

A model of quality education in economics and business administration

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Abstract

La literatura reconoce la importancia de la educación en Economía y Dirección de Empresas para la competitividad de las naciones, sin embargo el estudio de lo que constituye una formación de calidad en esta disciplina todavía es muy escaso. El objetivo de este artículo es contribuir en este campo presentando un modelo conceptual para evaluar y controlar la calidad de la enseñanza universitaria. El objetivo es que la información provista sea significativa para los profesores y gestores de las universidades que compiten en una economía internacional basada en el conocimiento, y en el caso concreto de Europa y con más precisión en España, en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior.

Key words: Educación; calidad; gestión de la educación; capacidades; educación superior.

JEL Codes: I2, A22, M20, M10.

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Introduction

Offering and receiving quality in the education is a key issue for all countries, since evidence shows that education allows economic development, and leads to democracy and social stability [World Bank, 2000]. This significance becomes obvious in the new knowledge-based economy, where knowledge is a decisive factor in the competitive advantage of every country [Danvila-del Valle and Sastre-Castillo, 2007; Porter, 1990]. Educational quality is a very important matter [De la Fuente, 2003] in many countries, not only in the United States, where education is a national priority [Alavi, Yoo and Vogel, 1997], but also in Europe [Palomino, 2008]. In fact, the European Commission admits that Europe requires excellence in its universities to optimise the underlying processes of the knowledge-based society, and to reach the objective of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world [Potocnik, 2008].

The education in Economics and Business Administration (EBA) is extraordinarily relevant in this economy as it trains students to manage the complex businesses of the future [López Cabarcos, Vázquez Rodríguez and Muñoz Ferreiro, 2006], and allows companies to compete in the global markets [Lazy and Salazar, 2005]. The professionals of this area must manage companies successfully, and get involved in important decisions that have an effect on their future [Senlle and Blanco, 1988]. In this context, the education in EBA becomes the key to a country's competitiveness [Danvila-del Valle and Sastre-Castillo, 2007], since managers in different EBA areas (human resources, marketing) are involved in the main decisions affecting the companies and the countries' economies [Pérez Fernández, 1994; Mhlemeyer and Clarke, 1997]. Consequently, there is an urgent need to analyse the education system that trains students for their future responsibilities [Fortier, Albrecht, Grady, Burbach and Westrich, 1998].

The existing literature shows the concern expressed by several authors about the current state of the education in EBA, where the scarce number of applied researches results in students lacking the skills to work efficiently in the business world [Delgado-Piña, Romero-Martínez and Gómez-Martínez, 2009; Ghoshal, 2005; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Donaldson, 2002; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002]. Although it is true that there

are publications about educational quality [Capelleras and Veciana, 2004], these are descriptive/normative, and they do not put forward any model that could be empirically tested, or do not focus on EBA [among others, see Felder and Brent, 1999]. This leads us to the conclusion that, although several issues relating to EBA have been studied, there is a lack of studies regarding the quality of the education in this discipline. This is even more evident in the case of the Spanish universities [as an exception, see Cabelleras, 2001]. Addressing this issue has become a critical question, if we bear in mind that experts of the European Commission point out that Spain must develop intellectual infrastructures associated with the skills and capabilities in EBA to develop an economic model based on a greater value added, and to improve the low entrepreneurial spirit of its university students [El Mundo, 2006].

The literature suggests a number of possible reasons behind this empirical and theoretical gap. The main argument has to do with the fact that it is not easy to assess the quality of higher education in EBA because of the difficulty in determining its ideal characteristics. Furthermore, different approaches to quality reflect different notions about higher education [Barnett, 1992]. Similarly, since quality is a multidimensional concept that depends on the context where it is observed [Alonso and Blanco, 1990; Díaz-Muñoz, 2005], it is not possible to reach a single set of standardised quality variables that could be applied to all countries, and used to assess educational institutions [UNESCO, 1998]. Another argument is that most of the information about quality management is generated in the United States [Svensson, 2009], and it is not that clear whether it can be useful and generalised to other countries [García-Mestanza and Díaz-Muñoz, 2008].

