



Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Education and Psychology

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

Attributes of Higher Education and Quality of Institutional Strategies in Times of Globalization in Hungary and Germany

Carla Liege Rodrigues Pimenta

Topic supervisors: Dr. Zoltán Rónay

Dr. András Németh

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Abstract

The primary objective of this research is to examine the concept(s) of quality assurance that are stated in the guiding education policy and discourses on the Hungarian and German higher education systems, respectively. This dissertation aims to demonstrate the perspectives of students, teachers, and staff at selected public universities in both countries, namely Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest and Humboldt University of Berlin, on their quality experiences in higher education, as well as to identify the perspectives of external policy makers on quality measures that are implemented in Higher Education Institutions, through interviews with students, teachers, and staff. Data were collected by a document analysis of national and institutional policies and semi-structured interviews. According to the information acquired from these legislations, the two nations have opposed methods to higher education governance. The management in Hungary is centralized and under the supervision of the national government. As a result of this state control, higher education institutions appear to have limited autonomy in the organization of academic programs. However, in 2021, the HE maintenance model shift, which has brought new way of operating. It is relevant to point out that the ELTE as an institution selected for this study continue to be remained as a state university. The thesis will not be able to cover the model change in depth, at least not in its current form. The German documents selected in this research demonstrate a conviction in the necessity of guaranteeing the quality of teaching, learning and research as well as academic freedom, equality of genders, and the autonomy of educational institutions. The data gathered for this study indicated a close association between governance and quality assurance in discourses about stakeholder responsibility, market openness, and academic freedom, among other topics. Even though professors have complete power over academic freedom, they must realign rules and practices to involve students in decision-making processes. It implies that institutions should continue to study strategies for making the best use of academics' abilities and experience, while also attempting to reduce the outflow of academics from the institution. Data has also revealed that the situation is comparable in both circumstances; the emphasis may be placed on different components in each scenario. Experience with quality in higher education is situational, and the experiences of the interviewees vary depending on their function. It has been argued that no two institutions would ever be the same because of the endless diversity of experiences that the stakeholders have. The precarity of the German context was brought up in the interviews, particularly in terms of pursuing a career in academia. The infrastructure provided to teachers to carry out their duties, as well as the provision of regular training and the promotion of interdisciplinary work across faculties, were the most frequently mentioned concerns from the Hungarian respondents.

Keywords: higher education; quality assurance; governance; institutional autonomy; academic freedom; history of university; comparative study



Absztrakt

A kutatás elsődleges célja, hogy megvizsgálja a minőségbiztosítás fogalmát (fogalmait), amelyek a német, illetve a magyar felsőoktatási rendszer irányadó oktatáspolitikai és felsőoktatási diskurzusaiban szerepelnek. A disszertáció célja, hogy a hallgatókkal, oktatókkal és munkatársakkal készített interjúk segítségével bemutassa a két ország kiválasztott állami egyetemein – a budapesti Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem és a berlini Humboldt Egyetem – a felsőoktatásban szerzett minőségügyi tapasztalataikról alkotott nézeteiket, valamint a külső politikai döntéshozóknak a felsőoktatási intézményekben alkalmazott minőségügyi intézkedésekről alkotott nézeteit. Az adatgyűjtés a nemzeti és intézményi szakpolitikák dokumentumelemzésével és félig strukturált interjúkkal történt. A dokumentumokból szerzett információk szerint a két ország a felsőoktatás irányításával kapcsolatban ellentétes megközelítést alkalmaz. A magyarországi felsőoktatási rendszer irányítása centralizált és a nemzeti kormány felügyelete alatt áll. Ennek az állami irányításnak az eredményeként a felsőoktatási intézmények a jelek szerint korlátozott autonómiával rendelkeznek oktatási és tudományos tevékenységük tekintetében. Azonban 2021-ben a felsőoktatási intézmények fenntartói irányítási szerkezete megváltozott, ami új működési módot hozott. Fontos kiemelni, hogy az ELTE az e disszertációhoz kiválasztott intézmény továbbra is állami egyetem. A dolgozat nem tudja mélyrehatóan tárgyalni a modellváltást, legalábbis a jelenlegi formájában nem. Az értekezésben vizsgált német jogi dokumentumok a tanulás, az oktatás és a kutatás minőségének, valamint az akadémiai szabadság, a nemek közötti egyenlőség és az oktatási intézmények autonómiájának biztosításában való meggyőződésről tanúskodnak. A tanulmányhoz gyűjtött adatok azt mutatták, hogy az irányítás és a minőségbiztosítás szoros kapcsolatban áll egymással többek között az érdekelt felek felelősségéről, a piac nyitottságáról és az akadémiai szabadságról szóló diskurzusokban. Annak ellenére, hogy a professzorok teljes hatalommal rendelkeznek az akadémiai szabadság felett, át kell alakítaniuk a szabályokat és a gyakorlatokat annak érdekében, hogy a hallgatókat bevonják a döntéshozatali folyamatokba. Ez azt jelenti, hogy az intézményeknek továbbra is tanulmányozniuk kell az akadémikusok képességeinek és tapasztalatának legjobb kihasználására irányuló stratégiákat, miközben arra is törekedniük kell, hogy csökkentsék az akadémikusok intézményből való kiáramlását. Az adatokból az is kiderült, hogy a helyzet mindkét körülmények között hasonló; a hangsúlyt az egyes forráskönyvekben eltérő összetevőkre lehet helyezni. A minőséggel kapcsolatos tapasztalatok a felsőoktatásban szituációfüggőek, és a megkérdezettek tapasztalatai funkciótól függően változnak. Azzal érveltek, hogy az érdekelt tapasztalatainak végtelen sokfélesége miatt nincs két egyforma intézmény. Az interjúk során felvetették a német felsőoktatási rendszer bizonytalanságát, különösen az akadémiai karrierlehetőségek tekintetében. A magyar válaszadók leggyakrabban említett aggályai között szerepelt az oktatók számára feladatuk ellátásához biztosított infrastruktúra, valamint a rendszeres továbbképzések biztosítása és a karok közötti interdiszciplináris munka hiánya.

