4 phases of the Appreciative Inquiry Framework, the following figures have evolved from successful and best practices in the past and present, with the intersections and convergences in order to achieve a positive organisational change for the future.

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based teacher learning in China from the perspective of organisational learning.
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Appendices

Appendix A – Semi Structured interview questions. (Teachers and Administrators)

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Icebreaker
- Tell us a little bit about your role at the school, your trajectory in the educational context, how did you get here?
- What are some of the activities that you perform?
- How long have you been working here?

1. What type of events in the community can C implement to enhance quality?

    1.1. How can C ensure that we are meeting these goals towards higher quality standards?

    1.2 Can you give me an example of when you have witnessed a particular situation when C achieved academic excellence or that made you feel particularly proud to be part of C?

    1.3 What recommendations can you give to keep fostering academic excellence?

2. How can C improve the relationship between administrators, teachers and students?

    2.1. Mention some actions that C could perform to improve the relationships between students and teachers?

3. When it comes to student services, in what areas does C excel?

    3.1 How can C do better in this area?

4. As the school grows, how can C ensure a focus on student success and make it a priority?

    4.1 Give some ideas on how C could provide higher quality in education for students that is relevant to today's world?

5. What does C do well to attract and retain students?

    5.1. What can we do better in this aspect?

6. How can C support sustainability and cultivate environmental awareness (Environmental awareness is about being aware of our natural surroundings, and understanding how our actions affect the well-being of the environment where we live as well as globally).

6.1 Provide some examples or suggestions.

Accreditation:

7. Now that every school has finished the International Accreditation Previsit with SAIS, what is your perception of this process?

7.1 What was the most significant and challenging aspect of this evaluation?

7.2 Was the previsit what you imagined it would be? Yes/No

Why?

Creativity:

8. Could you share an example of when you applied creativity in your work role?

8.1 From your point of view, where do you think we need to implement creativity?

Innovation:

In which way does C contribute to innovation, in other words (bring novelty) to the practice.

9. From your point of view, what do you think we need to implement to foster innovation?

Appendix B – Semi Structured interview questions. (Students)

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Introduction:

Tell us a little bit about yourself **(Please do not say your name as this is anonymous, but think about a pseudonym)**

What grade are you in? Why did you choose C?

How long have you been studying at C?

1. What type of events in the school can C implement to enhance quality?

   1.1. How can C ensure that we are meeting these goals towards higher quality standards?

   1.2 Can you give me an example of when you have witnessed a particular situation when C achieved academic excellence or that made you feel particularly proud to be part of C?

   1.3 What recommendations can you give to keep fostering academic excellence for years to come?

2. How can C improve the relationship between staff, teachers and students?

   2.1. Mention some actions that C could perform to improve the relationships among students and teachers?

3. When it comes to preparing you for University, in what areas does C excel?

   3.1 How can C do better in this area?

4. As the school grows, how can C ensure a focus on student success being a priority?

   4.1 Give some ideas on how C could provide education for students that is relevant to today's world?

9. What does C do well to attract and retain students?

   9.1. What can we do better in this aspect?

10. What are we doing well as a school to embrace diversity (**Diversity** is everything that makes people different from each other. This includes many different factors:

race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability, age, religious belief, or political conviction)?

10.1 What can we do better in this aspect?

11. How can C support sustainability and cultivate environmental awareness (Environmental awareness is about being aware of our natural surroundings, and understanding how our actions affect the well-being of the environment where we live as well as globally).

11.1 Provide some example suggestions.

Appendix C – Survey questions

2. Please select your school
C/C Morelos, C/C México, C/C Mérida, C Cancún
* 3. Select your position
Teacher
Advisor
Coordinator
Director

* 4. How many years have you been working here?
0-4 years
5-9 years
More than 10 years

* 5. What does quality mean to you as

* 6. What does academic excellence mean to you?

* 7. From your point of view, what does accreditation mean to you?

* 8. Why do you think it is necessary?

* 9. Do you think the accreditation process is necessary to improve Mexico 's education system?
Yes
No
Why?

* 10. How do you foresee academic excellence for C 10 years from now, in one sentence?

* 11. Are innovation and creativity important to you in your teaching?
Yes
No
Why?

