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Equity and the evidence regime in the SINAES 2025 accreditation model: A critical analysis of normative discourse

Equidad y régimen de evidencia en el modelo de acreditación SINAES 2025: Análisis crítico del discurso normativo

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Equity is part of the language through which accreditation models define university quality, although its role in evaluation depends on the criteria, weightings and information sources through which a degree program must demonstrate it.
Objective: To analyze how equity is incorporated into Costa Rica's SINAES 2025 Accreditation Model and through which components it can influence the quality judgment concerning students and their trajectories.
Methodology: A qualitative, documentary and interpretive study was conducted on the official guidelines for undergraduate programs. Lexical exploration with Voyant Tools was complemented by coding the 59 guidelines and their information sources, and the segments were interpreted using a matrix based on the sociocognitive approach to critical discourse analysis.
Results: Equity occupies a prominent place in the guiding axis, whereas as an assessment criterion it is assigned to two guidelines that account for 3.6% of the maximum score; other guidelines addressing inclusion, gender and accessibility are assessed for relevance or effectiveness. Students never appear as grammatical subjects of the guidelines and appear primarily as informants, consulted in the terms of the criterion being assessed. The only source containing data on student trajectories requests rates for the latest cohort without disaggregation.
Conclusions: The document makes the existence of institutional responses and their appraisal by consulted individuals assessable, but has less capacity to show how outcomes are distributed among groups of students.

Keywords: equity; accreditation; higher education; critical discourse analysis; evidence

RESUMEN

Introducción: La equidad integra el lenguaje con que los modelos de acreditación definen la calidad universitaria, aunque su incidencia en la evaluación depende de los criterios, ponderaciones y fuentes de información mediante las cuales una carrera debe demostrarla. Objetivo general: Analizar cómo se incorpora la equidad al Modelo de Acreditación SINAES 2025 de Costa Rica y mediante qué componentes puede intervenir en el juicio de calidad, respecto del estudiantado y sus trayectorias.
Metodología: Se realizó una investigación cualitativa, documental e interpretativa sobre el documento oficial de pautas para carreras de grado. La exploración lexical con Voyant Tools complementó con la codificación de las 59 pautas y de sus fuentes de información, y los segmentos se interpretaron mediante una matriz basada

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en el enfoque sociocognitivo del análisis crítico del discurso.
Resultados: La equidad ocupa un lugar amplio en el eje orientador, mientras como criterio de valoración se asigna a dos pautas que suman el 3,6 % del puntaje máximo; otras pautas sobre inclusión, género y accesibilidad se valoran por pertinencia o eficacia. El estudiantado nunca figura como sujeto de las pautas y aparece principalmente como informante, consultado en los términos del criterio que se evalúa. La única fuente con datos sobre trayectorias solicita tasas de la última cohorte sin desagregación.
Conclusiones: El documento hace evaluables la existencia de respuestas institucionales y su valoración por personas consultadas, con menor capacidad para mostrar cómo se distribuyen los resultados entre grupos de estudiantes.

Palabras clave: equidad; acreditación; educación superior; análisis crítico del discurso; evidencia

INTRODUCTION

Accreditation models organize a way of looking at university careers, because they define what information they must present, with what criteria that information is interpreted, and under what rules a decision is reached about their quality. When equity enters into this language, its presence in the definition of quality opens a question that goes beyond recognition, that of knowing where in the model it can intervene in the assessment and with what type of information a career is expected to demonstrate it. This study addresses this question in the case of the Accreditation Model of the National System of Accreditation of Higher Education (SINAES) of Costa Rica, in the version of its guidelines for undergraduate careers updated in 2025. The choice of the case responds to the fact that these guidelines constitute, according to the document itself, "the national academic standard of quality for the accreditation of university undergraduate degrees" (1, p. 6), so that what they establish on equity guides the self-evaluation of public and private careers that are subject to accreditation in the country.

The relationship between quality and equity has a long history in the discussion on higher education. Recent international research linked university quality with effective equity, community participation, and attention to structural barriers, elements that help to situate the normative question of this article (2). Lemaitre (3, pp. 76-79) warns that equity forces us to look at what happens within institutions once students enter, in permanence and in results, before a large and heterogeneous university population. Sustainable Development Goal 4 brought this concern to the international agenda by proposing inclusive, equitable, and quality education (4, p. 15), and the Costa Rican model itself picks it up when it recognizes that, although access for the least favored sectors has grown, there is still much to be achieved in terms of equity and democratization of higher education (1, p. 11). The Tenth State of Education Report records, in the same sense, that access to university studies has become broader and less unequal, while it identifies failure as a problem that merits focused strategies and efficiency in graduation as a priority (5, pp. 308, 340), and notes a slow progress in the accreditation of careers and in the affiliation of universities to SINAES (5, p. 322).

At the regional level, the study by Márquez Vázquez (6) on 236 higher education institutions in 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean found that 91.1% reported developing permanent actions in equity and inclusion, while 37.5% did not report any follow-up mechanism for these actions. In the same vein, a reflection on inclusion and curricular diversity in Colombian higher education

insisted on the need to consider the experience and participation of diverse student groups when designing institutional responses (7). Among the institutions that did evaluate them, post-intervention measurement predominated, and most used only outcome indicators, such as participation rates or coverage figures (6, pp. 6, 16). This background does not describe the functioning of SINAES, although it shows a distance between declaring policies and having information to know what they produce, a distance that in accreditation is played out in what the model asks and what it accepts as evidence.

