

STRATEGIC ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article examines the influence of administrative management models on the enhancement of educational service quality in higher education institutions. The study is based on a bibliographic review of peer-reviewed scientific literature published between 2017 and 2025 in the Scopus and Scielo databases. A total of 29 studies were analyzed, addressing key dimensions such as process management, quality assurance, institutional leadership, administrative digitalization, working conditions, and organizational climate. The findings indicate that efficient management—anchored in strategic leadership, continuous evaluation, and the integration of technological tools—has a positive impact on student satisfaction, academic performance, and institutional equity. Notable models such as TQM, EFQM, ISO 9001, and TRFQ are recognized for their contributions, while their contextual limitations are also acknowledged. Persistent challenges include regulatory fragmentation, resistance to innovation, and insufficient managerial training.

The study concludes that strengthening administrative management through participatory, ethical, and results-oriented practices is essential for building resilient and inclusive universities with a strong commitment to social responsibility. Finally, implications for educational policy and future research are discussed, with a particular focus on Latin American contexts.

Keywords: administrative management, educational quality, higher education, institutional leadership, quality assurance, systematic review

INTRODUCTION

Deficient administrative management in educational institutions severely limits the quality of learning (UNESCO, 2024). In this regard, UNESCO (2023) states that school leaders lacking training in educational leadership and organizational vision generate disorganized environments, with ineffective processes, low teacher motivation, and poor strategic decision-making, which negatively affects academic performance and weakens the overall functioning of the school. Moreover, the lack of adequate infrastructure and managerial capabilities prevents efficient planning, restricts pedagogical innovation, and exacerbates equity gaps (OECD, 2025a). According to UNESCO (2025), strengthening training in educational management and transformational leadership becomes essential to ensure effective schools, with clear direction, defined goals, and environments conducive to the holistic development of students.

According to UNESCO (2024), worldwide, weaknesses in educational management are one of the structural causes of low academic performance in school contexts. It is estimated that 42% of educational institutions in developing countries lack sustained strategic planning, limiting effective decision-making (UNESCO, 2023). In this regard, OECD (2025a) reports that around 30% of school principals lack formal training in leadership or basic administrative knowledge. This organizational weakness is also reflected in infrastructure: one in five public schools globally operates without adequate basic services such as continuous access to drinking water or electricity, directly impacting learning conditions (UNESCO, 2025). In Latin America, UNESCO (2024b) warns that school management challenges are compounded by gaps in leadership training and inefficient regulatory frameworks. Currently, 58% of public school principals in the region accessed their positions without going through a merit-based selection process or receiving training in educational management (UNICEF, 2024). Furthermore, the World Bank (2022) indicates that more than 40% of rural schools face critical infrastructure problems such as collapsed roofs, deteriorated furniture, and lack of digital connectivity. This combination of structural weakness and absence of leadership has resulted in approximately 17 million students receiving an education conditioned by disorganized and inefficient administrative environments (UNESCO, 2024c).

According to the Ministry of Education of Peru (2021a), the Peruvian context reflects systemic deficiencies in school management. Recent records show that 61% of public school principals lack specific training in education management or administration, which directly affects annual planning and the efficient use of the budget (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2025). In this regard, the Ministry of Education of Peru (2023) indicates that more than 35% of schools in the country report severe infrastructure deficiencies, ranging from uninhabitable classrooms to a lack of basic sanitary services. This administrative and operational precariousness generates unstable school environments, causing approximately 45% of basic education students to fail to achieve minimum expected learning levels in key areas such as reading and mathematics (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2024).

This study is justified by the persistent issue of deficient administrative management in educational institutions, particularly in contexts where infrastructure is precarious and school leadership teams lack specialized training in school leadership and organizational management. In various countries—especially those with low development indicators—educational administration faces structural and operational limitations that directly affect the quality of the educational service. The absence of managerial capacities, strategic planning, and institutional vision oriented toward results impedes the development of effective, inclusive, and innovative school environments. Furthermore, many school principals assume their positions without training in educational management, resulting in weak institutional governance, low student performance, and poor coordination with the community. Analyzing this issue allows for a better understanding of how deficits in leadership and management negatively impact pedagogical processes, teacher motivation, and student achievement. In this sense, the study is relevant as it contributes evidence for the design of public policies and leadership training programs that strengthen school governance, promote a culture of quality, and significantly improve educational outcomes at all levels.

Deficient educational administration—particularly in countries where schools face poor infrastructure and lack administrative capacities—has a direct impact on educational quality. Frequently, school principals lack the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage a school, which results in poor organization, inefficient resource management, and the absence of strategic planning. The lack of an entrepreneurial vision that fosters innovation and continuous improvement limits the potential to develop high-quality educational projects, while the absence of leadership and managerial training prevents the establishment of clear and sustainable goals. This perpetuates a cycle of low educational standards, in which students do not receive the attention or resources they need for their integral development, ultimately affecting their future preparation and access to professional opportunities.

Based on this, the objective of this study is to analyze—through a bibliographic review of international scientific literature—how administrative management models influence the improvement of educational service quality in higher education institutions, identifying their strengths, limitations, and critical dimensions such as strategic leadership, digitalization, organizational climate, and equity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Business Management is most notably associated with Peter F. Drucker, who in the mid-20th century proposed a systemic approach to understanding and leading organizations in an efficient and results-oriented manner (Isaka & Shimada, 2022). In this regard, Jaworski and Cheung (2023) explain that his thinking emerged in a context of industrial expansion and increasing organizational complexity, where the need for clear functional structures, rational decision-making, and effective leadership became increasingly evident. Drucker conceived management as a key discipline for achieving strategic objectives, mobilizing resources, and generating both economic and social value (Meynhardt, 2024).