Kulcsszavak: felsőoktatás minőségbiztosítása; irányítás és menedzsment; intézményi autonómia; akadémiai szabadság; felsőoktatás története; összehasonlító tanulmány



Zusammenfassung

Das Hauptziel dieser Untersuchung ist es, die Konzepte der Qualitätssicherung zu untersuchen, die in den bildungspolitischen Leitlinien und Diskursen über die Hochschulbildung im deutschen und ungarischen Hochschulsystem enthalten sind. Diese Dissertation zielt darauf ab, die Perspektiven von Studierenden, Lehrenden und Mitarbeitern ausgewählter öffentlicher Universitäten in beiden Ländern, nämlich der Eötvös Loránd Universität in Budapest und der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, zu ihren Qualitätserfahrungen in der Hochschulbildung aufzuzeigen, sowie die Perspektiven externer politischer Entscheidungsträger zu Qualitätsmaßnahmen, die in den Hochschulen umgesetzt werden, durch Interviews mit Studierenden, Lehrenden und Mitarbeitern zu ermitteln. Die Daten wurden durch eine Dokumentenanalyse der nationalen und institutionellen Politik und durch halbstrukturierte Interviews erhoben. Den aus diesen Dokumenten gewonnenen Informationen zufolge verfolgen die beiden Länder in Bezug auf die Steuerung des Hochschulwesens unterschiedliche Ansätze. Die Verwaltung des Hochschulsystems in Ungarn ist zentralisiert und steht unter der Aufsicht der nationalen Regierung. Aufgrund dieser staatlichen Kontrolle scheinen die Hochschuleinrichtungen bei der Organisation der akademischen Programme nur über eine begrenzte Autonomie zu verfügen. Im Jahr 2021 hat sich das Hochschulmodell jedoch geändert, was zu neuen Arbeitsweisen geführt hat. Es ist wichtig, darauf hinzuweisen, dass ELTE, die für diese Studie ausgewählte Institution, weiterhin eine staatliche Universität ist. Die Dissertation wird nicht in der Lage sein, den Modellwechsel in der Tiefe zu behandeln, zumindest nicht in seiner aktuellen Form. Die in dieser Studie untersuchten deutschen Gesetzestexte zeigen die Überzeugung, dass die Qualität des Lernens, der Lehre und der Forschung sowie die akademische Freiheit, die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter und die Autonomie der Bildungseinrichtungen gewährleistet werden müssen. Die für diese Studie gesammelten Daten deuten auf eine enge Verbindung zwischen Governance und Qualitätssicherung in Diskursen über die Verantwortung der Stakeholder, die Öffnung des Marktes und die akademische Freiheit hin, neben anderen Themen. Auch wenn die Professoren die volle Macht über die akademische Freiheit haben, müssen sie die Regeln und Praktiken neu ausrichten, um die Studierenden in die Entscheidungsprozesse einzubeziehen. Das bedeutet, dass die Einrichtungen weiterhin Strategien untersuchen sollten, um die Fähigkeiten und Erfahrungen der Akademiker optimal zu nutzen, und gleichzeitig versuchen sollten, die Abwanderung von Akademikern aus der Einrichtung zu verringern. Die Daten haben auch gezeigt, dass die Situation in beiden Fällen vergleichbar ist; der Schwerpunkt kann in jedem Szenario auf unterschiedlichen Komponenten liegen. Die Erfahrungen mit Qualität in der Hochschulbildung sind situationsabhängig, und die Erfahrungen der Befragten variieren je nach ihrer Funktion. Es wurde argumentiert, dass aufgrund der unendlichen Vielfalt der Erfahrungen, die die Beteiligten machen, keine zwei Einrichtungen jemals gleich sein werden. Die Prekarität des deutschen Hochschulsystems wurde in den Interviews angesprochen, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Verfolgung einer akademischen Laufbahn. Die Infrastruktur, die den Lehrkräften zur Erfüllung ihrer Aufgaben zur Verfügung gestellt wird, sowie die Bereitstellung regelmäßiger Fortbildungen und die Förderung der interdisziplinären Arbeit zwischen den Fakultäten waren die am häufigsten genannten Anliegen der ungarischen Befragten.



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Schlüsselwörter: Qualitätssicherung in der Hochschulbildung; Governance und Management; institutionelle Autonomie; akademische Freiheit; Geschichte der Hochschulbildung; vergleichende Studie



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Contents

Abstract	2
Absztrakt	3
Zusammenfassung	4
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	6
INTRODUCTION	12
Research tools and methods.....	15
Document analysis	16
Semi-structured interview	17
Content analysis	19
Target groups and sample	22
CONCLUSIONS	24
REFERENCES	32



INTRODUCTION

The European Bologna Declaration (BD), signed on 19 June 1999, was strengthened related to some trends, such as quality, internationalization, globalization, institutional autonomy, democracy, and massification of the Higher Education (HE) systems (Kehm, 2010; Ozga et al., 2011). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have gone through changes to the management, curriculum, and pedagogy arising not only from the Bologna Process (BP) but also from the requirements and international trends inherent in the phenomenon of globalization (Dale, 2000).

When the knowledge society and the new paradigm associated with it (also known as the "knowledge economy" or the "knowledge-based economy") are considered together, they illustrate a new reality in which knowledge has impacts on policies, practices, organizations, and individual's lives, particularly when information and learning are now understood as more critical to achieve greater positions across all sectors of society (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015; Hoffman *et al.*, 2009). Knowledge-based economy paradigm and globalization times are transforming the social role of HEIs as a knowledge society since it has become a vital intellectual gadget, as well as; there must be continued development of networked knowledge, which includes people's mobility and ideas, goods, and services, innovation, and financial capital for economic growth (Hoffman & Välimaa, 2016).