From there arises the question that guides the research, how equity is incorporated into the SINAES 2025 Model and through what criteria, weightings and sources of information it can intervene in the quality judgment, particularly with respect to the student body and their trajectories. The objective was to analyze, from the critical analysis of the discourse, the construction of equity in the normative document of the model, the positions from which the student body appears and the type of evidence provided to support the assessment. The work was carried out in Costa Rica during 2026 and is limited to the normative discourse, so that the interpretations of the careers, the requests of the teams of peer evaluators and the decisions of the National Accreditation Council are beyond its scope.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Equity, trajectories and quality

Equity in higher education has long been discussed from the point of view of access, as an extension of coverage to groups that previously did not reach university. Lemaitre (3, pp. 76-77) shifts this discussion to what happens after admission, when the opportunities to stay and achieve results are unevenly distributed among students who arrive with different conditions, and this perspective has consequences for any model that seeks to assess the quality of a career. For Latin America, Ezcurra (8) describes a massification that "includes and unequalizes" (8, p. 28), in which dropout affects precisely the previously excluded and disadvantaged groups, configuring what he calls exclusionary inclusion, an inclusion that tends to expel those who incorporate (8, pp. 28-29). If equity is also at stake in the trajectory, information about the trajectory becomes part of the problem, because a general pass or dropout rate can be accurate and, at the same time, not show whether the difficulties are concentrated in certain groups. Both forms of information are legitimate and answer different questions.

Chiroleu (9) observes that Latin American higher education agendas have treated inclusion and quality as "alternatively privileged" terms (9, p. 2) and argues that the goal should be oriented towards their conjunction (9, p. 12). In a similar direction, this study starts from the fact that equity can be understood as a constitutive dimension of quality when it modifies what is asked about a career, the evidence that is requested, the level of disaggregation with which the results are presented and the way they are interpreted. This formulation leaves out the requirement of identical results for all groups and the conversion of each singularity into an indicator. What is of interest is whether the available information makes it possible to identify relevant differences between populations, understand them and relate them to institutional decisions for which the career is responsible.

Quality, assurance and evidence

Quality, on the other hand, has been understood in different ways, and Harvey and Green (10) distinguished several of them in higher education, including quality as adequacy to the purpose, which is judged according to the extent to which a service fulfills the purpose that has been proposed, and quality as a transformation of those who learn (10, pp. 11, 16, 24). From Latin America, Cunha and Lucarelli (11, p. 20) recall that quality depends on contexts and values in tension, and Leite (12) argues that the discourse of quality is a political concept (12, p. 136), that certification and assurance have become the new order of quality (12, p. 139) and that it is possible to think of a quality of difference, linked to the social commitment of each institution and the incorporation of populations historically excluded from higher education (12, pp. 149-150).

Quality assurance systems know the life of a career through what it presents as evidence, documents, data, consultations, and records that must be able to be reviewed and, to some extent, compared between different degrees. Beerkens examined the evolution of university performance indicators and warned that their scope depends both on the available data and on the purposes for which they are used in institutional governance (13). This need is inherent to the evaluation exercise and sustains the public nature of the accreditation judgment. Martínez Iñiguez et al. (14, pp. 81, 88) warn, however, that in Latin America, accreditation tends to be approached from the administrative point of view and that many accrediting bodies stop at documentary verification, a criticism that leads to the question of what reality makes it possible to know each type of information and what differences it retains when university experience is translated into assessable evidence.

Each type of source says something different about equity. A recent review on evidence-based educational planning also highlights that collecting indicators does not guarantee relevant decisions when they are not interpreted according to the needs and results of educational communities (15). The need to compare involves what Espeland and Stevens (16) call commensuration, the comparison of different entities according to a common metric (16, p. 313), and this operation has effects on what each source retains. A policy demonstrates that there is an institutional decision, an implementation record is close to what was actually done, a rate describes the behavior of a population and its disaggregation makes it possible to locate differences within it, while a query can collect perceptions or barriers that an aggregate result does not explain. In this article, the evidence regime is the set of types of information that an accreditation model accepts as proof of compliance with its requirements, together with the conditions of temporality and aggregation under which it requests them. This is a descriptive notion constructed for this study, useful to ask which dimensions of the student experience can preserve the evidence that a model foresees and which remain with less resolution.

Speech and accreditation

Critical discourse analysis provided the framework for examining these issues in a normative document. An accreditation model, in addition to gathering technical instructions, constructs an institutional way of naming quality, distributes positions among the bodies and people involved in the evaluation, and establishes what should be considered relevant to demonstrate it. Van Dijk (17, p.

159) understands context as a subjective construction that participants elaborate on the communicative situation, represented in context models that intervene in the production and understanding of discourse. In his formulation of critical discourse analysis, the same author argues that the connection between society and discourse is sociocognitive (18, p. 207) and places the interest of this analysis in the way in which abuse of power and social inequality are reproduced, legitimized, and resisted in text and speech (18, p. 204).

From these relationships, it was observed how the model names the students, what positions it assigns to them, and how these formulations are connected to criteria, weightings, and sources of information. The operationalization in four planes described in the methodology is a construction of this research, inspired by the relationship between discourse, cognition, context, and society proposed by Van Dijk, and does not correspond to a model formulated by him.