Furthermore, Isaka and Shimada (2022) argue that when applied to the educational sphere, this theory suggests that universities should adopt administrative models similar to those of successful organizations in the business world, incorporating planning, control, and continuous improvement tools to optimize their academic, research, and administrative performance. Under this approach, the role of academic leadership is reconfigured around efficiency, innovation, and institutional sustainability (Jaworski & Cheung, 2023). According to Meynhardt (2024), this model promotes a more strategic view of higher education as a driver of development and competitiveness.

In line with the organizational perspective, the Theory of Service Quality, developed by A. Parasuraman in the 1980s, emerged in response to the growing prominence of the service sector in the global economy. In a context where differentiation no longer relied solely on the product but also on user experience, this theory proposed that quality should be evaluated from the customer's perspective, based on dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles (Sheu & Chang, 2022; Muharam et al., 2021). In the university setting, its application has enabled the recognition of students as active users, whose perceptions of the learning environment, institutional support, and technological infrastructure are essential for evaluating and enhancing academic quality.

This perspective also maintains that user satisfaction is a key indicator of success in service provision, including in education. From this standpoint, quality is defined not only by internal metrics but also by the institution's capacity to meet the social, professional, and technological expectations of its environment (Putri et al., 2025). The integration of business management principles with the foundations of service quality offers a robust analytical framework to rethink the modern university as an organization oriented toward both strategic outcomes and user experience (Muharam et al., 2021).

From an integrative perspective, educational service quality is understood as the institution's capacity to meet the expectations of students, families, and the community with respect to pedagogical processes, infrastructure, resources, and institutional support. This definition implies not only the efficient transmission of knowledge but also the creation of inclusive, safe, motivating, and technologically equipped environments that promote students' holistic development (Gryshchenko et al., 2021). In this regard, the concept of quality has evolved beyond approaches focused solely on access and coverage, toward more complex frameworks that incorporate pedagogical, organizational, and human dimensions. This shift has allowed for the inclusion of factors such as personalized attention, effective communication among educational actors, the availability of didactic resources, academic and emotional support, and a positive institutional climate (Rakhimov, 2021). User satisfaction, understood as the degree to which educational experiences meet formative expectations and produce positive outcomes across different time frames, is considered a fundamental component of service quality. To ensure high standards, it is essential to implement continuous monitoring processes, promote the active participation of the educational community, and establish effective feedback mechanisms (Rasheed & Rashid, 2024).

Educational service quality cannot be understood in isolation, as it is conditioned by structural factors such as institutional management, pedagogical leadership, and administrative efficiency. Within this framework, administrative management emerges as a strategic component that determines the systemic functioning of educational institutions and their capacity to respond to educational demands (Pham & Tran, 2023). This type of management is conceived as the set of processes aimed at organizing, coordinating, and optimizing human, financial, material, and technological resources within the institution. It encompasses strategic planning, personnel management, infrastructure, and operational logistics, thereby shaping an institutional environment conducive to achieving educational goals (Ahmad et al., 2022).

In increasingly complex contexts, efficient management enables the sustainability of institutional operations and supports sustained improvements in performance indicators. To this end, it is crucial to integrate elements such as transparency, evidence-based decision-making, rational resource use, and inter-hierarchical coordination. These conditions strengthen school governance and promote the construction of resilient institutions capable of adaptation and results orientation (Kumar & Limbachiya, 2023).

METHOD

This study is framed within a critical literature review, with an exploratory and analytical approach, aimed at identifying and systematizing the main academic contributions regarding the relationship between administrative management and educational quality in higher education institutions. Defined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied for the review, as detailed in Table 1. Scientific articles and reviews published between 2017 and 2025, in Spanish and English, available in open access and retrieved from recognized databases such as Scopus and SciELO, were considered, resulting in an initial total of 420 documents. After the screening process, a final selection of 29 scientific articles was made.

The search strategy employed Boolean operators (AND, OR) and keywords in both English and Spanish, including: “gestión administrativa” (administrative management), “calidad educativa” (educational quality), “educación superior” (higher education), “gestión institucional” (institutional management), “mejora continua” (continuous improvement), and “evaluación de calidad” (quality assessment). These combinations were applied in the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the articles.

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Applied to the Literature Search

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
- Studies in which the research topic focuses on administrative management and educational quality in higher education institutions. - Documents formatted as scientific articles and systematic reviews. - Studies published between 2017 and 2025. - Studies available in Spanish and English. - Studies conducted at the global level. - Open-access articles.	- Articles whose titles are unrelated or not linked to the topic. - Scientific studies that do not follow the format of scientific articles or systematic reviews. - Studies published before 2017. - Studies published in languages other than Spanish and English. - Restricted-access articles.