INTERNATIONAL ONLINE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS, HUMAN DATA, OR HUMAN MATERIAL**

Student applications to the online programmes' International Online Research Ethics Committee, with the specified attachments, should be posted to the Dissertation Advisor's classroom. If the Dissertation Advisor refers the application on the ethics committee, the DA must email the full application as a single, zipped file to liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com.

RESEARCH MUST NOT BEGIN UNTIL ETHICAL APPROVAL HAS BEEN OBTAINED

**This form must be completed by following the guidance notes, accessible at
www.liv.ac.uk/researchethics.**

Please complete every section, using N/A if appropriate.

Incomplete forms will be returned to the applicant.

Office Use Only (for final hard copies)

Reference Number:

Date final copy received:

Approval decision:

Approved – no conditions
Committee
Chairs Action
Expedited

Approved with conditions
Committee
Chairs Action
Expedited

Declaration of the:

Principal Investigator OR Supervisor and Student Investigator   X   (please enter an X as appropriate)

- The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it.

- I have read and understand the University's Policy on Research Ethics.

- I undertake to abide by the ethical principles underlying the Declaration of Helsinki and the University's good practice guidelines on the proper conduct of research, together with the codes of practice laid down by any relevant professional or learned society.

- If the research is approved, I undertake to adhere to the study plan, the terms of the full application of which the REC has given a favourable opinion, and any conditions set out by the REC in giving its favourable opinion.

- I undertake to seek an ethical opinion from the REC before implementing substantial amendments to the study plan or to the terms of the full application of which the REC has given a favourable opinion.

- I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the research at all times.

- If there are any serious adverse events, I understand that I am responsible for immediately stopping the research and alerting the Research Ethics Committee within 24 hours of the occurrence, via ethics@liv.ac.uk.

- I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.

- I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future.

- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application will be held by the University and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.

- I understand that the information contained in this application, any supporting documentation and all correspondence with the Research Ethics Committee relating to the application, will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts. The information may be disclosed in response to requests made under the Acts except where statutory exemptions apply.

- I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved

in the study, and that it is my responsibility to ensure that they abide by them.

- For Supervisors: I understand my responsibilities as a supervisor, and will ensure, to the best of my abilities, that the student investigator abides by the University's Policy on Research Ethics at all times.

- For the Student Investigator: I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of safety, ethical and other guidelines as agreed in advance with my supervisor and understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and any other applicable code of ethics at all times.

Signature of Principal Investigator   or Supervisor   : F.G.Kop
Date: 24th September 2019
Print Name: Rita Kop

Signature of Student Investigator: *Yazmin Ramirez Abdala*
Print Name: Yazmin Ramirez Abdala

SECTION A - IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

A1)   Title of the research (PLEASE INCLUDE A SHORT LAY TITLE IN BRACKETS).

Mexican Education Quality standards in private schools: Perspectives from students, teachers and administrators

A2)   Principal Investigator x   OR   Supervisor   (please check as appropriate)

Title:	Ms	Staff number:	XXXX
Forename/ Initials:	Rita	Surname:	Kop
Post:	Doctoral Supervisor	Department:	Educational Doctorate Program
Telephone :		E-mail:	rita.kop@online.liverpool.ac.uk

A3)   Co-applicants (including student investigators)

itle and Name	Post / Current programme (if student investigator)	Departm ent/ School/I nstitutio n if not UoL	Phone	Email
s. Yazmi n Ramire z Abdala	E.D.D		+5217774961404	yazmin.ramirez@online.liverpool.ac.uk

SECTION B - PROJECT DETAILS

B1)   Proposed study dates and duration (RESEARCH MUST NOT BEGIN UNTIL ETHICAL APPROVAL HAS BEEN OBTAINED)

Please complete as appropriate:
EITHER

a) Starting as soon as ethical approval has been obtained   X   (please check if applicable)

Approximate end date:	December 2020

OR
b) Approximate dates:

Start date:	January 2020	End date:	December, 2020

B2)   Give a full lay summary of the purpose, design and methodology of the planned research.

The purpose of the research is to analyse the perspectives of students, teachers and administrators on quality standards and the accreditation process in a developing country. The aim is to gain insights from this study to inform future processes of accreditation in Mexico as well as identify key issues related to education quality in private schools. Quality means different things depending on the context. In light of student skills development, it is very important to succeed in the global world. However, professional practitioners and administrators may have different perspectives. Therefore, 3D perceptions towards quality in a wider sense than skills might help close the gap in standards in the private school sectors in developing countries. This would mean that research should also take into consideration the professional development of school directors, teachers and administrators in order to develop an accurate picture of the educational culture.