To fill the above-mentioned gaps, our paper puts forward a theoretical model with the aim of answering the following questions: *What are the theoretical relationships between a quality education and the competitive performance of the universities? Why are there universities involved in educational quality initiatives, and what are the roles played in this process by teaching staff, students, and university managers? Will all this later have an influence on the good working practices of the professionals responsible for future companies?*

To answer these questions, this paper starts by reviewing the literature and introducing the conceptual framework that would later allow to design a holistic and exploratory model of quality education in EBA. The literature section analyses quality in higher education, the indicators that measure it, and the suitability of the models proposed to measure it. Then we put forward the model's variables and their measurements. Finally, we present our conclusions and the references.

1. Literature review and conceptual framework

Despite the extensive literature about the experiences in several countries regarding academic quality, there is no agreement about: (i) the *definitions* of educational quality; (ii) the essential *indicators* in the assessment of quality; (iii) and the suitability of the *models* put forward to measure quality in higher education [Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003].

1.1. Quality in higher education

The lack of agreement about the concept of quality in higher education explains the existence of many definitions, which reflect the complexity and multifaceted nature of this concept [UNICEF, 2000; UNESCO, 2002]. Terms such as efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and quality have been over-used as synonyms [Adams, 1993]. Thus, quality is a multidimensional and subjective concept [PHARE, 1998]. Defining and assuring what "quality" is turns out to be an almost impossible task [Fife and Janosik, 1999], although the real question is the lack of agreement about the context to define it, and not if quality in higher education can or cannot be defined. To make the matter even more complex, national and local contexts contribute to different definitions of quality in each country [Adams, 1993]. Even more so, to reach an agreement about quality, the relevant stakeholders must be taken into consideration, although they often maintain differing points of view and meanings regarding educational quality [Benoiel, O'Gara and Miske, 1999; Motala, 2000].

1.2. Quality of the indicators measuring higher education

Choosing this type of indicators is problematic, and despite the fact that it has become one of the main concerns of higher education institutions and governments [Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002], the research in this area is still insufficient [see Sancho and Esteban, 2007]. According to Ramina [2003], the definition of “quality” should be followed by the indicators that can adequately measure it, and by a system to monitor it, but two problems represent an obstacle to that. First, quality education is influenced by different measures and by factors that cannot be measured. Consequently, there is in this area a lack of measurement tools capable of meeting the conditions of both validity and reliability of the data [Ramina, 2003]. Second, there is general disagreement about the selection of objective indicators. Quantitative results are difficult to obtain, particularly at a system level, due to the diversity of institutional structures. Our objective becomes even more complicated when it comes to quantifying the qualitative aspects at the base of the tasks of higher education teaching, learning, and researching [Kaiser and Yonezawa, 2003].

1.3. Suitability of the models proposed to measure quality in higher education

Our literature review shows that there is certain variety in the models assessing educational quality. One of them is based on the notion that quality is an ideal standard. As regards higher education, this has been called “Harvard Model”. Under this concept, the quality of a university is measured against the most prestigious institution. The most interesting element about this approach regarding the definition of quality is the assumption that all the “customers” want the same thing [Fife and Janosik, 1999]. Other models have developed from the Total Quality Management (TQM) system [see Vazzana, Elfrink and Bachmann, 2000; Fernández Fernández, 2003], although this model has also been criticised. In fact, the authors who have analysed the use of TQM [i.e. Salter and Tapper, 2000] tend to conclude that such an assessment of quality does not deal with key education concepts, but is inclined to an exercise in control. These criticisms are supported by empirical evidence, especially that found by Birnbaum and

Deshotels [1999] in their study of 469 higher education institutions. They authors conclude that the use of TQM in the academic environment is both a myth and an illusion.

Other models focus on prioritising several aspects of the educational process. From a pedagogical perspective, it is important to measure the efficiency in the completion of the curriculum. From a cultural perspective, the curriculum content needs to be based on the conditions, possibilities and aspirations of the different groups to which such content is addressed. From a social perspective, educational quality means that the education contributes to the creation of equal opportunities. Finally, in economic terms, quality refers to the efficient use of resources.

Given this situation, the next section describes the conceptual framework that we have used to analyse the variables associated with the quality of higher education in EBA. The holistic model of quality education that we put forward will justify our choice of definitions of educational quality, the indicators, and the model to assess it.