Study Selection Process

The selection of studies was carried out sequentially and rigorously. First, an exhaustive search was conducted in the SciELO and Scopus databases using Boolean operators combined with key terms aligned with the objectives of the review. In the initial stage, 420 documents were identified. After applying exclusion criteria related to duplication, language, or lack of thematic relevance, approximately 142 studies were discarded. Subsequently, abstracts were reviewed, leading to the exclusion of 228 articles. From these, 50 were selected for full-text assessment. Of those, 21 were excluded for not meeting the required methodological or thematic approach, resulting in a final sample of 29 articles included for analysis (see Figure 1).

Data Extraction

Following the selection process, a data extraction sheet was designed to collect key information: authorship, year of publication, country, type and design of the study, educational level addressed, population characteristics, specific objective, main findings, limitations, and conclusions. The information was systematized in a comparative matrix, which facilitated cross-analysis and the identification of common patterns, divergences, and gaps in the literature.

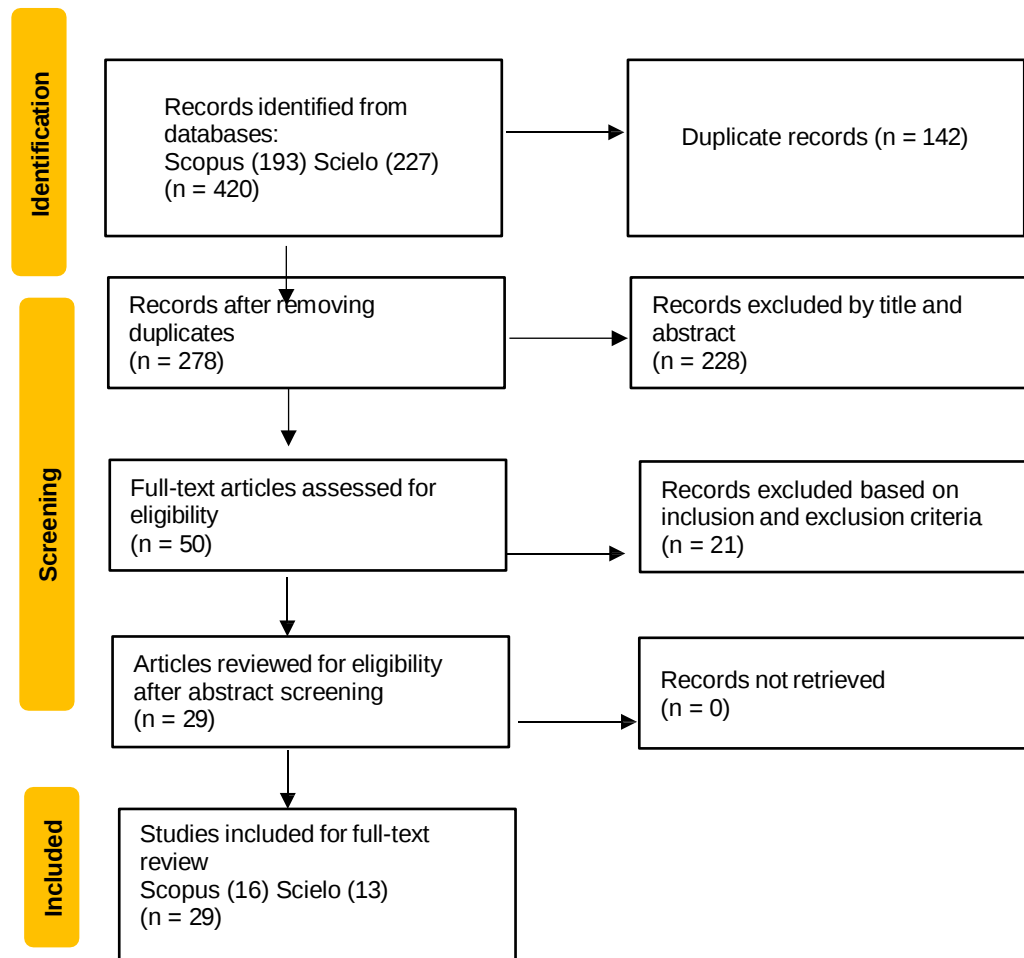
Methodological Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of the selected studies was assessed using the relevant Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal checklists for each study design. The assessment considered items such as clarity of objectives, appropriateness of methodology, sample selection, data collection methods, consistency between results and conclusions, and discussion of limitations. Each item was scored as “Yes,” “No,” or “Unclear,” and only studies scoring positively on at least 70% of applicable items were included in the final analysis, ensuring methodological rigor and reliability of the review findings.

The quality of the 29 included studies was evaluated using the tools of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), applying the checklist corresponding to each study design. The criteria considered included the adequacy of the approach, methodological clarity, consistency between results and conclusions, and the discussion of limitations. Overall, the studies demonstrated sufficient quality to support the analysis.

Figure 1 Filtering and Analysis Sequence of Scientific Articles in the Literature Review

Identification of Studies through Databases and Records



The analysis was structured around four cross-cutting themes: strategic leadership, administrative digitalization, organizational climate, and equity, allowing for a holistic and comparative interpretation of educational management models applied in diverse university contexts.