METHOD

Approach and design

The study was developed from a qualitative approach, with documentary and interpretative design, because what was of interest to know is written in a normative instrument that defines what should be observed in a career and with what information that judgment can be sustained. Kripka et al. (19, p. 58) characterize documentary research, within qualitative research, as a broad examination of various materials in which the data come strictly from documents, and in this sense the accreditation model was treated as a text that organizes positions, priorities, and forms of evidence among those who participate in the evaluation. The central analytical strategy was the critical analysis of discourse in Van Dijk's sociocognitive perspective (17, 18), from which the relationship between discourse, cognition, and society was taken, with the context as a mediation between the structures of the text and the situation in which it is produced and used.

Corpus and units of analysis

The corpus was the document Evaluation Guidelines for the Accreditation of University Degree Programs Taught in the Face-to-Face and Non-Face-to-Face Modality, approved by the National Accreditation Council in session 1629-2022 and updated in session 1887-2025, a version that in this article is called the SINAES 2025 Model (1). The definition of quality, the four guiding axes, the six dimensions, the 59 guidelines, the nine criteria, the 137 sources of information, the weight system and the decision rule, as well as a glossary, are brought together in the same text, so that the journey from general orientation to evidence could be followed in full within the document (Table 1). The Guide for the Accreditation Process, which regulates the procedures and products provided by the degree, was left out of the corpus, and therefore the statements of the study refer to what the guidelines establish.

Table 1.

Components of the normative document according to content and function in the analysis, SINAES 2025 Accreditation Model

Component	Contents	Role in analysis
Definition of quality and guiding axes	Concept of quality, four axes, including equity, inclusion and social responsibility	Identify the place of equity in the institutional definition of quality
Dimensions and patterns	Six dimensions and 59 guidelines	Follow how general orientations become career-oriented demands
Criteria	Nine endpoints, one per guideline	Establish where equity is an explicit reference of judgment
Sources of information	137 sources declared	Recognize what type of information is accepted as evidence
Weight system and decision rule	Categories A, B, C and D; Decision Ranges	Reconstruct the impact of each guideline on the decision
Glossary	Institutional definitions	Recover the meaning attributed to the categories analyzed

Note: Prepared by the author based on the SINAES 2025 Model (1).

Two units were used. The first was the guideline, considered together with its weight category, the criteria with which it is evaluated and the sources of information that accompany it, because in this set it is established what is asked of a career, how much the answer counts in the decision and what is accepted as evidence. The second was the segment recovered during the lexical exploration, which in all cases returned to the guideline, section or entry of the glossary from which it came before being interpreted. The research did not involve participants.

Data collection techniques

The collection combined two procedures on the same document. The first was a lexical exploration with Voyant Tools (20), in its web version, used during 2026, on the text of the document. When reviewing the exported concordances, it was found that the uploaded text retained the index, the column headings that are repeated on each page of the guideline tables, and part of the page headers, which is why each recovered context was then classified according to the area of the document in which it appears (index, table header, quality framework and axes, model structure, guidelines and sources, glossary). This classification avoided reading as conceptual presence what responded to the layout, a situation especially visible in the consultation on sources, whose 49 appearances include 31 table headings. The forms were recorded as returned by the tool, so that students and students, or evidence and evidence, were kept separate.

The queries were defined during the reading. It began with equity, inclusion and diversity, and the recovered contexts led to the way in which the document names those who study, with students, students and participation; when it became visible that the presence of the student body depended on the way in which it could become evidence, sources, criteria and evidence were added. For each query, the export with the position of the term and its immediate context was preserved, along with a table of gross frequency of those same terms.

The second procedure was the codification of the 59 guidelines and their sources of information. It became necessary because the exploration showed that the criterion of each guideline is not named with the word criterion, it is typographically marked within the formulation ("The career executes the

processes of selection, hiring, evaluation and promotion with equity..."), and because the sources of information never designate themselves as evidence. In each guideline, the dimension, the weight category, the marked criterion, the grammatical subject and the mention of the student body were recorded. The 64 student appearances were also coded according to the position that the term occupies in each segment.

The source coding unit was each source numbered in the document, from 1 to 137, and each one was assigned to only one of five mutually exclusive categories, defined by the main object requested by the career. The official normative, policy, plan, or curricular document category brought together regulations, regulations, policies, guidelines, protocols, institutional plans, the organizational chart, and the components of the curriculum, such as the profile, the mesh, or the course programs. The description, list, table, or matrix grouped the documents that the program prepares for the self-evaluation report in order to account for actions, resources, or activities. The record, example, instrument, or result included the evidence produced by the execution of an action, such as participation records, evaluation instruments and examples of them, curricula, attestations, and process results. The opinion of the people consulted included the sources that request perceptions or assessments from some sector of the university community, and the quantitative data, those whose main purpose is numerical indicators, such as rates, percentages or averages.

When a source combined objects from more than one category, an order of precedence was applied ranging from the most specific to the most general: opinion, quantitative data, record or result, regulation or plan and, finally, description or list. Thus, a list of actions that also requests their results was coded as a result, and the profile of a position accompanied by the attestations of those who occupy it, as a record. The quantities that accompany a list or table, such as the number of participants, the hours or the time allocated, were recorded as a complementary attribute and did not convert the source into quantitative data; five sources have this attribute. For each source, it was also recorded, separately, if it literally mentions the students and if its content provides information about students even if it does not name them. The coding was carried out on a case-by-case basis on the full text of each source, and the border cases were resolved with these rules and documented in the matrix.