To meet these demands, it has become important for the institutions to reconfigure their practices and programs to promote the 'new knowledge production' within the international principles and global policies, the dynamics of the research environment, and enhance the quality as a key element for the improvements which, on the one hand, allows the institutions to engage in new wide world market logics aiming for qualification at the cultural, social and academic level in an innovative manner. On the other, it enables the mobility of students and teachers to establish a collaborative project, achieve democratization, and access/produces knowledge in the contemporaneity society (Ball, 2001; Gibbons *et al.*, 1994).

Under these influences, the quality and the search for "efficiency" have followed hybrid systems and standardized models established by international policies, especially those arising out of European cooperation. This standardization justifies the prospect of Roger Dale (2000) when he discusses how national policies might be affected by globalization which stems from a "globally structured educational agenda" or "common world educational culture." In fact, globalization and



the challenges of the “knowledge society” have implications for the production of knowledge and educational policies, particularly in the expansion and integration of students from different countries and contexts in terms of social inclusion and cohesion, which are also part of the organization and higher education aim.

From this perspective, the enactment of the quality assurance mechanisms and tools in the HE systems to be able to systematically and continuously guarantee monitor and lead the sustainable practices and achievement of the institution's mission consequently promotes the quality of education. The quality assurance phenomena and their importance have been growing in the increasingly globalized world (Rozsnyai, 2003).

This Ph.D. research takes into consideration the importance of the quality assurance of HE. It mainly brings a compared view, which aims to observe/relate the policies that orient the systems and create strategies to ensure that quality will be guaranteed in this dynamic context. The quality of HE aims to satisfy the needs of all stakeholders in the process; establish structures for data analysis for comparison of institutions and countries consisting of an exercise to clarify the contexts and their changing aspects. Primarily, this dissertation intends to explain/interpret critically as these policies have potential implications and (un)intended effects on the contexts and actors and how to enable new approaches for the continuous improvement of the quality.

The objective of this research is quadripartite: (1) to examine the concept(s) of quality assurance mentioned in the guiding education policy and higher education discourses, emphasizing Hungary and Germany’s HE systems, two public universities, namely Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) and Humboldt-University of Berlin (HUB); (2) to look into the two universities’ institutional strategies to leverage the qualification and improvement of training and the challenges of globalization and faced ideals of democratization; (3) to analyze perspectives of students, staffs, and teaching personnel in both countries regarding their quality experiences in HE. We have chosen these two HEIs because both institutions have a key role in leading research and their powerful influence on the production of knowledge and social improvement in the countries selected (Backhaus, 2015; Bösch, 2018; Németh & Garai, 2020). On the one hand, Hungary is an excellent example of a country that transitioned from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one in 1989-1990, only to reverse course twenty years later. However, Hungary and Germany can serve as valuable points of comparison because of their historical roots and longstanding cultural



influence. The contextual framework looks at their historical, economic, and social impact on the Hungarian and German HE contexts.

Therefore, the methodological part offers scientific theoretical foundations and insights into selecting qualitative research methods. This section includes data collection methods, participants, and analysis techniques.

The comparative method selected for this research places an integral part in comprehending the context of the educational policies for the quality assurance developments and their enactment in Hungary and Germany on the HE systems, many of which of these discourses are embedded in the contemporary context of globalization. It also aims to understand to what extent the national and supranational transformations affect the HEIs concerning autonomy and democratization (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003).

The comparative study, using the historical dimension, provides comprehension of the development of the idea of the university, which has been impacted by essential variations in the discourses of the quality and promotes reforms in the universities over time in both European countries inspired by the social, political and economic demands. Comparing the historical context since the beginning of the German university model and after the transformations in the mid-1980s, there have been profound changes in the political, economic, and education fields related to their mark on HE and the nations.

At the institutional level, the comparative perspective is relevant to be discussed, which began in the 1990s, the Hungarian university system reverts to the attributes of the Western scientific and educational system. The HUB, which was situated in East Berlin until 1990, falls into this duality because it was positioned in the German Democratic Republic, which belonged under the Soviet influence zone at the time. After this period, the current changes in the development of both HUB and ELTE are built on these common frameworks. Hence, it is evident that the two institutions share similarities.

With this Ph.D. research, we hope that, on the one hand, it will be interesting sociologically, pedagogically, and on other management-oriented, primarily because the quality of the HE takes an essential role in this complex academic and social world and the entire society.

The research question focuses on how institutions are creating institutional strategies to deal with the local, national, supranational, and international demands and, at the same time,



promote the quality of education to respond to contemporary issues and needs of all actors of society after their changes in the historical past.

Research tools and methods

The research methodology of the dissertation follows an approach with a qualitative-oriented research design, taking into consideration the questions and the guiding objectives of this PhD research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin, 2017). The main aim of the empirical work is to collect qualitative data on the macro, meso, and micro-levels of Hungary and Germany.

The primary and secondary data sources that will be used in the research plan are: 1) Primary data sources: – data collected from the teachers, students, and expert interviews– data collected from the document analysis, national and State HE regulations. 2) Secondary data sources: scientific/academic papers, dissertations, books, and existing research focus on the quality assurance in HE.

In a deductive study employing a multi-method research design, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data gathering techniques, while content analysis was used to analyze the data within the constructivist paradigm. Figure 2 shows the methods of data collection for this research project.