Table 2 Scientific Articles Selected for the Critical Analysis of the Study

N°	Authors	Article Title	Methodology	Country	Year	Database
1	Ibidunni et al. (2023)	Impact of Total Quality Management on Research Output in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria	Quantitative	Nigeria	2023	Scopus
2	Ardhiya et al. (2024)	Digitalization of Quality Management in Higher Education	Qualitative	Indonesia	2024	Scopus
3	Parveen et al. (2024)	The Contribution of Quality Management Practices to Student Performance: Mediated by School Culture	Mixed	Pakistan	2024	Scopus
4	Carvalho et al. (2022)	Cross-Border Higher Education and Quality Assurance: Results from a Systematic Literature Review	Systematic Review	United Kingdom	2019	Scopus
5	Lazarević et al. (2021)	Analysis of Higher Education Institutions in Serbia Using Scientometric and Digital Technology Indicators	Mixed	Serbia	2021	Scopus

6	Arjona-Granados et al. (2022)	Impact of Process Management and Strategic Planning on Educational Quality in Public Higher Education Institutions in Mexico	Quantitative	Mexico	2022	Scopus
7	Meisuri et al. (2024)	Quality Assurance System in Higher Education	Qualitative	Indonesia	2024	Scopus
8	Martínez Prats et al. (2021)	Organizational Climate and Its Impact on Educational Quality in Universities	Quantitative	Mexico	2021	Scopus
9	Biloshchuk et al. (2024)	Development of Models and Methods to Create Informational Spaces for Scientific Activity Subjects to Support Sustainable Development of Higher Education Institutions	Qualitative	Kazakhstan	2024	Scopus
10	Budiharso Tarman (2020)	Improving Educational Quality Through Better Working Conditions in Academic Institutions	Quantitative	Indonesia	2020	Scopus
11	Díez et al. (2020)	Impact of Two Quality Systems on Educational Centers: The EFQM Model and the Integrated Quality Project (PCI)	Quantitative	Spain	2020	Scopus
12	Hair et al. (2013)	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling: Rigorous Applications, Better Results, and Greater Acceptance	Quantitative	India	2022	Scopus
13	Allam (2020)	Demystifying the Aspect of Quality in Higher Education: Insights from Saudi Arabia	Quantitative	Saudi Arabia	2018	Scopus
14	Weenink et al. (2018)	Playing with Languages: The Dynamics of Quality in Higher Education in Dutch National Policies Since 1985	Qualitative	Netherlands	2018	Scopus
15	Harvey (2024)	What Have We Learned in 30 Years of Quality in Higher Education?: Faculty Perspectives on Quality Assurance	Qualitative	United Kingdom	2024	Scopus
16	Cabacang (2021)	Quality Is Never an Accident: A Study on Total Quality Management Practices in Selected Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines	Quantitative	Philippines	2020	Scopus
17	Méndez et al. (2024)	Educational Quality Management: A Human Rights-Based Approach	Systematic Review	Ecuador	2024	Scielo
18	Lule-Uriarte et al. (2023)	Educational Management: A Key Factor in Educational Quality	Systematic Review	Peru	2023	Scielo
19	Flores-Flores (2021)	Educational Management: A Discipline with Its Own Characteristics	Systematic Review	Mexico	2021	Scielo
20	Inguilla et al. (2017)	Educational and Administrative Quality from the Inside: The Case of the National University	Quantitative	Peru	2017	Scielo

		of the Altiplano – Puno – Peru, 2017				
21	Ávalos et al. (2021)	Educational Quality and New Teaching–Learning Methodologies: Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities for a Disruptive Vision of the Teaching Profession	Qualitative	Spain	2021	Scielo
22	Mejía-Rodríguez & Mejía-Leguía (2021)	Evaluation and Educational Quality: Advances, Limitations, and Current Challenges	Systematic Review	Costa Rica	2021	Scielo
23	Menacho-Vargas et al. (2021)	Variables Affecting Educational Quality in a Public Health Crisis Context in Public Schools of Comas	Quantitative	Peru	2021	Scielo
24	Arjona-Granados et al. (2022)	Quality Management Systems and Educational Quality in Public Higher Education Institutions in Mexico	Quantitative	Mexico	2022	Scielo
25	Ovalle-Saldarriaga & Lino-Ovalle (2024)	School Leadership and Learning Quality in Basic Education Students	Qualitative	Peru	2024	Scielo
26	Apaza & Rivera (2022)	Educational Management as a Quality Factor in Public Educational Institutions	Quantitative	Peru	2022	Scielo
27	Guerrero et al. (2023)	Educational Quality in Regular Basic Education Institutions	Systematic Review	Peru	2023	Scielo
28	Condor et al. (2025)	Progress on Quality in Higher Education	Qualitative	Peru	2025	Scielo
29	Cubela et al. (2024)	Teaching and Educational Management in Higher Education for Quality Training	Systematic Review	Cuba	2023	Scielo

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the literature review conducted, the following theme is addressed: Administrative management for improving the quality of educational services in higher education institutions.