In a first automatic segmentation of the tables, sources 7 and 8 of guideline 3, "Curriculum: Professional Academic Profile" and "Table with the Professional Academic Profile, Teaching Strategies and Evaluation Strategies", were joined because the first lacks an end point in the document, which produced a count of 136. When the original numbering was restored, both were coded separately, the first as an official curricular document and the second as a table prepared by the career, so that the denominator of the analysis corresponds to the 137 sources that the document declares (1, p. 24).

Information processing and analysis

The segments located by both procedures entered a matrix that preserves the category, the frequency recorded, the contexts, the area of the document, and the reading in four planes. The distinction between documentary record and interpretation is also relevant for the methodological

assessment: the criteria of validity and reliability must be examined according to the approach and the type of information that is actually used (21). At the level of the context, attention was paid to the authority from which the document is enunciated and to the function of the fragment within the accreditation process, including the definition of quality as the level of compliance with the guidelines with its criteria. In the text, the lexicalization of the criteria, the agency in the formulations, and the way of naming the students were examined. The cognition level brought together the representations of the student body and equity that can be reconstructed from these formulations, and the society level related them to the weighting of the guidelines, the decision rule, and the types of source that the model accepts as evidence. Each interpretation was compared with its section of origin and with the entire document before assuming it as a result, and the figures were used to locate reading areas and describe the distribution of criteria, weights and sources, without taking them as a measure of the importance of a concept.

The scope of this reading extends to normative discourse. What the document establishes makes it possible to recognize the conditions under which equity can intervene in quality judgment, while interpretations of careers, what peer teams request, and Council decisions require other corpora. Voyant exports and the coding matrix are available upon request from the author.

RESULTS

Equity in the axes, criteria and weighting of the model

The 20 occurrences of equity that Voyant returned are distributed unevenly among the areas of the document. One corresponds to the index, nine to the framework where quality and axes are presented, two to the part that describes the structure of the model, and eight to the tables of guidelines and sources of information (Table 2). Inclusion leans even more towards the guiding level, since six of its seven occurrences are part of the name of the axis, the index, or the figure that organizes the model, and the remaining one is located in a source of guideline 56, the same pattern in which diversity has its only appearance within the operational tables. With the caution indicated in the methodology, these figures indicate where the vocabulary is concentrated and to which places it was convenient to return, and it was in this return that the relationship between the axis and the guidelines began to take shape.

Table 2.

Contexts retrieved in Voyant Tools by query according to document area, SINAES 2025 Accreditation Model

Inquiry	Paratext 1/	Framework: quality, axes and process	Model structure	Guidelines, Sources, and Observations	Glossary	Total
Equity	1	9	2	8	0	20
Inclusion	1	4	1	1	0	7
Diversity	0	0	1	1	1	3
Students	0	5	4	45	10	64
Students	1	0	1	2	0	4

Inquiry	Paratext 1/	Framework: quality, axes and process	Model structure	Guidelines, Sources, and Observations	Glossary	Total
Participation	0	1	0	4	4	9
Sources	33	5	10	1	0	49
Criteria	2	4	3	0	1	10
Evidence	1	1	3	1	1	7

Note: Prepared by the author based on Voyant Tools' exports on the SINAES 2025 Model (1). Values expressed in number of appearances. 1/ The paratext brings together the table of contents, the column headers of the tables and Figure 1 of the document; in the sources query, 31 of its 33 appearances in that area are table headers.

In the framework, the axis of equity, inclusion and social responsibility is presented as "one of the quality facets of the careers". The document assigns it the task of ensuring that they "account for their efforts so that inclusion, equity, well-being, solidarity and harmony with the environment can be evidenced in the training processes" and that the coverage reaches "more students with fewer opportunities for social mobility" (1, p. 11). The same section extends this concern to the strategic plan, staff training, infrastructure, technology, research, social action and student and teacher support, and recognizes that, although access for the least advantaged sectors has grown, "there is still much to be achieved in terms of equity and democratization of teaching at this level of education" (1, p. 11).

The four axes, according to the document, "function as guides of quality and therefore constitute cross-cutting principles that cross dimensions and guidelines" (1, p. 9). From the point of view of the context, the place occupied by these formulations is of interest, enunciated by the authority that sets the national quality standard with the breadth of an orientation and without a guideline, a criterion or a source that directly corresponds to them. Their arrival at the judgment is thus in charge of the level at which the document establishes what is valued and how.

This level is set by an operational definition that the model itself makes explicit when it states that, in the Costa Rican context, "a career is of quality when it reaches a level of compliance with these guidelines with their corresponding criteria" (1, pp. 14-15). Each of the 59 guidelines is assessed by one of nine criteria, and equity is among them with a broad definition, as that which "expresses the sense of justice and implies recognition of and respect for diversity, commitment to equal opportunities and the absence of arbitrary discrimination" (1, p. 23). The codification showed that the criterion of each guideline is inscribed in the formulation as an adjective or a complement highlighted in bold, and that its distribution is very unequal (Table 3). Effectiveness and relevance account for 34 of the 59 guidelines and slightly more than half of the maximum score, while equity corresponds to two guidelines that add up to four out of 111 possible points, 3.6%.

Table 3.