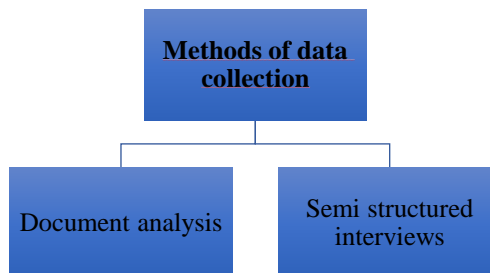


Figure 1. Methods of data collection

Detailed explanations of the various methods can be found in the following subchapters.



Document analysis

In this research, document analysis was used for European and national policies (macro-level) and official documents of the two institutions selected (Meso level). The quality systems were examined, the tools and strategy for assessment (internal and external), and how the quality of the teaching, learning, and management of these institutions is ensured. The document analysis allows us to identify the tensions and contradictions between the internal and external demands, the forces and influences that shape the HE system in aspects of social and economic development (Bray & Jiang, 2014), designing programs that adequately meet students' needs, while at the same time responding to the demands of the knowledge-based economy.

As for methods of data collection to support this research, the institutions' documents were analyzed, which demonstrate various aspects involving the institution, such as management, regulations, commitments, values, and mission choice of these documents allows "(...) *researchers access to an 'official perspective'* (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994).

The analysis of HE documents in both countries focused on 14 legal documents that were essential to understanding national-level policies and institutional policy at ELTE and HUB. The documents that were analyzed are shown in the table below.

Country	Legal documents / Institutional documents
Hungary	National level
	Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education
	Institutional Level – Eötvös Loránd University
	ELTE Organisational and Operational Regulations - Academic Regulations for Students (2021).
	Organisational And Operational Regulations Volume 2. Annex 6 To the Academic Regulations for Students- Doctoral Regulations (2016).
	On the institutional implementation of the Government Decree Non. 599/2021. (X. 28.) regarding the mandatory vaccination against coronavirus of the employees of state and local government institutions
	ELTE Epidemiological Operative Coordinating Body (2021).
Germany	Federal Level
	Federal Data Protection Act – BDSG (2017)
	Freedom of Information Act - IFG (2006)
	State-level
	Law on Universities in Baden-Württemberg (State University Law - LHG) of January 1, (2005). Bavarian University Act (BayHSchG) from May 23, (2006).



	Law on Universities in the State of Berlin (Berlin University Law- BerlHG) as amended on July 26, (2011).
	Law on Universities in Baden-Württemberg (State University Law - LHG) of January 1, (2005).
	Institutional level - Humboldt University of Berlin
	Constitution of the Humboldt-University of Berlin (Version of 28 June 2011)
	Evaluation of Humboldt University of Berlin (2013)
	Statute collection data thesis (2010)

Table 1. Legal documents selected for the analysis.

All the German legal documents were in German, which were translated to English using automated software from Word Microsoft office, and to analyze if the term was comprehensible, we asked native speakers to help translate them. In the Hungarian case, all documents were found in English.

For this study, policy document analysis was used to compare the present quality policies in Germany and Hungary HE and look for parallels and variations between the two nations. The chosen institutions were divided by the Federal level, state/national level, and institutional level. Regarding the institutional level, the policies enacted were also added in the pandemic situation because they guide the institutional activities during the critical period.

As for the HUB, it was only found a website called "Pandemic operation" that provides updates on the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on academic teaching and research as well as professional career development. For students, teachers, and employees, there is a FAQ, a regulation for working from home, and current tasks and responsibilities for both teachers and students on this website.

Semi-structured interview

In the framework of my Ph.D. research goals, the semi-structured interview approach was chosen because it allows a discussion about quality, it encourages personal thoughts and feelings from students, teachers, top and middle management staff, and researchers of the institutions selected. This was considered a suitable technique because it will allow a direct communication experience, where the "I- the subject," in this case, the interviewee, can speak, expressing opinions and values that are "Theirs." The following definition is that those authors, Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Accardon, and Susan Emanuel (1999), consider the relationship established between interviewer



and interviewee should be comprehensively based on trust relatedness between two persons. Nunes (2004) complements this idea by stating that when in contact with the participants, there are two essential questions: social proximity and familiarity, which favors "*nonviolent communication*" (p. 195). This means that during the contact with the participants, the necessary conditions should be created for the interview development, such as the environment, general information on the subject to be addressed, issues elaborated in advance and related to the objectives of the research, and finally, the relationship of empathy and verbal and non-verbal reinforcement involving the interviewer and interviewee (Brown, 1990).

In this view, the interview aims to promote knowledge-producing practices about the participant's opinions and experiences on a given topic and/or context and to infer the meaning of these experiences, enabling a scientific understanding of a social phenomenon in the midst of interactions between people and situations governed by a set of social interactions (Brinkmann, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

For this investigation, it is considered using semi-structured interviews as a technique that allows an approximation of the context and the people. Using this technique will make it possible to get to the "statements" of the interviewees and to understand the individual importance that each participant attributed to the quality of the HE, specifically in ELTE and HUB. That is to say; the interviews facilitated the auscultation, inquiry, and realization of inferences about the senses and experiences of the students we interviewed.

The interview planning is considered one of the relevant points to reach the objectives outlined—initially, the construction of an interview script (Appendix 1) contains important questions to be answered. The interview guide assisted as a guideline for the researcher to insert a series of topics and, mainly, reorient the questions to the topic under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994). As these authors, Robert Bogdan and Sari Biklen (1994) argue: the scripts are mainly used to collect data in several places that can be compared. If similar data is collected at each site or each statement can be made regarding the distribution of the facts gathered. Although, in some studies, this is essential, concerns about program agreement, rather than understanding the data, can counteract the potential of the qualitative approach.