This study will critically examine the accreditation process in an educational setting of 4 high schools across 4 cities in Mexico (Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Cancun and Merida).

The research process will use a mixed methods approach to data collection, consisting of semi-structured interviews and surveys with students, teachers and administrators. As this allows for a variety of data to be collected that align well with the purpose of the inquiry and support the research questions, while it also supports triangulation for data validation through an Appreciative Inquiry lens. This Appreciative Inquiry lens (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) will be useful as they align with the principles of analyses that are extensively used in the educational setting.

Proposed Research Question(s):
What are the perspectives of teachers, students and administrators on international accreditation standards and quality in education? Are creativity and innovation integral components of international accreditation? If so, how?

Some sub questions to get to the issues at a deeper level:
1. Do perspectives differ across teachers, administrators and students?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities faced by administrators, teachers, students when quality standards change in private education in Mexico?
3. How do teachers, students and administrators conceptualize academic excellence?

During an Academic meeting with teachers, directors and administrators who participate in each accreditation committees I as a researcher will discuss the accreditation process and also perform a self-diagnostic analysis with the objective of identifying the organization's main institutional goals towards improvement and academic excellence followed with a survey using survey monkey program to collect the responses.

A total of 400 students (100 students per school) and 100 teachers (25 per school) will be chosen as well as 16 administrators 4 per school to answer a survey to collect data on their perceptions about quality and academic excellence. All data will be collected, translated and analysed anonymously and will be stored securely. Then 16 senior administrators (4 from each of the 4 schools) will be invited to participate in a semi structured interview that will last from 30-60 minutes.

The second stage of the study will be a semi-structured interview,

where 16 teachers and 16 students(4 teachers and 4 students from each school) and 8 administrators (2 from each school), will be recruited by purposeful sampling. Then a second interview with 1 senior administrator from each school after the Accreditation visit and all the evidence has been collected, completed and presented to the Accreditation Board. Qualitative data will be analysed through thematic coding. Quantitative data will be examined by descriptive statistics to summarise trends and independent-sample and text to compare perspectives across contexts and educational agents (teachers, students and administrators) from different cities, (Morelos, Mexico City, Cancun and Merida) interacting at the forefront of the institutions that will be part of a self-study and analyses.

A variety of research methods will support the diversity underlying educational research including the variances present in framing individual questions. Every faculty member will be approached via the institution's email and will be provided with a brief description about the study's background. Each participant will be asked for informed consent and only the interested participants will be formally approached and be contacted.

B3)   List any research assistants, sub-contractors or other staff not named above who will be involved in the research and detail their involvement.

Appendix D-Student Participation Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Committee on Research Ethics

Participant Information Sheet Guidelines

Mexican Education Quality standards in private schools: Perspectives from students, teachers and administrators

You are being invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask for more information or if there is anything that you do not understand.

Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what it will involve. Please also feel free to discuss this with your work colleagues, supervisors of the school, if you wish. I would like to reassure you that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

The purpose of the research is to analyse the perspectives of students, teachers and administrators on quality standards and the accreditation process in a developing country. The aim is to gain insights from this study to inform future processes of accreditation in Mexico as well as identify key issues related to education quality in private schools.

Since the institution is going through an international accreditation process this means that all the members of the institution who join have received enough information about the purpose of evaluating quality standards as well as why they are being asked to take part in the research study.

Even though your participation in this study is voluntary, even if initially you agreed to participate you can always change your mind and withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring any disadvantage.

What will happen if I take part?

By taking part in this study it will help examine different quality perceptions and perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators in a group of private high-schools pursuing International accreditation in 2019 and it will examine through Appreciative Inquiry a research methodology. Cooperrider, Watkins, and Srivastva (1987) developed the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework in the early 90's, which has its main focus on systems and institutional development by taking a reflective attitude to determine the best from the past to create a more sustainable and innovative future. The main focus in terms of quality is not what the organisation is not doing correctly, nor paying attention to the problem but getting inspired by the desired

outcome. This Appreciative Inquiry lens (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) will be useful as the principles of SWOT analysis are extensively used in the educational setting.