Guidelines and maximum score by assessment criteria, SINAES 2025 Accreditation Model

Criteria	Guidelines	Maximum points 1/	Percentage of Maximum Score
Effectiveness	18	33,5	30,2
Relevance	16	30,0	27,0
Suitability	7	12,0	10,8
Consistency	5	11,5	10,4
Sufficiency	5	9,5	8,6
Efficiency	3	6,0	5,4
Equity	2	4,0	3,6
Relevance	2	3,0	2,7
Transparency	1	1,5	1,4
Total	59	111,0	100,0

Note: Prepared by the author based on the SINAES 2025 Model (1). Values expressed in absolute and relative values. 1/ Score calculated with the conformity value of each category established in the document: A = 2.5; B = 2.0; C = 1.5; D = 1.0.

The two guidelines assessed for equity occupy different places in the model. Guideline 16, category A, pertains to the educational process and establishes that "assessment activities for learning promote equity, through alternative strategies for all students" (1, p. 33). Guideline 35, category C, is addressed to staff and asks that the career carry out "the selection, hiring, evaluation and promotion processes with equity" (1, p. 43).

In guideline 16, it is convenient to focus on the text. The definition of the criterion speaks of the recognition of diversity, while the operational formulation proposes alternative strategies for all students, without naming the conditions, groups or differences that could guide them. The alternative assessment can open space for differentiated attention, so that this reading does not imply that the model excludes it. What the text reveals is a shift in the way equity is represented, which in the definition of the criterion is linked to diversity and in the guideline is formulated as a general condition of the assessment. The associated sources follow the same line, since they request the description of the strategies, examples of instruments, the regulations and the "opinion of the student body about equity in assessment activities" (1, p. 33), without information on the learning outcomes of different groups of students.

Other guidelines deal with issues that the axis and definition of the criterion link to equity, although they are assessed with different criteria (Table 4). Gender equity is found in guideline 43, which calls for policies and actions and is assessed for relevance, and with the same criterion and in the same category C, the prevention and attention of sexual harassment are assessed, in guideline 45, and accessibility regulations, in guideline 42. Guideline 56, category A, is the one that most clearly addresses inclusion, requiring that the university or career follow "effectively the principles of inclusive education" and have the resources to achieve it, and in its sources there is the only operational mention of the diversity of the student body, in a "list of educational support resources to attend to the diversity of the student body" (1, p. 53).

The fact that none of these guidelines is assessed by equity could respond to a technical reason, since in each case the relevance of a norm or the effectiveness of a policy may be of interest; even so, it

shows that equity as a criterion is reserved for two formulations, while the issues covered by its definition are distributed under other criteria. The six guidelines also share a similar composition of sources, made up of regulations or policies, descriptions, in one case examples of instruments, and the opinion of people consulted, and none of them requests quantitative data.

Table 4.

Guidelines related to equity, inclusion, gender and accessibility according to dimension, category, criteria and sources of information, SINAES 2025 Accreditation Model

Agenda	Dimension	Category	Criteria	Sources of information requested
16	Educational process	A	Equity	Description of strategies, examples of instruments, regulations, student opinion
35	Personal	C	Equity	Human resources or equity policies, staff opinion
42	Resources and Support Services	C	Relevance	Regulations, emergency plan, staff and student opinion
43	Resources and Support Services	C	Relevance	Gender equity policies, staff and student opinion
45	Resources and Support Services	C	Relevance	Regulations, description of instances, opinion of staff and students
56	Career Management	A	Effectiveness	Inclusive education policies, list of support resources, staff and student opinion

Note: Prepared by the author based on the SINAES 2025 Model (1).

The weighting adds another layer to this distribution. The six guidelines in Table 4 add up to 11 of the 111 possible points, 9.9%. For careers that are presented for the first time, the document establishes that the National Accreditation Council "will guide its decision based on the rank" and specifies that the range "is determined considering the weight system" (1, p. 17), with Rank I set at a result of 80% or more and a Rank II, between 70% and 80%, in which the Council can accredit, defer the decision or not accredit (1, p. 18). The document does not make explicit the formula with which this percentage is obtained, does not associate additional conditions with specific guidelines and refers the detailed description of the accreditation decision to the Guide for the Accreditation Process (1, p. 7), a text that is not part of the corpus.

With this caveat, what follows is presented only as a hypothetical scenario. If the percentage were calculated on the maximum score, a career with greater non-conformity in the six guidelines and compliance in all the others would obtain around 90%, within Rank I. The scenario does not describe observed decisions, which this corpus does not contain, nor does it replace the judgment of the Council, which the range guides without determining it. It only indicates that, according to what the

document makes explicit, the numerical weight of these guidelines is not sufficient by itself to prevent the result from reaching the higher rank.

Students in the guidelines and sources of information

The document names those who study almost always with the collective noun students, which registers 64 appearances, while students appear four times and in three of them it is part of the name of Dimension 3. Of these 64 appearances, 45 are located in the tables of guidelines and sources of information, ten in the glossary, five in the quality framework and four in the description of the structure of the model (Table 2). The preference for the group is consistent with an instrument that is aimed at complete careers and that needs formulations applicable to diverse populations, although the frequency says little about the way in which students enter the quality judgment and to reconstruct it it was necessary to examine the position they occupy in each formulation.