As Ferreira (2014) points out, the interviews "*correspond to intersubjective constructions, that is, descriptions and discursive positions that are constructed from a situation of interaction structured from pairs of question-answers, a model where the narration of the interviewee is not*



automatic, and the interviewer's intervention is not neutral" (p. 176). It is with this attitude of dialogue between interviewee and interviewer that we position ourselves in close proximity to Castro, Ferreira and Gonzalez (2013) when they consider that: the interview is an intentional conversation and is used when there are few situations to be observed or quantified, and even when you want to deepen an issue. In the interview, one should let the person speak freely, unlike the open-ended questionnaire, which avoid shifting the focus, which is more objective compare to the interview. When the interview is intentional, the participants were comfortable talking about their personal and institutional experiences.

A critical aspect of doing a semi-structured interview is to recognize the challenges that are associated with this tool to gather data. According to the author Eike Adams (2010), the challenges are: staying focused during the interview, managing silence, being non-judgmental, and, most importantly, comprehending their ethical responsibility toward the interviewee (Adams, 2010). More aspects can be added, such as including control of the interview (*i.e.* who sets the direction or tone) and establishing an honest relationship with the participants.

Content analysis

The data collected were analyzed through content analysis. The Nvivo 12 software was used for data processing, facilitating the structuring and compiling of data through the maximum retention of information handled in research (Bardin, 2011; Krippendorff, 2018). The content analysis consists of a technique that allows understanding, removing, and validating inferences from texts and contexts in the analysis.

Content analysis was used as a method of information processing. In light of the study's goals, this technique was deemed appropriate for describing and organizing the data collected, whether related to the documents selected on national and institutional policies or interviews with stakeholders.

It is an analytic technique that can be used to understand, retrace, and validate inferences drawn from texts and contexts in an analytic environment (Krippendorff, 2018).

Furthermore, according to Castro *et al.* (2013), content analysis is seen as a research technique that aims to go beyond immediate and spontaneous comprehension, or in other words, to observe the meanings of a text with greater acuity, and this necessitates the development of



connections between analytic premises and textual elements, as such, the focus of this work is on interpretation. As a result, this can lead to an in-depth interpretation of the text and the creation of inferences about the world of research. An interpretive process seeks to describe the discourses and assign feelings and meanings favorable to the inferences drawn.

The content analysis "(...) *is a way to enrich spontaneous reading, making it more productive, relevant, and useful*" (Lopes, 1993), and "*from it are derived understandings, meanings, and inferences about the communication's production conditions*" (Lopes, 1993, p. 257). This analysis created categories that allowed to uncover what is not explicitly expressed in the discourses.

Content analysis is part of a categorization process that is either *a priori* or emergent from the analysis itself that follows the deductive approach method (Bardin, 2011). Precisely, for this investigation, a procedure of topical categorization was followed, which was taken as analytic dimensions.

As a result, the documents were analyzed in six main dimensions.

Dimension	Categories	Indicators
Dimension 1	Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General concept - quality assurance, excellence, and professional development
Dimension 2	Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public and private sector• Stakeholders• Higher Education Internationalization (mobility programs)• Data protection
Dimension 3	Institutional autonomy: Homogenization x differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic freedom• Institutions and programs• Role of the State and institutions• Evaluation and institution`s autonomy
Dimension 4	Internal and external evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instruments• Improvement in the outcomes• Rankings
Dimension 5	Learning, teaching, and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student-centered learning• Teaching methods• Scholarship/ Social support• Feedback• Interdisciplinarity
Dimension 6	Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well-being• Changes/ challenges• Training

Table 2. Dimensions of analysis.



Since the study was conducted in two European nations, Hungary and Germany, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were deemed the best method for capturing the complexity of the setting and research components.

In this research, Nvivo 12 was used for our content analysis because it is an application that assists researchers in performing qualitative analysis by making data organization and compilation easier by retaining as much information as possible about the research that was conducted.

The following table is an example of the coding used in the first research stage at the macro level.

Legal Documents	Year	Dimension Quality
Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education	2011	<i>(...) in cases involving the launch of a bachelor, master, or tertiary vocational programme (...) the higher education institution may propose an expert other than the one specified in paragraph (4), provided that it is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. In such case, the educational authority shall invite the organisation (Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education, Article 67, and Section 4b).</i>
Law on Universities in Baden-Württemberg (state University Law - LHG)	2005	<i>(...) quality assurance concept includes an interim evaluation or other suitable measures to provide feedback on previous performance during the qualification period and status advice before starting the evaluation (Law on Universities in Baden-Württemberg (State University Law - LHG) of 1 January 2005, Section 51 b).</i>
Bavarian University Act (BayHSchG)	2006	<i>In the field of study and teaching, especially bachelor and master's programs, one quality assurance measure must be accredited following the Study accreditation State Contract. 2Legal Regulations under Articles 4 (1) to 5 and Article 16 (2) of the Study Accreditation State Treaty is issued by the State Ministry (Bavarian University Act (BayHSchG) 2006, Section IV, Article 57).</i>
Law on Universities in the state of Berlin (Berlin University Law - BerlHG)	2011	<i>Quality assurance and accreditation- Through appropriate measures, universities ensure that their work, particularly in research and teaching and in the conduct of examinations, complies with recognized quality standards. Essential stand-up of the university's internal quality assurance system is the regular implementation of evaluations, especially in the field of teaching. The students and the graduates are to be involved in the evaluation of the teaching. The member's Universities are obliged to participate in evaluation procedures, in particular by providing the necessary information (Law on Universities in the state of Berlin, 2011, Section 1, Article 8A).</i>

Table 3 Example of document analysis: Dimension quality – Macro level. Source: Author analysis through Nvivo12



The table above provides a graphic representation of the quality/ quality assurance analysis enacted by each country's legal framework. Further research into the relevance of this topic based on higher education policy documents is now possible, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. This was taken into account throughout the subsequent stages of the content analysis. A meso-level example of dimension quality (interviews) can be seen in (Appendix 3).