The method to be utilised in various contexts with the participation of senior leaders, teachers, and administrators to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in 4 different cities in Mexico. After this reflection a self-diagnosis will be assigned to redefine best practices and will assess the levels of creativity in the teaching process to help develop these competencies in future.

Sampling
Participants for the survey (100 teachers, 400 students, and 16 administrators) will be selected randomly. Participants for the semi-structured interviews (20 teachers and 20 students), will be recruited by purposeful sampling. Qualitative data will be analysed through thematic coding. Quantitative data will be examined by descriptive statistics to summarise trends and independent-sample and text to compare perspectives across contexts and educational agents (teachers, students and administrators) from different cities, (Morelos, Mexico City, Cancun and Merida) interacting at the forefront of the institutions that will be part of a self-study and SWOT analyses.
A variety of research methods will support the diversity underlying educational research including the variances present in framing individual questions.

Research design
During an Academic meeting with teachers, directors and administrators who participate in each accreditation committee I as a researcher will discuss the accreditation process and also perform a self-diagnostic SWOT analysis with the objective of identifying the organisation's main institutional goals towards improvement and academic excellence followed with a survey using survey monkey to collect the responses.
Surveys will be sent to 400 students and 100 teachers to analyse their perceptions about quality and academic excellence. Then 4 senior administrators from each school will be invited to participate in a semi structured interview. Also, reflection of the SWOT analysis will be analysed to enrich the contributions and perspectives of the group members.

Research Ethics
Prior to data collection, student teachers' and participants will complete a release and informed consent letter to follow the ethics review procedure assigned by the ethical committee at the University of Liverpool.
There are no anticipated risks for participation in this research as I as researcher am not directly responsible for the quality in the institution.
Data will be gathered and stored in a secure location, using a password protected computer. Also, paper interviews and questionnaires will be locked in a file cabinet and information will be anonymous. No personal data will be exposed in the findings since all the personal information will be confidential.
The research process will use a mixed methods approach to data collection, consisting of semi-structured interviews and surveys with students, teachers and administrators, and also the completion of SWOT analyses by the school teams.
I will be the soul researcher on this project and can be reached at the following email address. My name is Yazmin Ramírez Abdala and my email is:
yazmin.ramirez@online.liverpool.ac.uk
Furthermore, I will be the sole person conducting the interviews, survey. The interviews will be private and personal and should not last longer than approximately 45- 60 minutes.
The Participants responsibility is to answer interview questions truthfully and to the best of their ability. Also, to answer survey questions in a timely manner.

Expenses and / or payments

Please note that there are no compensation claims, gifts or reimbursements being provided before, during or after the study. All interviews will be conducted during the workday but before or after their duties.

Are there any risks in taking part?

Considering the investigator's role as a Language Coordinator, none of the participants will be English or Language teachers. Moreover, most of them are not known personally to the researcher in the other cities and will be approached on a one to one basis and asked for voluntary participation. Therefore, the investigator has no influence on the data collected. Furthermore, she expects to collect independent views from all the participants. The study activity will not affect participant's performance evaluation nor has undue influence over it.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

The participants and the institution will have the opportunity to reflect on how the current international accreditation in Mexico influences their school in terms of quality standards and academic excellence.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If the participant is unhappy or has any complaints, he/she is free to contact the principal investigator, Yazmin Ramirez at yazmin.ramirez@liverpoolonline.com. They also may contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com They need to provide the details of the name or description of the study, the researcher's name, and details of the complaint for quick identification.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

The institution and the participants' names will be anonymized, and only identifiable to the investigator through a code which is stored in a password-protected file on the investigator's computer. All interviews will be audio-recorded and labelled individually with unique labelling and will be stored in the investigator's personal computer for later transcription, translation for research reference. Each interview file will be transcribed verbatim using coding to look for patterns in the data. All electronic data will be translated into English and records will be kept on a password-protected personal computer and backed up on the personal external hard-drive with private access only to the investigator. Data will not be shared with other organisations nor will it be disclosed to any third party.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Detail how the results will be made available to the participants and whether the results are to be published. If the results are to be published, detail how and where they will be accessible. Tell participants that they will not be identifiable from the results unless they have consented to being so.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

Participants are free to withdraw at any point during the data collection. Due to the anonymised results, the results may only be withdrawn prior to anonymisation. However, the participant no longer needs to participate.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Principal Investigator.