2. A proposal for a holistic model of quality education in Economics and Business Administration (EBA)

Our research uses the concept of quality as “transformation” since it conceives education as an incoming process that transforms the student [Harvey and Green, 1993], and assumes an efficient use of the resources. “Efficiency” is an understandable concept in today’s world, where educational institutions are forced to prove the impact of organisational efficiency on the students’ education [Welsh and Metcalf, 2003]. This approach also focuses strongly on the students. As the quality of higher education increases, so does the authority of the students with specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes to live and work in the knowledge society [Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002]. The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) [1995], which defines the product in terms of value added to the knowledge, skills, and personal development of the student, also supports this perspective. Likewise, this notion of quality is particularly appropriate when the students’ profile experiences significant changes [Harvey and Knight, 1996], such as those facing the students in a globalisation context.

The information we intend to use in this type of research is based mainly on the perceptions of lecturers about variables related to quality education. Although we agree that quantitative and qualitative data could be used as “indicators” in the assessment of quality [Jones, 2003], we believe that qualitative indicators can be more fitting for a number of reasons: qualitative information is vital for controlling the educational process, and the use of nominal and ordinal scales may be a way of capturing information beyond the reach of quantitative indicators [Kaiser and Yonezawa, 2003]. Furthermore, the literature about the implementation of educational quality emphasises the relevance of the role played by lecturers in processing the assessment results [Morse and Santiago, 2000], and the influence of their perceptions on the implementation of the process [Carron and Châu, 1996; Palomba y Banta, 1999]. The notion of the involvement of the teaching staff is the key to understanding universities as educational organisations.

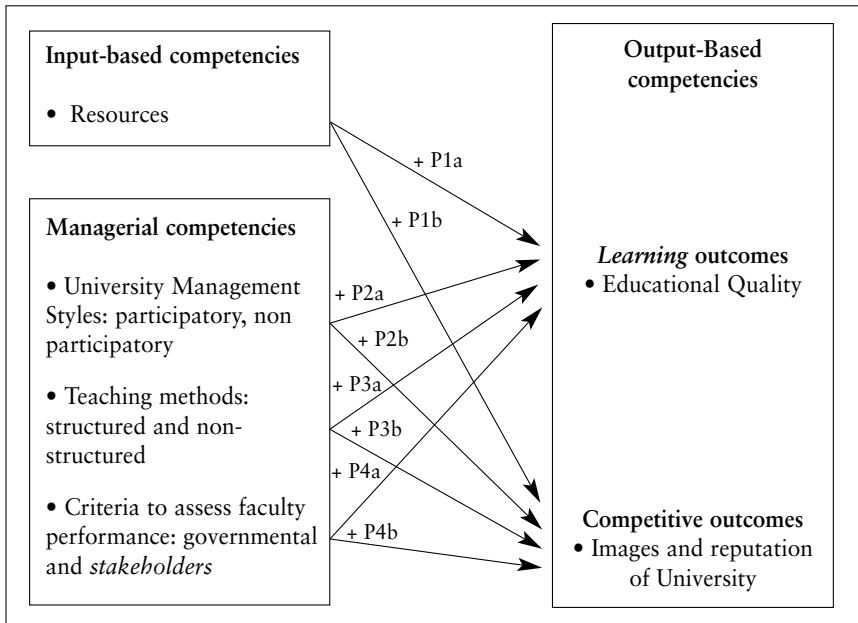
We have chosen UNESCO’s model of quality assessment as our base model because it is conceptually consistent with the definition of quality and the indicators that we have selected. UNESCO [2001] and the Regional Education Indicators Project (REIP) [2002] use the input-process-output framework to approach the issue of quality education. This perspective defines quality with respect to the human resources and materials invested, and also to what takes place in educational institutions and classrooms (learning and teaching process, curriculum, expectations of the students regarding their learning, etc.). The model also assumes that quality may be defined through the results of the students’ education, with the emerging attention of the assessment of quality in higher education [Pascarella, 2001].

For its part, the dependency theory explains why certain companies obtain a competitive advantage while others do not, despite being in the same sector [Nelson, 1991]. Although this theory has been developed to study the returns companies, its arguments offer an explanation of the competitiveness of universities and countries based on their efficient management of resources and capabilities [see APO, 2003]. In any case, it allows us to identify if the level of capabilities of the institutions has an effect on the level of learning abilities of the students acquired through the education system.