Target groups and sample

This Ph.D. research concentrates on the following target groups:

- Quality experience of students, teachers, staff in ELTE and HUB, and external policymakers within the Hungarian and German context.

The perspective of the participants will be added to the data collected at the meso level (institutions) and the macro-level (supranational and national policies), seeking to combine all the data to identify the consequences of these processes on individuals and systems.

The technique selected to find the participants is snowball or chain sampling, as this approach is useful in locating information.

“The process begins by asking well-situated people, “Who knows a lot about _____? Whom should I talk to?” By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 451). This technique helps us to comprehend the participant's perspectives about the topic, and the semi-structured interview is based on gathering suggestions from those who have parallel or different points of view.

Before beginning the interview, most consent forms had been signed. Verbal consent from the researcher was necessary where this was not practicable, followed by the appropriate consent form. Only in the absence of face-to-face meetings was this a viable option. Virtual interviews (Microsoft Teams and Zoom) were organized similarly to personal interviews.

All respondents were first contacted via e-mail, which included thorough information on the study's objective, scope, overview, and the researcher's background and ethical information



such as confidentiality and procedures. The interviews were scheduled at times and locations convenient for the interviewees, and they were conducted both in-person and online.

Semi-structured interviews lasted, on average, 60 minutes; within three weeks of the interviews, audio recordings were made, and transcriptions were completed. Some participants were asked to review their transcription and add or modify what they found important or not for this study. Most of the interviews were conducted in English; only four interviews were in Portuguese. All 43 interviews were voice recorded, and the audio file was erased after transcription.

As a result, all interviews for this study were conducted anonymously. Following that, each interview will be recognized by the countries HU- Hungary or GE Germany, the interviewee's position – Student, Teacher, Staff, and External Policymaker; and the interviewee's code number (e.g., HU Student 1, GE Student 1, HU Teacher 1, GE Teacher 1, HU External Policymaker 1, GE External Policymaker 1,... and so forth).

Overall, the data collection took place over a long period of time, from September 2020 to November 2021, and 43 participants in the process: 22 were female, and 21 were male. The breakdown of the participants is shown in Table 3. The difficulty in finding and interviewing participants, especially throughout a pandemic, explains in large part the discrepancy in the number of Hungarian and German interviewees (teachers and students).

Participants type	Number of interviews	Hungary	Germany
Teachers	16	12	4
Students	15	10	5
Staffs	7	4	3
External policymakers	5	3	2
Total	43	29	14

Table 4 Participants in this research. Source: Author

The decision was made based on the general principle that a sample of roughly 30 participants is a sufficient medium-sized subject pool that can provide helpful information “This medium size subject pool offers the advantage of penetrating beyond a very small number of people without imposing the hardship of endless data gathering, especially when researchers are faced with time constraints” (Baker & Edwards, 2012).



CONCLUSIONS

This research looked at the differences and similarities in views of the concept of quality mentioned in the guiding education policy and HE discourses, emphasizing the two universities' institutional strategies to leverage the qualification and improvement of training, as well the challenges of autonomy and globalization faced ideals of democratization.

The search for better education, quality, and management is part of the same process that involves places, meetings, debate, reflection, and planning collective actions to reach high levels of successful training in HE (McBurnie, 2001).

However, globalization is the engine that drives reforms in HE systems related to privatization, efficiency, accountability, accreditation, and internationalization. The implemented culture of quality is associated with autonomy, democratization, social support, assessment, teaching and practice, research, infrastructures, and, most importantly, the role of the stakeholders in this interplay. As a result of globalization, the term 'quality' encompasses many concepts, from academic excellence to national development to international acknowledgment. It is time for us to embrace a more flexible view of quality, qualifications, quality assurance, and collaborative recognition (d'Egmont, 2006; Elassy, 2015; King et al., 2011; Serrano-Velarde, 2008).

This study presented trends in implementing quality assurance procedures in HE in both institutions. Regardless of the substantial efforts taken to launch an EHEA development of what is often thought to be a part of the HE market, the recognition of the external evaluation through the national agencies, the supremacy of the national framework, and discourses of orientation within the data stated above are prominent.

This study found parallels in German and Hungarian quality assurance, presumptuous that both nations implemented the BP governance under the same supranational expectations to respond to the compatible recognition and international collaboration of EHEA.

Quality assurance from an external perspective in Germany involves a number of accrediting agencies, some of which are run by foreigners. Allow the institutions to choose which agency will execute the accrediting and obtain feedback for performance improvement in this situation. However, in Hungary, external evaluation is managed by a single agency that is also in charge of accrediting programs at the national level.



Direct concern about the positive and negative impacts of HE reforms on knowledge generation, whether oriented by a centralized or decentralized strategy, is expressed through these two European situations (Gibbons et al., 1994). The analysis of the legal policy documentation helped validate the relevance and complexity of developing standards for the required quality and perspectives on power, governance, sustainability, and responsibility.

A comparison of the policy documents leads to the conclusion that quality assurance systems, assessments mechanisms, and strategies depend on the ability of the national policies to advocate HEIs to engage in a culture of excellence, and good practices, drive innovation and enhance outputs, and to freely manage the transformation process in their operations and activities in an autonomous manner.

The study found variations between the two institutions in the extent of autonomy they allocate to HEIs in managing quality assurance prerequisites. Evaluating HE texts demonstrated the implications of varying norms of institutional autonomy in applying quality assurance requirements.

The scope for action of institutions in regulating quality assurance through data collection of these legal documents demonstrates that the two institutions have opposing approaches to HE governance, consequently affecting the decision-making in the operations of the institutions. The reforms are mediated by different national realities where changing quality assurance parameters affects the *status quo* of university governance policies. This study mainly indicates that in the Hungarian context, the changing role of universities illustrated limited institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

This approach was highlighted in the discussion phase, which took place at HUB, where they were a Quality teaching excellence agreement to enhance the teaching practices and invest more in this area. At ELTE, there existed an organization called TPF that is responsible for fostering internationalization through the provision of scholarships, workshops, and other activities in collaboration HEIs both locally and remotely.