In the 59 guidelines, the student body is never a grammatical subject. In 40 of them, the subject is the career, the university or, in one case, the person who directs the career, and in the remaining 19 it is components of the curriculum or the institution, such as course programs, mediation strategies, the curriculum, the staff or the virtual campus. When students appear in a guideline, they do so as a complement to an action carried out by the career, such as students who are induced, who are advised, who are made available with support services, who develop skills or whose progress is monitored "through statistics and effective procedures" (1, p. 38).

The only formulation in the document in which it acts with its own verb is found in the framework of the axis of vocational training, where it is stated that "students seek a guarantee that the knowledge and skills offered to them will allow them to successfully enter the world of work" (1, p. 10). At the level of the text, this distribution of agency corresponds to the normative genre of the document, which is aimed at the career as responsible for demonstrating quality; at the level of cognition, it leaves a representation in which the student body receives institutional action and, when an initiative is attributed to them, this is formulated as a demand for training that guarantees labor insertion.

The coding of the 64 appearances according to the position that the students occupy in each segment refined the positions identified in the initial reading (Table 5). The most frequent is that of informant, with 28 appearances, followed by that of recipient of actions, services or resources, with 16, and that of training or learning subject, with nine, while the positions of participant, with five, and of population evaluated or followed by results, with three, have a much lower presence. Only two segments distinguish students by a condition. One is the formulation of the axis that aims to reach "more students with fewer opportunities for social mobility" (1, p. 11), and the other is the source of guideline 56 that requests resources "to attend to the diversity of the student body" (1, p. 53).

Table 5.

Appearances of the term student body according to position in the segment, SINAES 2025 Accreditation Model

Position 1/	Appearances	Document formulation (example)
Informant	28	"Students' opinion on the relevance of the support services they receive"
Recipient of actions, services or resources	16	"makes support services available to students"
Training or learning subject	9	"Development of inquiry and scientific reasoning skills in students"
Participant	5	"incorporates the participation of academic staff, students, graduates and employers"
Assessed or tracked by results	3	"Track student progress through statistics"
Population with fewer opportunities	1	"The more students with fewer opportunities for social mobility"
Subject who demands labor insertion	1	"Students are looking for a guarantee that the knowledge and skills..."
Dimension Naming	1	"Students and graduates"
Total	64	Not applicable

Note: Own elaboration based on the SINAES 2025 Model (1). Values expressed in number of appearances. 1/ Own coding of the contexts exported from Voyant Tools, restored to their origin section.

Participation, which could bring students closer to an active position within the career, enters the guidelines in few places and with sources of a particular type. Guideline 6, category A, requires that the revision of the curriculum incorporate the participation of academic staff, students, graduates, and employers, and demonstrates this with a "list of activities carried out and participants" (1, p. 29). In guideline 22, on induction, participation is documented with "records of participation in induction activities: photographs, videos, lists, graphic memories" (1, p. 36). Guideline 26, which addresses student organization, participation, and representation, has the category of least weight, is assessed for suitability, and is demonstrated by institutional regulations and the students' opinion on them. In these formulations, participation is recorded as attendance, as presence on a list, or as the existence of norms and spaces.

It is in the glossary where the word acquires a meaning closer to equity, as inclusive education policies are defined by their action on "the academic, personal, and social barriers that hinder the learning, participation, and educational success of all students" (1, p. 59). This relationship between barriers, participation, and learning lacks correspondence in the guidelines and sources, none of which request the identification of barriers or to know how different groups of students participate.

The position of informant deserves a closer reading, because it is the way in which students appear most frequently in the operational tables. Twenty-seven sources of information solicit the opinion of students, alone or together with other sectors of the university community, and in 26 of them the object of this opinion is formulated with the same criteria with which the guideline is assessed, so

that questions are asked about the relevance of support services, the suitability of the virtual campus, the effectiveness of feedback or "equity in assessment activities" (1, p. 33).

The document itself justifies the consultation when it states that the careers "must be evaluated in an objective and democratic way by each of the social actors" and that the students, together with other groups, "must be consulted in this regard" (1, p. 15). The consultation thus has an explicit value within the model, and the opinion of the students can include experiences that other records do not show. At the level of cognition, the representation that is configured is that of a student body that assesses whether the institution meets the criterion of the guideline, in the terms set by the criterion itself. This opinion is also requested as the opinion of the students, in the singular collective, and the guidelines do not indicate whether to distinguish between groups or how to deal with differences between opinions, a matter that could be regulated in the Guide for the Accreditation Process and that this corpus does not allow to establish.

Sources of information on trajectories and curriculum

The coding of the sources of information showed an evidence regime composed mainly of documents and queries (Table 6). Of the 137 sources that the document numbers, 49 correspond to descriptions, lists, tables or matrices prepared by the career, 39 to opinions of people consulted and 37 to regulations, policies, plans or official curricular documents, while 11 request records, examples, instruments or results and only one has quantitative data as its main object, source 57, referring to student trajectories. Another five include quantities as a complement to a list or table, and none of them reports on student results. The model describes these sources as basic and recommends that the program assess "whether it requires additional data to improve the provision of evidence" (1, p. 24), so that it leaves open the possibility of presenting more detailed information without requiring it.

Table 6.