3. Variables and proposals for a holistic model of quality education in Economics and Business Administration (EBA)

“Competencies” are the abilities or potential sources of competitive advantage that ensure the best results for a task, skill, or capability. They are focused on the internal environment of a company, and the decisions and practices that take place within it, which change the way the company responds to outside pressures. According to the literature [Lado and Wilson, 1994; Tumer and Crawford, 1994], competencies are mainly classified under the following four categories: (1) organisational output-based competencies; (2) input-based competencies; (3) managerial competencies; and (4) organisational technical competencies (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Holistic model of quality education in Economics and Business Administration



Source: Authors’ elaboration.

3.1. Dependent variables

Output-based competencies guide a company towards tangible and intangible results that provide customers with enhanced value [Lado and Wilson, 1994]. These competencies include: the quality of the product or service, the ability to adapt products or services to the changing expectations of the customers, the image and reputation of the company, and other influences beneficial to the local environment of the company's activities [Clark and Wheelwright, 1992; Verdin and Williamson, 1994]. Thus, we choose the *quality of the education service* (learning outputs), and the *image and reputation of the company* (competitive outputs), as both produce beneficial influences on the local environment.

3.1.1. Learning outputs in EBA education. Lengnick-Hall and Sanders [1997] define excellence in education management as achieving an increase of knowledge and skills, the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills, and the positive response of the students. Although these criteria are useful for assessing the degree of excellence of an institution, they should take into consideration how adequately a university replies to the criticisms as regards education management. The education in EBA has been criticised for not meeting the demands of the new business environments, not focusing on the real labour markets, and not developing ties with the company's community [Rowley and Rowley, 2000]. The literature shows that education management should not avoid the difficult issues regarding social responsibility and the need to train leaders [UNESCO, 1998].

Lecturers should bear in mind these criticisms with respect to education management, as well as the fact that their graduates require both a deep knowledge of their discipline, and a series of general skills that are key to working in a changing, competitive, and complex working environment [Hunt, Eagle and Kitchen, 2004]. McMullen [1998] suggests that graduates need a "problem solving" methodology, effective communication, and to use their judgement, and Walker, Hanson, Nelson and Fisher [1998] recommend the ability to integrate and use knowledge creatively and with synergies. Other recommended skills are leadership or people management, and power distribution [Adrian and Palmer, 1999; Floyd and Gor-

don, 1998]; teamwork or interpersonal skills to work efficiently with subordinates, colleagues and superiors [Floyd and Gordon, 1998; Wright, Bitner and Zeithaml, 1994]; and the relationships with business practices [Koch, 1997; Stern and Tseng, 2002]. Therefore, we will use these concepts to assess educational outputs in terms of their adaptation to the companies' needs, their contribution to solving the countries' problems, and the students' ability to solve real problems, work in a team, and develop innovative solutions and a leadership behaviour.

3.1.2. Competitive outputs in EBA education. Another perspective of excellence in education adds to the previous one the competitiveness that universities acquire when they develop a quality education. Experts agree that universities, private and public, depend on their own performance to secure the funding necessary to offer quality educational programmes and lines of research [Martínez, 2005]. Consequently, the search of prestige is a common element in the behaviour of academic institutions worldwide [Brewer, Gates and Goldman, 2002]. Thus, universities compete in the market of public opinion with their prestige and reputation, and lists and rankings are commonly made from the perspective of their prestige [Lombardi, Craig, Capaldi, Gater and Mendonça, 2001]. Since prestige is a way of acknowledging a brand name that stems from the institution's historical visibility, promotional campaigns that convey the institutional identity, and the halo effect of actual achievements, it becomes an antecedent of the market share [Bok, 2003]. It also involves the institution's differentiation from its competitors in the ways stakeholders consider important. To analyse the competitive outputs, we assess the position of universities in relation to students, donors, staff and competitors in the market.