Yazmin Ramirez Abdala
Av. Bonampak.Lt 8-2 SMZA 10B
Cancun, Quintana Roo. C.P.77500
998-889-9292
Yramirez@cuam.edu.mx

Appendix E – Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Committee on Research Ethics

Please
initial
box

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMTitle of Research   Mexican

Education Quality standards in private schools: Perspectives from

students, teachers and administrators

I,(Yazmin Ramirez) am enrolled in the Doctor of Education (EdD)
Programme at the University of Liverpool in partnership with
Laureate Education.

I entered the programme in order to develop a doctoral-level depth
of knowledge and research skills across areas in higher education
such as higher education management, innovative approaches to
educational leadership, decision making, as well as ethics, social
responsibility, and social change. As an EdD student, I am required,
as part of this programme, to undertake research projects during the
taught modules. These projects provide an opportunity for me to
reflect on critical issues that I encounter in the context of my work,
apply my scholarly learning to these issues, and, in the end, develop
as an agent of positive change in our organisation.

In the context of my research in the EdD programme, I hereby
request authorisation to access organisational data, facility use, and
use of personnel time for research purposes relevant to my required
assignments. This includes permission to access documents from the
archives of the organisation which are not necessarily in the public
domain and which I may normally have access to when performing
the responsibilities of my job. This also includes authorisation to
conduct an interview with an employee, teacher or student of the
organisation about the organisation's policies, programmes, and best
practices enhancement. I also request permission to provide my
personal reflections on the collected data about perceptions of
quality. I have included with this letter a Participant Information
Sheet which outlines in greater detail the nature of the current
research project I am required to complete for the EdD programme.

I appreciate the opportunity to engage in research involving my
organisation. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant
Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any question or
concerns you may have.

My contact details are:
Yazmin Ramirez Abdala

Academic Coordinator
Centro Universitario Anglo Mexicano
Av. Bonampak.Lt 8-2 SMZA 10B Cancun, Quintana Roo.
C.P.77500
yramirez@cuam.edu.mx
+52-777-496-1404
The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the
University of Liverpool are:
001-612-312-1210 (USA number)
Email address liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com
Sincerely,

....
Yazmin Ramirez Abdala, EdD student

Researcher(s):

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [DATE] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name   Date
Signature

Name of Person taking consent   Date
Signature

Researcher   Date
Signature

Principal Investigator: Student
Researcher:
Yazmin Ramirez Abdala   Yazmin
Ramirez Abdala

                                                                                998-889-9292

yramirez@cuam.edu.mx
        yramirez@cuam.edu.mx

Version 3-October 2019

Optional Statements

● The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether

you would like to receive a copy.

☐

- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications [or explain the possible anonymity options that you are offering participants and provide appropriate tick box options accordingly].

☐

- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee.

☐

- I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded /video recorded (please delete as appropriate) and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes (which must be specified)

☐

- I understand that I must not take part if I am pregnant.

☐

- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.

☐

- I would like my name used and I understand and agree that what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.

☐

- I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential [only if true]. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

- I understand and agree that once I submit my data it will become anonymised and I will therefore no longer be able to withdraw my data.

Appendix F- Ethics Approval

Dear Yazmin

I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	Yazmin Ramirez Abdala
School:	
Title:	Mexican Education Quality standards in private schools: Perspectives from students, teachers and administrators.
First Reviewer:	Dr Carolina Guzmán Valenzuela

Second Reviewer:
              Dr Arwen Raddon

Other members of the Dr. Lucilla Crosta,
Committee

Date of Approval: 5 May 2020

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1   Mandatory   M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the
                               VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD
                               Thesis Primary Supervisor.

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration
of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it
is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee
by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at
http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to
proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local
permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research
ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the
researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the
researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact
participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify
potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for
research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or
her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix G – CEO Authorisation Letter for Research

November 30th, 2019

Attn.