Sources of information by type of evidence requested and reference to students, SINAES 2025 Accreditation Model

Type of evidence 1/	Sources	They literally mention the student body 2/	They provide information about students 3/
Description, listing, chart, or matrix	49	6	6
Opinion of people consulted	39	27	27
Official regulations, policies, plans or curricular documents	37	3	3
Record, example, instrument, or result	11	0	1
Quantitative data	1	0	1
Total	137	36	38

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Note: Prepared by the author based on the SINAES 2025 Model (1). Values expressed in number of sources. 1/ Mutually exclusive categories assigned to the 137 sources numbered in the document according to the rules described in section 3.3. 2/ Sources whose text contains students, students, students or students. 3/ Includes sources with literal mention and, in addition, source 49, which requests records of participation in the induction of new students, and source 57, which requests pass, repetition, dropout and graduation rates.

The difference between the last two columns of Table 6 separates lexical coincidences from substantive information. Thirty-six sources mention the student body and 38 provide information about students, because two of them do so without naming them, source 49, which asks for records of participation in induction activities, and source 57, which asks for the rates of the last cohort. The latter is also the only source of quantitative data in the model, so that the numerical evidence on student trajectories depends entirely on it.

The glossary defines evidence as "any evidence that corroborates a fact or truth of a proposition" (1, p. 57). Read together with the form of the standards, written in the present tense as statements about the career ("The career has...", "The career develops..."), this definition suggests a relationship in which the guideline functions as a proposition and the source as its corroboration. This enunciative form orients the evidence towards confirmation that something exists or is being done, and could have consequences for equity, because a proposition about the existence of an inclusive education policy or support services can be corroborated with the policy, the list of services and the opinion of those who know them, without information about who benefits from them or with what results.

Student trajectories enter the model through guideline 25, category B, which is assessed for effectiveness and establishes that the career "follows the progress of the student body through statistics and effective procedures and proposes actions to promote timely progression and reduce repetition, lag and dropout" (1, p. 38). Its two sources are the only way by which data on student results arrive at the assessment. The first requests "data on pass, repetition, dropout rates and average graduation time of the last cohort", and the second, a description of the actions carried out to avoid repetition, lag and dropout, including curricular flexibility, elective courses, diversification of graduation modalities, vocational guidance and scholarships (1, p. 38). Lag is among the problems that must be addressed, without an associated fee, and graduation is requested as an average time.

This information is necessary and answers relevant questions about the general behavior of the career. Its formulation establishes, at the same time, two conditions that delimit what can be known from it. The first is temporal, because the data correspond to a single cohort and not to a series that shows trends, and the second is aggregation, because the source does not ask to distinguish between groups of students. Throughout the document, the root disaggregation does not appear, nor do terms such as disability, socioeconomic, territory or indigenous, and gender is found only in guideline 43 and its sources.

With a general rate of the last cohort, it is possible to know how many students passed, repeated, or dropped out, while the question of whether these difficulties are concentrated in students from certain regions, socioeconomic conditions, or situations of disability is outside of what that source

can answer. What this finding describes is a low resolution of the evidence in relation to the differences that the axis and the definition of the criterion name as relevant. A program can submit disaggregated data on its own initiative and the Guide for the Accreditation Process could request additional information, so that the result is limited to what the guidelines require and does not report on what the programs actually present.

The curriculum is the dimension where the distance between the axis and the guidelines is most visible. Its twelve guidelines are assessed for coherence, relevance, sufficiency, effectiveness, efficiency and suitability, and deal with the relationship between the programmes and the professional academic profile, the entry profile, methodologies, academic dedication, learning activities, periodic review of the plan, extracurricular activities, resources in the second language, digital competences, inquiry and scientific reasoning and research. None of them mentions the equity, inclusion or diversity of the student body. The term intercultural appears twice in the document, once in the framework, among the global competences that are expected to be developed, and once in the glossary, within the definition of internationalisation, so that interculturality is linked to the international projection of the degree rather than to the diversity of those who are already studying in it. Curricular flexibility, on the other hand, is among the possible actions against lag and dropout in the source of guideline 25, and in the glossary as an alternative that favors student participation.

The transversal axis of equity makes it possible for a career to relate its curricular decisions to the characteristics of its population, and nothing in the document prevents it from doing so. When this relationship is not formulated as a guideline, however, its presence in the evaluation depends on the reading that the career and the peer teams make of the axis, and the sources of information of the dimension do not provide evidence on how the conditions of the student body affect the organization of teaching, evaluation or the achievement of the profile. In the curricular guidelines, students appear above all as an entry profile, as a required academic dedication and as a place where competencies are developed, positions that represent them as the recipient of a common training proposal.

DISCUSSION

The model's evidence regime is adequate to verify that policies, services, and actions exist, and that the people consulted value them in terms of each criterion. In the field of quality assurance, Vettori analyzed how evaluation cycles introduce time scales and institutional rhythms that should be considered when interpreting the evidence for improvement (22). To know how the results are distributed among groups of students, he has a single source of data, aggregated and referred to a cohort. The commensuration that makes it possible to compare careers (16, p. 313) operates here with a metric that leaves out the differences between groups, and it is at this point that the document moves further away from a quality of difference such as that proposed by Leite (12, p. 150). In this asymmetry, the equity declared in the axis finds its limits as an object of evaluation within the document, and it is also there where a study with self-evaluation reports and accreditation decisions could show whether the practices expand or reproduce the resolution that the document establishes.