Tabla 3 Scientific Articles on Administrative Management for Improving the Quality of Educational Services in Higher Education Institutions

Thematic Axis	Main Authors	Key Findings	Barriers to Effective Implementation
Leadership and Institutional Management	Arjona-Granados et al. (2022); Apaza & Rivera (2022); Ovalle-Saldarriaga & Lino-Ovalle (2024); Budiharso & Tarman (2020); Cubela et al. (2024); Martínez et al. (2021)	Participatory and strategic leadership enhances teaching performance, institutional planning, and organizational climate	Lack of managerial competencies, resistance to change, and limited sustainability in complex contexts
Evaluation and Continuous Improvement	Díez et al. (2020); Inquilla et al. (2017); Mejía-Rodríguez & Mejía-Leguía (2021); Parveen et al. (2024); Menacho-Vargas et al. (2021); Condor et al. (2025)	Continuous evaluation promotes significant improvements when applied with a formative, diagnostic, and participatory approach	Superficial or technocratic assessments limit effective pedagogical decision-making

Digitalization and Technological Management	Ardhiya et al. (2024); Biloshchytskyi et al. (2024); Lazarević et al. (2021); Cabacang (2021); Ávalos et al. (2021); Condor et al. (2025)	Digitalization enhances traceability, operational efficiency, and access to data; it strengthens evidence-based management	Technological gaps, insufficient faculty training, and institutional resistance hinder effective implementation
Organizational Climate and Human Talent	Martínez et al. (2021); Budiharso & Tarman (2020); Menacho-Vargas et al. (2021); Allam (2020); Apaza & Rivera (2022); Ovalle-Saldarriaga & Lino-Ovalle (2024)	Healthy work environments boost motivation, collaboration, and faculty retention, positively impacting educational quality	Role ambiguity, process bureaucratization, and institutional stress reduce transformative impact
Equity, Inclusion, and Educational Justice	Méndez et al. (2024); Guerrero et al. (2023); Cubela et al. (2024); Ávalos et al. (2021); Weenink et al. (2018); Lule-Uriarte et al. (2023); Flores-Flores (2021)	Quality must integrate inclusive approaches, human rights, and social justice to achieve transformative education	Standardized models often overlook non-hegemonic trajectories and diverse institutional contexts
Quality Models and Regulatory Frameworks	Ibidunni et al. (2023); Cabacang (2021); Arjona-Granados et al. (2022); Hair et al. (2013); Díez et al. (2020); Lazarević et al. (2021); Biloshchytskyi et al. (2024); Allam (2020); Harvey (2024)	TQM, ISO 9001, EFQM, and TRFQ support institutional improvement when adapted to local contexts and integrated with pedagogical reflection	Instrumental or bureaucratic use, poor contextualization, and weak organizational culture limit their effectiveness

Implementation of Educational Quality Models

Although educational quality models share theoretical foundations, their practical effectiveness depends on their contextual alignment with institutional dynamics. On one hand, according to Ibidunni et al. (2023), the application of the TQM approach fosters organizational environments that enhance both research and teaching innovation. Moreover, multicriteria evaluation platforms have been shown to strengthen strategic planning based on performance indicators and social expectations (Lazarević et al., 2021). In the same vein, based on Cabacang (2021), the deployment of TQM criteria in Filipino universities requires clear policies that link local standards with international demands. Similarly, certified systems such as ISO 9001 improve institutional quality only when accompanied by integrated and sustainable management processes (Arjona-Granados et al., 2022).

More recent models, such as the TRFQ, include critical components such as self-awareness, problem-solving, and bias mitigation, framing quality within a transformative vision (Hair et al., 2022). From the perspective of Arjona-Granados et al. (2022), however, the instrumental use of these tools can result in merely procedural processes if not grounded in deep pedagogical reflection. Therefore, institutions that link management with a formative purpose achieve greater alignment between perceived quality and academic outcomes (Lazarević et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, as noted by Ibidunni et al. (2023), challenges persist regarding the bureaucratization of quality when models are implemented without a situated understanding of educational objectives. In contrast, Cabacang (2021) highlights that effective implementation depends on leadership committed to continuous improvement and institutional adaptation. Furthermore, comparative analysis shows that only those universities that contextualize their models achieve sustainable impacts on learning and equity (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4 *Strengths and Limitations of Quality Models Applied to Higher Education*

Model	Reported Strenghts	Identified Limitations	Sources
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		Bureaucratization of processes when not contextualized.	
TQM (Total Quality Management)	Continuous improvement, user-centered approach, promotes a collaborative organizational culture.	Difficulties in implementation in universities with limited resources.	Ibidunni et al. (2023); Cabacang (2021)
		Excessive focus on standardization may reduce teaching innovation.	
EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management Model)	Holistic evaluation, promotion of leadership, and equitable distribution of resources.	Requires high institutional capacity for self-regulation. May become a formalist tool without critical reflection.	Díez et al. (2020)
		High implementation cost in non-European environments.	
ISO 9001	Improves traceability and standardization of processes. Facilitates audits and accreditations.	Risk of institutional rigidity when technical compliance is prioritized over pedagogical purpose. Administrative approach may discourage teacher creativity.	Arjona-Granados et al. (2022); Cabacang (2021)
		Still in the validation stage with limited practical application.	
TRFQ (Transformative Research Framework for Quality)	Introduces critical dimensions such as problem-solving, self-awareness, and educational justice.	Low adoption in Latin American contexts. Requires deep changes in organizational culture to be viable.	Hair et al. (2022)
		Lack of clarity in measurement criteria.	
Hybrid/Institutional Models	Adaptability to specific contexts, integration of internal norms with international standards.	Low replicability across institutions. Dependence on individual leaderships.	Lazarević et al. (2021); Biloshchytskyi et al. (2024)

Strategic Leadership and Institutional Management

As noted by Arjona et al. (2022), strategic planning proves effective only when it is articulated with process-based management systems that ensure operational coherence. However, despite its theoretical strength, many universities fail to link these strategic plans to measurable institutional capacities, resulting in documents that lack operational translation. Furthermore, the organizational climate directly influences university quality, as it shapes the symbolic and relational conditions of leadership (Martínez et al., 2021). Nonetheless, few studies explore how this climate is sustained over time or how it reacts under institutional crises or staff turnover.