3.2. Independent variables

3.2.1. Input-based competencies. These competencies include different resources, knowledge, and skills that allow a company's process of transformation to create and distribute products and services valuable to the consumers. Following the definitions by Grant [1991], and Amit and Schoemaker [1993], "resources" are inputs of the production process

(financial, physical, human, and technological). The influence of the availability of resources on learning achievement has been discussed in the literature about quality education in different educational levels [see Glewwe and Jacoby, 1994; Carron and Châu, 1996]. This trend can be seen in many universities (particularly in the United States) where a good incentive system attracts and keeps the best lecturers [Henry et al., 1997]. These institutions also understand that, to meet the challenges posed by changing business environments, they would need physical resources [Rowley, Lujan and Dolence, 1998]. Finally, institutions in other countries (Central and South America, and Europe) are starting to acknowledge that the level of competitiveness is linked to additional financial resources [EUA, 2003]. According the above-mentioned arguments, we propose the following:

P1.a The more resources available to universities, the higher level of learning outputs will be reached.

P1.b The more resources available to universities, the higher level of competitive outputs will be reached.

3.2.2. Managerial competencies. They are associated with the distinctive skill of the administrator or manager of creating a relationship between the company and its environment [Lado and Wilson, 1994]. They comprise the distinct abilities of the company's leaders to design the organisation, and manage the coordination between different functions [Boyatzis, 1999]. They also include the implementation of the management of organisational systems, such as the direction and the control to obtain organisational results [Tumer and Crawford, 1994]. Our study assesses the competencies with respect to (i) the management styles of the universities, (ii) the methods and education actions, and (iii) the criteria used to assess the performance of the lecturers.

(i) The preferred management style in the departments of EBA faculties. Pascarella and Terenzini [1991] point out that the organisation and the atmosphere in an academic department may be more important for the students' learning than the subject itself. Thus, the aim is to determine if

the environment where lecturers work allows them to prepare the students adequately for their future jobs. According to the literature, institutional autonomy, particularly in the key academic functions, is the main condition for research without obstacles and the spread of knowledge, for the optimum fulfilment of the university's social responsibility [Neave, 1998; UNESCO, 1998], for improving an atmosphere where lecturers can focus on the students' education and their achievements [Wyman, 2001], for becoming "learning" departments [Walvoord, Carey, Smith, Soled, Way, and Zorn, 2000], and for better adjusting to changing social conditions [Dill, 2003]. Furthermore, the quality guarantee in new organisations is based on the total autonomous participation in quality of all of the organisation's members, rather than on the external control of quality [Frackmann, 2000]. Since there are very few previous studies related to our research, we suggest two alternative propositions. Therefore:

P2.a The higher the level of participatory management style, the higher the level of (a) learning and (b) competitive outputs.

P2.b The higher the level of non-participatory management style, the higher the level of (a) learning and (b) competitive outputs.

(ii) *Educational methods and actions used.* The literature states that many of the problems in higher education are related to the use of educational methods based on conveying information in a static way, which emphasises the development of critical thinking as a tool for problem resolution [Dubois, 1995]. It is essential to analyse the way lecturers teach, and if their methods convey adequately the knowledge they wish to transmit [Frost and Fukami, 1997]. A highly criticised teaching method, although widely used, is the lecture based on structured learning. It has not changed since its beginnings, and sees the lecturer as the authority from which all knowledge stems [Rowley and Rowley, 2000]. Other critics point out that structured teaching methods stimulate the cognitive resources, but nowadays, this type of resources is not used in business practices [Cova, Kassis and Lanoux, 1994]. In this learning environment students are considered as passive recipients of the teaching [Lengnick-Hall, 1996]. Thus,

education management needs non-structured teaching methods that see students as co-producers of their training [Lengnick-Hall and Sanders, 1997] as their learning requires active participation [Alavi, Yoo and Vogel, 1995; Leidner and Jarvenpaà, 1995]. Furthermore, the use of cooperative learning is consistent with the changes experienced by companies, where teamwork and good interpersonal skills are required to process complex information [Baldwin, Bedel and Johnson, 1997]. UNESCO [1998] indicates that higher education must implement pedagogical methods based on participatory knowledge to train students in how to learn and start new businesses. Since there are very few previous studies related to our research, we suggest the following alternative propositions:

P3.a The higher the level of non-structured teaching methods, the higher the level of (a) learning and (b) competitive outputs.

P3.b The higher the level of structured teaching methods, the higher the level of (a) learning and (b) competitive outputs.