Seen from the relationship between quality and equity proposed in the introduction, the case analyzed shows how both meet at the normative level. The encounter exists and is clearly formulated in the axis, in the definition of the criterion and in the recognition of democratization as a pending task; its passage to demand, on the other hand, occurs in a few guidelines, with disparate weights and under criteria that mostly question the relevance or effectiveness of policies and actions. This predominance brings the model closer to the conception of quality as adequacy to the purpose described by Harvey and Green (10, p. 16), and leaves the conjunction between inclusion and quality proposed by Chiroleu (9, p. 12) clearly formulated in the axis and only partially specified in the guidelines.

At the same time, the definition of quality as compliance with standards with its criteria means that what is not formulated as a guideline depends on the reading that the career and peer teams make of the transversal axis. Martínez Iñiguez et al. (14) point out that many accrediting bodies "remain in the verification of the documentary" (14, p. 88), and here this criticism serves to formulate a more limited question, that of what form of compliance is requested when the issue is equity, a question that leads to the way in which the student body appears in the guidelines and to the sources through which what the model says about them can be demonstrated.

Lemaitre (3, pp. 76-79) links equity in higher education with a large and heterogeneous student population and with what happens after admission, in permanence and in results. Read from this point of view, the reconstructed positions show a student body that is very present in the model, frequently consulted and the recipient of numerous actions, whose differentiated conditions are named on the axis and in a source without guiding the questions or the consultations of the guidelines. Whether this heterogeneity arrives at the quality judgment then depends on the information that is requested about what happens with different groups of students throughout their career.

The low resolution of the evidence on trajectories acquires weight if one considers that, according to Ezcurra (8, p. 29), dropout affects precisely the previously excluded and disadvantaged groups, and that for Costa Rica the Tenth State of Education Report states that failure merits focused strategies (5, p. 340). Focusing requires knowing where a difficulty is concentrated, and an aggregate rate of a single cohort offers little information to do so.

The report by Márquez Vázquez (6) found that Latin American institutions that evaluate their equity policies do so mainly after the intervention and with outcome indicators such as participation rates or coverage figures (6, p. 16). The similarity with the evidence regime established by the SINAES 2025 Model does not authorize the inference of a relationship between the two phenomena, although it suggests that accreditation could reinforce or, on the contrary, expand the forms of information with which institutions know their results in terms of equity.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the SINAES 2025 Model shows an equity present in the definition of quality, with its own axis, a definition as a criterion that includes the recognition of diversity and the explicit mention

of democratization as a pending task of Costa Rican higher education. Its passage to assessable requirement is concentrated in two guidelines valued for equity, while other guidelines related to inclusion, gender and accessibility are valued for relevance or effectiveness. The document does not explain the way in which the percentage that guides the decision is calculated and refers the details of this to another guide, so the impact of these guidelines on accreditation could only be examined as a hypothetical scenario, in which their numerical weight is not sufficient by itself to prevent the result from reaching the higher rank.

Students are widely present in the document, although never as the subject of the guidelines. Their most frequent position is that of informant, consulted about the relevance, efficacy or suitability of what the career does, and the conditions that differentiate them are named on the axis and in a source without guiding the questions of the guidelines. The evidence regime is mainly composed of documents, descriptions and opinions, and the only source of data on trajectories requests general rates from the last cohort. What the document makes assessable, therefore, is the existence of institutional responses and their assessment by the people consulted, who are less able to show how the results are distributed among groups of students.

The contribution of the study is also in the route used to arrive at this reading. Following equity from the guiding axis to the criterion, weighting, and source of information made it visible that its impact on evaluation depends on the place where it is formulated and the type of test associated with it, regardless of the frequency with which it is named. The combination of lexical exploration with the coding of patterns and sources also showed that searches by word do not reach central elements of the structure of the model, such as the criterion of each guideline, which the document typographically marks, or the sources, which never designate themselves as evidence. This route can be applied to other accreditation models and serve as a basis for comparisons between systems that attend to the function of each statement beyond its denomination.

The conclusions are limited to the normative discourse of the guidelines for undergraduate programs. The corpus does not include the Guide for the Accreditation Process, the self-evaluation reports, the peer reports, or the decisions of the National Accreditation Council, and therefore it is not possible to know how the programs interpret the guidelines, what the peer teams actually request, or whether the information presented exceeds what the document requires. The codification of the students' positions and the types of source is an interpretative construction of this research, whose traceability is safeguarded by the coding matrix, available at the request of the author.

For the research, the next step is to contrast these results with self-evaluation and external evaluation reports, in order to know if the careers present disaggregated information on trajectories and how peer teams value the guidelines linked to equity. For those who design accreditation models, the results open the question of whether the equity axis should have an explicit correspondence in the sources of information of the curriculum and student dimensions, for example by justifying how the career knows the relevant differences in its population and what decisions it has made based on them.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was developed through a literature review based exclusively on previously published documentary sources. It did not involve the direct participation of human or animal beings, the performance of interventions, the use of biological samples, or access to personally identifiable data. Consequently, it did not require approval from an ethics committee or the obtaining of informed consent. During the research process, the principles of scientific integrity, adequate attribution of authorship, rigorous citation, and responsible use of the sources consulted were observed.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USAGE STATEMENT

The authors state that the AI tool was used exclusively to support the organization of the article and the translation of the text. Its use did not determine the scientific content, study design, selection of sources, data analysis, interpretation of results, or conclusions. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

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The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this study and that all the procedures followed comply with the ethical standards established by the journal. They also confirm that this work is unpublished and has not been published, either partially or totally, in any other publication.

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