In addition, Budiharso and Tarman (2020) demonstrated that healthy work environments strengthen teacher motivation and, consequently, student performance. Yet, their analysis underplays how structural factors—such as bureaucratic rigidity or political interference—can undermine even the most well-designed leadership models. Empirical findings also emphasize that effective educational management depends on

planning that combines participatory leadership and collaborative work (Apaza & Rivera, 2022). While this is theoretically consistent, in practice, collaborative governance often clashes with hierarchical decision-making cultures, particularly in Latin American universities.

According to Ovalle and Lino (2024), managerial competencies not only involve resource management but also shape institutional ecosystems conducive to meaningful learning. However, they do not fully address how these competencies are acquired or evaluated in systems with limited leadership training infrastructure. This is further supported by the observation that leadership strategies require constant alignment with organizational culture and contextual dynamics (Cubela et al., 2024), though little is said about how to achieve such alignment in institutions with fragmented governance structures or low autonomy.

Based on Martínez et al. (2021), it can be affirmed that without consistent pedagogical leadership, reforms become diluted within fragmented administrative management. This diagnosis is accurate but lacks a proposal on how to generate long-term leadership continuity, a critical element in preventing reform fatigue. Consequently, shared governance models yield better results when they integrate the institutional mission with active participation (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020), although the literature tends to idealize this integration without critically examining internal resistance or conflicts of interest.

Moreover, Apaza and Rivera (2022) argue that the three key dimensions—organizational, pedagogical, and community—enable a structured understanding of school leadership. While comprehensive, this triad does not explicitly account for external pressures such as marketization or accreditation mandates, which often reorient leadership focus. This comprehensive approach reveals that the principal's role transcends the operational sphere and is rooted in building a collective institutional vision (Cubela et al., 2024), a goal that remains aspirational in contexts where institutional fragmentation prevails. In this framework, Arjona et al. (2022) stress that strategic processes only generate impact when supported by solid institutional competencies. However, the mechanisms through which these competencies are institutionalized remain underexplored. Additionally, analyses suggest that transformational leadership is more effective in contexts of sustained change and continuous evaluation (Ovalle & Lino, 2024), yet few studies interrogate the specific pedagogical assumptions or power dynamics embedded in these “transformational” frameworks.

Continuous Evaluation and Performance Improvement

At the institutional level, Díez et al. (2020) affirm that quality systems lead to sustained improvement only when they are integrated into evaluative processes with real impact on the school environment. However, the notion of “real impact” is rarely operationalized in their study, leaving open questions about how impact is measured beyond compliance metrics. It has also been identified that measurement tools based on service perception help prioritize intervention areas not always visible from a structural perspective (Inquilla et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the literature reviewed gives limited attention to the risk of over-relying on perception-based indicators, which may not always reflect systemic challenges or long-term pedagogical outcomes.

Thus, Mejía and Mejía (2021) emphasize that an authentic evaluation culture requires collective participation, critical contextual analysis, and a formative vision. While their approach is conceptually strong, it lacks empirical evidence on how such cultures are fostered in institutions that operate under rigid accountability regimes. Moreover, evidence shows that superficial evaluation approaches limit relevant pedagogical decision-making (Parveen et al., 2024), but it remains unclear how institutions can transition from bureaucratic to transformative practices without overburdening staff or generating resistance.

From the perspective of Menacho et al. (2021), knowledge management and pedagogical leadership must be incorporated as key variables in continuous improvement systems. This adds value to the discussion, yet their analysis does not explore the systemic obstacles that often hinder the flow of knowledge across institutional levels. Findings also show that without active feedback between students and teachers, quality instruments lose transformative effectiveness (Inquilla et al., 2017). This observation highlights a key paradox: although most models advocate for user-centered approaches, few provide mechanisms to ensure that feedback loops are institutionally embedded rather than left to individual initiatives.

According to Parveen et al. (2024), effective evaluation is mediated by organizational culture rather than the simple application of standards. However, this raises further questions about how such cultures are built, sustained, or challenged in environments where managerialism prevails. Furthermore, contextualized evaluation enables correction of asymmetries in learning access (Díez et al., 2020), but few studies offer guidance on the methodological tools needed to carry out such contextualization in a scalable and sustainable manner.

According to Condor et al. (2025), improved academic performance is closely linked to evaluation frameworks that incorporate criteria of innovation, inclusion, and holistic training. Yet, these criteria often remain aspirational in practice, particularly in institutions with limited resources or segmented curricula. Moreover, universities that apply homogeneous indicators tend to obscure the educational potential of their internal diversity (Menacho et al., 2021), which points to a systemic bias in many quality assurance systems that privilege standardization over responsiveness. Based on the analysis by Mejía and Mejía (2021), it is

argued that evaluating without prior diagnosis perpetuates structural gaps instead of reducing them—a critique that remains largely unaddressed in conventional accreditation frameworks. Therefore, the most effective quality models are those that transform evaluation into a tool of educational justice (Condor et al., 2025), although this goal requires a fundamental rethinking of what is being measured, by whom, and for what purpose.