(iii) Assessment of the lecturers' performance. The increasing struggle for scarce resources, and the dwindling trust of the public in the practices of higher education have resulted in unprecedented demands on educational institutions to prove their efficacy and efficiency [Heck, Johnsrud and Rosser, 2000]. The literature suggests that academic quality is defined in terms of the quality of the teaching in a university [Cave, Hanney, Henkel and Kogan, 1997]. Then, the students' response to a subject is a way of finding out how well the teaching system is working. This approach is based on the belief that teaching is a service, and as with all services, the students' (consumers) participation is significant, both in the teaching process and the results [Lengnick-Hall and Sanders, 1997]. Academic quality is also associated with sharing information about best practices [Zhou, 2000], so the number of textbooks and support materials published by lecturers, as well as consulting contracts or other contracts that they secure for their institution, are also criteria taken into account to assess their performance. The latter criteria are usually supported by critics who maintain that the academic community and the publications are also criteria in the

assessment of the lecturers' performance, since not only do they complement the actual teaching, but they are also the sine qua non of achieving academic excellence [Braumoh, 2002]. Bearing in mind that education management must satisfy the governments' criteria and the external stakeholders, we put forward the following propositions:

P4.a The higher the level of teaching assessment methods based on governmental criteria, the higher the level of (a) learning and (b) competitive outputs.

P4.b The higher the level of teaching assessment methods based on stakeholders' criteria, the higher the level of (a) learning and (b) competitive outputs.

3.2.3. Organisational technical competencies. They are the capabilities that contribute to transform inputs in outputs [Lado, Boyd and Wright, 1992]. Organisational technical competencies are sources of competitive advantage because they are very difficult to reproduce, and remain embedded for a long time in the tacit and practical routines of a company [Kogut and Zander, 1996], related to organisational learning [Lado and Wilson, 1994]. Since these are the skills, knowledge and experience of the employees [Green, 1999], we will use in our research the *qualification of the lecturers*. This variable is analysed through (i) the experience of the lecturers, (ii) the academic level of the lecturers, and (iii) their international experience.

Qualifications of the lecturers. In education management it is essential to determine the educational and professional qualifications of the lecturers because this area has certain peculiarities. Contrary to what happens in other disciplines where the students can acquire competences by using laboratories or technical equipment, the education in EBA is dependent mainly upon the knowledge and skills of the lecturers. The qualifications of the teaching staff are crucial as they have a direct influence on the quality of education [Kennedy, 1998].

A number of studies suggest an association between the years of experience in teaching and the students' results [Greenwald, Hedges and Lain,

1996]. Researchers also see a positive relationship between learning outputs and the educational qualifications of the teachers [Strauss and Vogt, 2001]. These relationships have also been supported by studies on higher education. Here there is a positive association between the lecturers' education level and their qualifications [Glewwe and Jacoby, 1994; Pawlowski, 2004; Ramina, 2003]. Furthermore, the literature suggests that there is a relationship between the level of international experience of the lecturers and educational quality [Heyl and McCarthy, 2003; Ramina, 2003]. Therefore, we propose the following:

P5 The higher the level of qualification of the lecturers, the higher the level of (a) learning and (b) competitive outputs.

3.2. Control variables

Another key aspect is to examine if the public or private nature of an educational institution can affect the perception and the use of variables associated with educational quality. With respect to the influence of the public or private nature of an educational institution, the literature offers contrasting points of view. One perspective is that the distinction between public and private is less relevant than the rules of the game by which the critical actors in the system play [Wolff and de Moura Castro, 2001]. Those who support public education believe that, with the appropriate political framework, the sustainability of a high-quality public education and the promotion of the growth of private schools are compatible. Others suggest that private institutions lag behind the public ones because they lack a coherent system of accreditation that would lead them to keep high standards. As a result, private institutions tend to have a reputation of relaxed academic standards, with graduates that often have difficulties when it comes to competing in a labour market that questions the excellence of their training [Bernasconi, 2003].

The advocates of private education argue that these organisations are more efficient than public institutions because they have a greater administrative flexibility, and pay attention to the type and quality of education that the students and their parents demand [Lockheed and Jiménez, 1994]. In

Spain whether a university is public or not is one of the key differences that determines other variables related to quality. Private universities are younger and tend to be more specialised, are smaller and offer less degree programmes, and tend to have a certain ideological perspective. On the other hand, public universities are overcrowded, offer a larger number of degree programmes and have more centres, have more teaching staff and less administrative support staff, but higher academic levels [E-campus, 2006].