Executive Director
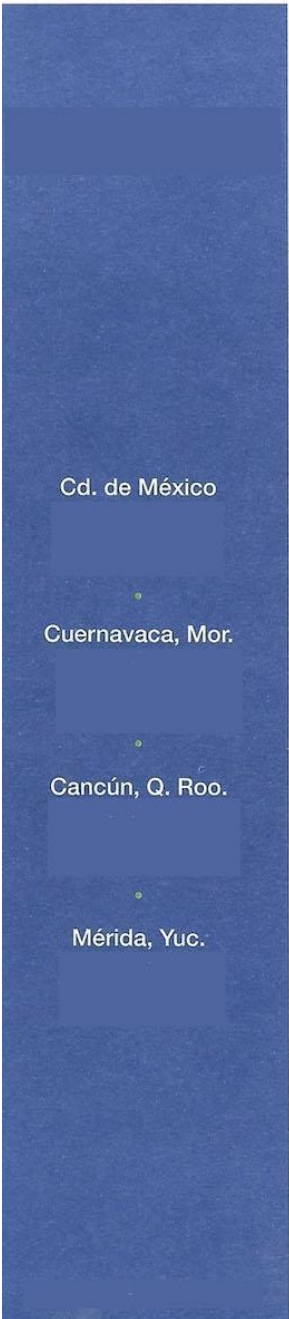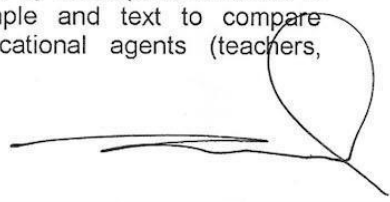
Morelos, Mexico

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Raul,

Hoping that this letter finds you well. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study in high schools (Morelos, Mexico City, Cancun and Merida).

As a Doctoral Degree candidate in Higher Education at the University of Liverpool, currently in the process of working on my Doctoral thesis. The study will be around Education Quality standards related to International accreditation and aims to get the perspectives from students, teachers and administrators. I am hoping that my research study will shed light on best practices towards academic excellence and quality standards within the Group once the data is analyzed, as well as contribute to new perspectives and knowledge dissemination in this field.

The study entails two main stages. The first one being an online survey of participants in four schools, using the survey monkey tool, recruiting 400 students (100 students per school) and 100 teachers (25 per school) will be chosen as well as 16 administrators 4 per school to answer a survey to collect data on their perceptions about quality and academic excellence. All data will be collected, translated and analyzed anonymously and will be stored securely. Then 16 senior administrators (4 from each of the 4 schools) will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview that will last from 30-60 minutes.

The second stage of the study will be a semi-structured interview, where 16 teachers and 16 students(4 teachers and 4 students from each school) and 8 administrators (2 from each school), will be recruited by purposeful sampling. Then a second interview with 1 senior administrator from each school after the Accreditation visit and all the evidence has been collected, completed and presented to the Accreditation Board. Qualitative data will be analysed through thematic coding. Quantitative data will be examined by descriptive statistics to summarize trends and independent-sample and text to compare perspectives across contexts and educational agents (teachers,

Cd. de México

Cuernavaca, Mor.

Cancún, Q. Roo.

Mérida, Yuc.

students and administrators) from different cities, (Morelos, Mexico City, Cancun and Merida) interacting at the forefront of the institutions that will be part of a self-study and analyses.
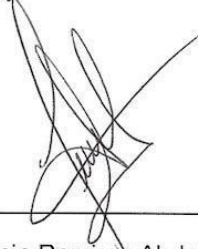
If approval is granted, student participants will be recruited through the school supervisor, and contacted via the email system and asked to complete the survey, and participate in the interview in a place of their choice, which could be a classroom or other quiet setting on the school site. The survey can be completed from their own home or from any location in the school, as the survey will be done completely online and anonymously, while interviews could be via face-to-face, telephone or skype, depending on participant preference. The survey process should take no longer than 15 to 20 minutes. The interviews may take between 45 and 60 minutes.

The survey results will be analyzed for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and no costs will be incurred by the individual participants in the study.
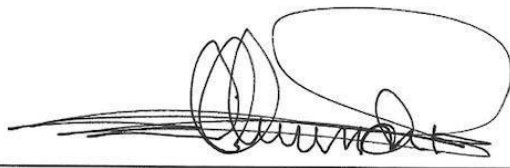
If you agree, kindly sign below acknowledging your consent and permission for the research to be conducted in   schools as a requisite to be approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Liverpool and start my research process. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research.

I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have about my research study.

Sincerely,

_____

Yazmin Ramirez Abdala

_____

Cd. de México

Cuernavaca, Mor.

Cancún, Q. Roo.

Mérida, Yuc.