Digitalization and Educational Technology Management

In contemporary settings, as Ardhiya et al. (2024) propose, digitalization in quality management requires integrating technological tools with a long-term strategic logic. However, few studies examine how such long-term logic is constructed in institutions where strategic planning itself is fragile or reactive. Furthermore, the incorporation of intelligent platforms has helped reduce operational times and improve the traceability of institutional indicators (Biloshchytskyi et al., 2024). While this operational efficiency is valuable, it often overshadows the need for a pedagogically grounded rationale for digital transformation. From this perspective, Lazarević et al. (2021) argue that technoscientific evaluation systems can enhance academic competitiveness if adapted to multicriteria and transversal benchmarks. Yet, their implementation presumes institutional capacities—technical, human, and cultural—that are often absent or underdeveloped in public universities, particularly in resource-constrained settings. It is also observed that institutions operating under analog structures tend to fall behind under the digital pressures of the global educational environment (Cabacang, 2021), but this observation frequently lacks nuance regarding the sociohistorical reasons behind analog persistence, including governance lag and equity concerns.

Simultaneously, according to Condor et al. (2025), digitalization becomes meaningful only when it promotes teacher autonomy and equitable access to knowledge. This position is compelling but contrasts with dominant trends where digital tools are used primarily for performance monitoring and control. Analyses also show that digital evaluation models require indicators that are sensitive to the sociotechnical diversity of university environments (Ávalos et al., 2021), although current platforms often rely on standardized metrics that fail to reflect this diversity. In fact, many digital systems reproduce biases by privileging data collection over dialogical engagement.

Based on Ardhiya et al. (2024), institutional resistance to digitalization stems from both technological gaps and rigid organizational cultures. Yet, there is little exploration in the literature of how these cultural resistances might be addressed through inclusive change management or participatory design of digital tools. This results in constant tension between technical innovation and traditional governance structures (Biloshchytskyi et al., 2024), a tension that is rarely resolved and often exacerbated by top-down mandates lacking pedagogical legitimacy.

Moreover, as Lazarević et al. (2021) caution, adopting technologies without a profound pedagogical redesign tends to reproduce pre-existing inequalities—a phenomenon largely ignored by techno-solutionist approaches that prioritize innovation for its own sake. It has also been found that the success of digital processes depends on the level of institutional preparedness and ongoing staff training (Cabacang, 2021), yet training is often treated as a one-time intervention rather than a sustained developmental process. Drawing on evidence from Condor et al. (2025), digital strategies must align with educational purposes, not merely with control standards. Additionally, a technology vision centered on educational quality—rather than isolated operational efficiency—is essential (Ávalos et al., 2021), a point that remains underdeveloped in policy and often misunderstood in practice.

Organizational Climate and Human Resources

As noted by Budiharso and Tarman (2020), working conditions have a direct impact on faculty stability and, consequently, on the quality of the learning process. However, their study places limited emphasis on how institutional hierarchies or policy fluctuations can undermine improvements in work conditions, even when leadership is well-intentioned. Furthermore, a healthy organizational environment improves institutional cooperation and pedagogical motivation (Martínez et al., 2021), though most analyses fall short of explaining how such environments are cultivated or sustained over time, especially in contexts marked by high turnover or budget constraints.

From this perspective, Ovalle and Lino (2024) argue that emotional leadership and human resource management must be oriented toward generating trust, belonging, and efficiency. While this approach is normatively appealing, it assumes a level of managerial agency that may not exist in bureaucratic systems where decision-making is centralized and inflexible. It has also been confirmed that toxic work environments increase stress levels and reduce the quality of learning outcomes (Menacho et al., 2021), yet few studies propose actionable strategies for addressing the root causes of toxicity—such as unclear performance metrics, poor communication structures, or lack of recognition mechanisms.

According to Allam (2020), clarity in organizational roles minimizes internal conflicts and increases institutional commitment. However, this clarity is often undermined by overlapping mandates or ad hoc institutional reforms, especially in public universities undergoing frequent structural changes. Institutions

with stronger organizational cohesion are also reported to implement quality systems more effectively (Apaza & Rivera, 2022), though such cohesion is more often assumed than empirically demonstrated. Based on Budiharso and Tarman (2020), improvements in the well-being of academic staff should be understood as a strategic investment rather than an expense—a claim that remains largely rhetorical in settings where austerity measures and temporary contracts dominate the academic labor landscape. Likewise, the use of human-centered indicators helps identify areas of institutional risk (Martínez et al., 2021), but few frameworks incorporate these indicators into decision-making processes in a way that has measurable consequences. Moreover, as Ovalle and Lino (2024) argue, effective leadership involves mediating between administrative demands and the socioemotional needs of staff, yet this balancing act is often neglected in leadership training or is relegated to informal interpersonal dynamics rather than structured support systems. Universities with sustained collaborative work frameworks show higher levels of faculty retention (Menacho et al., 2021), but this relationship remains vulnerable to institutional politics, underfunding, and conflicting stakeholder interests.

According to Allam (2020), quality processes that overlook the human dimension tend to become formal devices with no transformative impact—an insight that is particularly relevant in systems where quality assurance is reduced to audits and compliance checklists. Bureaucratic models that prioritize compliance over professional well-being must also be overcome (Apaza & Rivera, 2022), although this often requires institutional reforms that challenge entrenched logics of control and standardization. In sum, while the literature supports a shift toward human-centered quality frameworks, it lacks robust models for operationalizing this shift in constrained and unevenly resourced educational systems.