4. A proposal for measurement of the variables

4.1. Input-based competencies or the resources received by higher education

We propose eight items to measure the perception of resource availability in universities: (1) government funding for higher education; (2) support of the teaching staff salary; (3) support of the administrative staff salary; (4) library resources available to students; (5) bibliographic resources available to teaching staff; (6) technical resources; (7) political support; and (8) private funding for higher education.

4.2. Managerial competencies

To measure the “**management style**”, we suggest four items that describe the governance structure or preferred structure of the management style in universities’ departments. We have borrowed these items from Cameron and Quinn’s framework [1999] about the association between four organisational values and forms of organisation. The responses are assessed with a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The “**teaching methods**” can be measured with seven items deriving from the studies of Roach, Johnston and Hair [1993], and Clow and Wachter [1996] about methodology of teaching. The responses are assessed with a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (none), through 3 (some) to 5 (very much). The measurement of the “**assessment criteria**” is carried out with six items deriving from the basic governance mechanisms used by Braun and Merrien [1999], which allows us to assess the performance of the teaching staff (seniority, criteria related to their civil servant status, students’ assess-

ments, academic and scientific publications, consulting work). Their responses are assessed with a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (none), through 3 (some) to 5 (very much).

4.3. Organisational technical competencies

The “**qualifications of the teaching staff**” are assessed through three variables: “experience of the teaching staff”, “academic level of the faculty”, and “international experience of the teaching staff”; and three scales. First, lecturers are asked about their years of experience in teaching using a 3-point scale, where 1=1-4 years of experience, 2=5-10 years of experience, and 3=over 10 years of experience. The academic level of the faculty is assessed with the highest educational qualification achieved according to the following possible answers: (1) bachelor’s degree; (2) master’s degree; (3) doctorate. To measure international experience, we propose to record the level of instruction received abroad: (1) none or some course, (2) bachelor’s or master’s degree; (3) doctorate. The “**learning outputs in EBA**” are assessed with six items that measure the results of the educational process. The items show if the results are adapted to the companies’ needs, they are instruments that meet the countries’ needs, they are useful for the problem-solving skills of the students, they help students to work in teams, they are helpful in devising innovative solutions, and if they facilitate the students’ leadership skills. The responses are assessed with a 5-point scale, where 1=strongly disagree, and 5=strongly agree. The “**competitive outputs in EBA education**” are assessed in terms of the reputation of the educational process (market position as regards students, donors, market competitors, and staff). The responses are assessed with a 5-point scale, where 1=bad position; 3=unclear position, and 5=good position.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper is to put forward a conceptual model to assess and monitor educational quality. The empirical validation of the model could answer the following questions: *What are the theoretical relationships between a quality education and the competitive performance of the universities?; Why are there universities involved in educational quality initiatives,*

and what are the roles played in this process by teaching staff, students and university managers?; And will all this later have an influence on the good working practices of the professionals responsible for future companies?

The motivation behind this paper is the fact that guaranteeing academic quality has become over the last few decades a relevant issue in management policy. Unfortunately, and despite the abundant literature on the subject in different countries, no agreement has been reached about the following questions: the definitions of educational quality, the basic indicators to assess it, and the suitability of the models proposed. As a result, there are still very few theoretical and empirical studies on this. This article is intended to partly fill this gap, so it puts forward a model of quality education that allows us to identify conceptually the variables of resources and competencies linked to the learning outcomes of the students, as well as their association with the competitive position of the universities.

Thus, our work shows for the first time the educational variables of resources and competencies associated with the learning outcomes in Economics and Business Administration. This is a relevant contribution since the literature indicates that researchers are aware of important issues about higher education, but they have not been so successful in proposing policies to improve it, and even less in implementing them. Therefore, we hope that the relationships here described will help politicians and lecturers to know the variables that can be used to implement high-quality programmes in Economics and Business Administration in higher education institutions. The results will also be a source of information for politicians and professors as a self-diagnosis tool to determine whether or not a university is likely to succeed.

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