The comparison helped us question the naturalness of accountability in today's educational context. The adoption of accountability at both the national and local levels affected students' and teachers' autonomy and agency. Cultural and infrastructural differences affect the teaching profession in different ways. Therefore, comparison studies may help reveal various modes of policy reception and different responses or alternatives to the same phenomenon. As a result,



looking at these two institutions in Hungary and Germany could provide insight into the global influence on national practices.

Over some time, Hungary's economy has grown considerably. They have experienced immense growth and development, which has exacerbated the need to advance in their educational sector. This is important to equip their students in higher learning education with essential skills that will make them fit perfectly in the job market. As a result of the documents, a more dependable system was created, whereby graduates are guaranteed good positions upon graduation through programs (Erasmus, Stipendium), sports activities, and inclusion practices (SHÜTI).

The national government's governance is centrally regulated and monitored in the Hungarian HE system. This direct state control reflects a lack of organizational autonomy of higher education institutions to organize academic programs and their resources under the restriction of the freedom of teachers, students, and researchers in their activities.

The Hungarian HE framework is *sui generis* since the centralized management narrows the quality assurance framework that is subordinated to a strong national administration that affects the responsibility of the university administrators (e.g., people such as the university's rector or chancellor). The Hungarian case is different from to the German one.

The privatization of more of the former state institutions impacted HE because of the changes in funding and governance; institutions no longer have as much autonomy as they formerly did. At the same time, the shortage of resources in Hungarian HE is hampering performance; because of the existing model, universities will have less autonomy, which will be mostly "corporate autonomy," which is dependent on the diktats of management, i.e., the board of trustees, and the possibility of political involvement will increase, resulting in lower academic quality.

Hungarian HE and scientific research have become increasingly concentrated in recent years, at least as seen by academic groups. After the 2010 election, the government's need for direct control and readiness to take a dominant role became even more apparent. Some of the procedures had already begun in the early 2000s, however, when a restructure was offered, it was usually accompanied by a promise of increased financial support, which made it seem like a restructure was inevitable. Academic communities as a whole have lost much of their ability to make decisions. In many cases, financial and strategic decisions have been taken over by new entities (board of trustees, governing boards) or players who have a substantial or exclusive effect



on the composition and decisions of these bodies or actors. When it comes to academia, the ability of academic communities to make their own decisions and govern themselves is being eroded by an increasing number of external actors (chancellors, financial inspectors, and managers appointed by the board of trustees, for instance) who have limited the decisions that can be made in the field of academics. In the last year, the privatization of some institutions reflected an increased government control.

In contrast, the German HE system is decentralized, which allows the institution's constitutive states to determine how to implement quality assurance policies individually. The German law texts analyzed in this study emphasize the need to ensure the quality of learning, teaching, research, academic freedom, gender equality, and institutional autonomy (Pimenta et al., 2021). However, the lack of policy regimes in the national guidelines concerning quality assurance could reflect the difficulties in establishing a standardization quality evaluation that allows a comparison of German and other HEIs nationwide (Federkeil, 2003). The data collected in this study discovered the close relationship between governance and quality assurance in policies concerning the accountability of stakeholders, market transparency, and academic freedom (Pimenta et al., 2021). Even if professors have complete control over academic freedom, they would need to reorient the policies and practices to engage students in decision-making.

In the data collected, just a few teaching practices are in line with the Humboldt principle, largely because the BP does not consider this old model. The legal documents portray employability-related skills and competencies and various forms of entrepreneurship as areas where universities can directly impact the national economy. The European strategy recommends moving away from content-based instruction and learning outcomes-based instruction when the students' interests and labor market requirements are met. BP dismantles academic autonomy as a European creation in the goal, content, pedagogy, and institutional autonomy of HE. While some scholars believe there are no conceivable ties between Humboldt and Bologna, others believe otherwise (Dysthe & Webler, 2010; Moutsios, 2013).

All these reforms share the ability to achieve almost the same range of things in common. Countries, over time, have tried to come up with several reforms that they implemented in the tertiary institutions to advance their education department. Although there has been the availability of reforms, financial restraint has had a significant impact on this. Some institutions have better financial capabilities as compared to other institutions.



In terms of the current state of the financial situation, the majority of the financial support for ELTE came from the government as well as several programs funded by the EU. At HUB, the majority of the budget comes from the state of Berlin, while the remaining portion comes from third-party organizations.

As a result of our investigation, we observed that the HUB approach gives the impression that, to a certain extent, national imperatives have been overtaken by EU imperatives, which is, in fact, the case. Given their history and geographical location, it is crucial to acknowledge that the nation and the institution consider membership in the EU and its initiatives to be more of a sense than an obligation, given their respective circumstances. However, over-reliance on the EU and the implementation of Europeanization standards are both feasible results. Following the available data, ELTE has attempted to meet national expectations while also complying with EU orientation at the same time. According to data collected, recent developments at the national level in terms of governance, on the other hand, reflect the difficulties that will be encountered in the following years.

Both universities should consider how a service/client-focused perspective may be broadened, with the resulting resistance against more traditional bureaucratic cultures in both the business and engineering departments and other areas. It is feasible that this strategy will be accompanied by a type of service-level agreement, clear and visible incentive mechanisms to encourage departments to operate in an interdisciplinary manner, and the development of linkages between departments and faculties to facilitate integrated work. To ensure that central units and faculties continue to function as proactive units and faculties, they must do so in an entrepreneurial rather than a bureaucratic manner. In the context of education, this may mean going beyond the facilitation to include the promotional aspects and achieve the democratization of the HE.