Equity, Inclusion, and Educational Relevance

As Méndez et al. (2024) argue, a rights-based approach provides a framework that links educational quality with social justice and institutional responsibility. While this paradigm is conceptually powerful, its translation into institutional policy remains limited. In practice, few universities have embedded human rights as operational principles in their quality systems, and most continue to prioritize accountability metrics over equity-based indicators. Additionally, discourses on quality have historically been used more as mechanisms of control than as guarantees of inclusion (Weenink et al., 2018), a contradiction that reflects deep tensions between regulatory mandates and emancipatory educational goals.

Traditional management systems also tend to reproduce inequalities when not aligned with frameworks of active inclusion (Cubela et al., 2024). Yet, inclusion is often treated as a secondary or reactive policy domain, rather than as a core dimension in institutional planning. According to Ávalos et al. (2021), curricular flexibility and methodological innovation are necessary to address student diversity. However, their recommendations lack specificity on how to implement such flexibility in centralized or heavily standardized education systems.

Standardized quality frameworks have been shown to obscure non-hegemonic educational trajectories (Guerrero et al., 2023), particularly those of rural, Indigenous, or first-generation university students. Despite this, many quality models remain rooted in universalist assumptions that fail to capture the plural realities of student populations. According to Weenink et al. (2018), semantic conflicts around the concept of quality hinder the development of inclusive policies with real impact. Yet, few institutional actors are trained to navigate or resolve these conceptual tensions, and policy frameworks rarely acknowledge them. Educational relevance, therefore, can only be achieved if evaluation models incorporate cultural and territorial dimensions (Méndez et al., 2024). Still, there is insufficient evidence on how such dimensions are operationalized, and most national evaluation systems continue to apply uniform standards that overlook contextual diversity. Moreover, the implementation of inclusive principles is more effective when based on participatory institutional diagnoses (Guerrero et al., 2023), though such participatory mechanisms are often fragile, symbolic, or disconnected from strategic planning processes.

From the perspective of Cubela et al. (2024), inclusion should be treated as a structural axis of management, not merely a compensatory addition. However, this structural repositioning requires not only institutional will but also legal and financial frameworks that support inclusive transformation. Quality frameworks must go beyond a compliance logic and shift toward the active recognition of differences (Ávalos et al., 2021), a shift that demands epistemological rethinking, cross-sector coordination, and persistent advocacy to become more than rhetorical aspiration.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that while educational quality models differ in their approaches, they share a functional structure that integrates indicators, processes, and institutional objectives. Frameworks such as TQM, EFQM, ISO 9001, and TRFQ not only support technical process control but also influence the

configuration of the academic environment—provided they are adapted to institutional contexts and accompanied by pedagogical reflection. The effectiveness of these models lies not in their formal adoption, but in their critical integration with educational goals.

In this regard, strategic leadership, organizational climate, digitalization, and equity emerge as interdependent dimensions that either sustain or limit the effectiveness of quality systems. Evidence shows that institutions promoting participatory leadership, healthy work environments, and pedagogy-oriented technologies achieve sustained improvements in both performance and inclusion. This articulation enables a shift from a compliance-based logic to an institutional culture focused on educational transformation.

These findings suggest that institutional policies could include mandatory training programs on strategic quality management for academic leaders, implementation of participatory planning frameworks involving faculty and students, and integration of digital quality monitoring systems aligned with international standards. At the governmental level, ministries of education should promote accreditation models that consider contextual realities and provide technical support for the adoption of quality assurance frameworks in resource-constrained universities.

Therefore, the most relevant implications point to the need to rethink quality systems from a situated, holistic, and critical approach. Only when university governance aligns with values of inclusion, justice, and relevance can quality models transcend their technical dimension and function as effective instruments of educational improvement.

This review is based exclusively on literature published in recent years, which may have excluded earlier yet still relevant conceptual developments. In addition, the thematic categorization privileged institutional approaches, omitting studies focused on specific actors such as students or teachers. No comparative statistical analysis between models by country or region was included.

From a strategic perspective, the findings of this review have direct implications for the design and reformulation of educational policies in Latin America and other developing regions. It is imperative that national regulatory frameworks not only promote the adoption of quality models but also ensure their alignment with the institutional, cultural, and technological contexts of each university. Public policy must prioritize the strengthening of managerial capacities, the promotion of participatory leadership, and the provision of sustainable resources for continuous improvement processes. Moreover, quality assurance systems should shift from a punitive or merely evaluative logic to a formative, inclusive, and transformative vision.

As for future lines of research, it is recommended to pursue comparative studies that explore how quality policies differentially affect public and private universities in Latin American contexts. It would also be valuable to examine the actual implementation of these models in low-resource universities, taking into account variables such as digital exclusion, academic autonomy, and student participation in quality assurance processes. In addition, comparative research is needed on the real effects of quality models on variables such as equity, innovation, and student satisfaction. Empirical studies are also required to analyze the concrete implementation of these models in contexts of low digital connectivity, limited autonomy, or high leadership turnover. Finally, it would be valuable to explore mixed-method approaches that integrate qualitative perceptions from students, teachers, and administrative staff with institutional performance metrics, in order to generate more comprehensive, contextualized, and actionable knowledge.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

This article was prepared by the authors without the use of generative artificial intelligence tools for the writing of its content. Artificial intelligence was used exclusively for language editing and grammar checking purposes.

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