At HUB, interdisciplinary is already consolidated, and many examples of these practices were given in the interviews. However, at ELTE, the interdisciplinary needs to be further implemented in order to promote innovation and knowledge sharing among peers and stakeholders.

The findings of this study revealed that the subjects of this investigation believe that their education will not be completed upon receiving a diploma and that the vast majority of the students interviewed intend to continue their education through the completion of a master's degree, with the hope of working in their fields of expertise in the future, and even moving abroad to have a



better life. When asked about the influence of this training on their future professional lives, the vast majority of students stated that the training would have a positive impact since it would provide them with the necessary foundations, whether on a personal or professional level.

Despite this trend in the data, the research revealed the need for institutional reflection, specifically in the areas of pedagogy, didactics, and curriculum (teaching practices and assessment methods), all of which were identified by the participants as being essential for academic success, satisfaction with the course, and professional activity. Quality has always had a social dimension, and we will continue to believe so. The study demonstrates that social quality is critical in promoting conditions for an education founded on democratic and equitable principles, which supports the development of a just and equitable society (Dias Sobrinho, 2013).

In more concrete terms, the students' arguments are consistent with some of the directives outlined in the normative documents, particularly those about the development of projects and programs that assist students in gaining admission to and remaining in HE. By constituting a mechanism capable of generating positive effects in people's lives and contributing to their recognition, these strategies also embody the fundamental principles of an equitable political system.

According to the findings, students, professors, and employers all have different perspectives on what constitutes high-quality HE. Teacher feedback, grants, and research projects were highlighted as necessary by qualitative data; students' methodologies, teacher practices, and international experiences were cited as quality by students; staff was asked about their daily activities, and external policy makers' projects and contributions to the quality of HE were discussed.

However, from the perspective of some Hungarian students, it is essential to set the requirement and be clear and transparent in the scholarship evaluation process, as some semesters are eligible for scholarships while others are not.

In both countries, the bureaucracy has been identified as a significant obstacle to achieving quality in activities such as scholarship applications, course registration, teacher evaluations, traditional practices implemented in classrooms, and contract signing in universities.

The opportunity presented in terms of quality improvement consists of the ability to digitize their data and move away from outdated methods and processes.



In the context of Germany, one crucial subject that emerged was the precarity of academic work, which means that only a small number of people will have the option to pursue a career in academia. The use of third-party funds is attributed to the new managerialism movement. Also implied is that academic institutions should adhere to the same standards as the rest of the economy. Modern managerialism has established ways for allocating resources on a national and international scale while also boosting efficiency due to this development.

The principle of putting people at the center of policymaking reveals the intention of promoting projects and programs from the perspective of continuous quality improvement while also serving as social action and practice contextualized to the people who participate in them. However, the data showed that only a small number of participants from both institutions were ever invited to quality activities or meetings to provide their feedback for the process of continuous improvement, as confirmed by Serrano (2008).

There are numerous frameworks under which institutional strategies might be analyzed. A narrow interpretation would focus just on the institution's purpose, aim, principles, and commitments. This may include student exchange, recruitment, international partnerships, cross-border distribution, sabbaticals, and other similar initiatives that may fall under this category.

Policies at the institutional level that take a comprehensive approach to deal with the effects of globalization would include declarations, rules, and planning accords. A comprehensive and long-term strategy for internationalization necessitates the adoption of a wide range of policy and procedure statements covering areas such as quality assurance, planning, funds, staffing, training programmes, admissions, research, teaching, educational support, agreement and project work, and so on.

Internationalization has played an important role in the quality implementation through programs such as Erasmus, ESN, and Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship that promotes an IA and IaH in both institutions focusing on teachers and student mobility (Knight, 2008; Leask, 2009).

Concerning the Pandemic situation, universities have played an essential part in this by giving students a chance to succeed, collaborate and demonstrate their strengths through extracurricular activities and group projects and by providing the infrastructure to cope with Emergency Remote Teaching. Both universities took a distinct approach to deal with the pandemic, with ELTE establishing an operational organization to oversee the crisis regionally.



HUB used a local approach through the department and institutions to identify needs and give needed support.

While the findings indicate that there were issues with quality during the remote teaching, they also suggest that the quality assurance system should have been in operation and supporting and evaluating the processes from the beginning of the pandemic in order to provide the necessary infrastructure to the teachers and students in coping this crisis.

Every aspect of society has been affected by digitalization, including HEIs. Both ELTE and HUB had trouble switching between systems and providing support for staff and students in difficult circumstances.

The data revealed the challenges faced by the teachers in the transition to remote emergent education, forcing them to adopt more interactive activities supported by the use of the active methodology.

At ELTE, the interviews mentioned mentoring to support the teachers and have a smooth transition to the online platform. As a result, it was discovered that despite the teachers' lack of preparation for remote emergency instruction, they were capable of managing an online learning project.

In contrast, at HUB, the interviewees mentioned general support from the university but a lack of support in the special situation of the pandemic.

Participants at ELTE brought up the poor internet connections in university buildings, which should now be considered a crucial component of the infrastructure provided. In order to be able to accept and send more students to mobility programs, digitization was noted at HUB as a key tool for internationalization and the reduction of bureaucracy.

This study serves as a foundation for future research that will seek to further our understanding of students' perceptions of the various universities that make up the Hungarian and German academic communities on the quality of their education. It is necessary to maintain a training program founded on the principles of quality and social justice, and democratic values throughout the duration of the program. To provide this type of training is to recognize that policies must be aligned with real-world contexts and must serve as an impetus for formative processes that allow for participation and critical thinking, or, in the words of Paulo Freire (1997), that can help to create a problematizing educational environment.



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