

# ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY IN VIRTUAL EDUCATION IN SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS MODALITIES.

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**Abstract:** *The concept of "quality", due to its variability and multifunctionality, is used in many fields of activity. The term came to the forefront of higher education in the 1980s. Twentieth century, but disputes over how to define it continue to this day. Considering the increase in virtual internships in university programs and the absence of a unified system for quality assurance and evaluation in the synchronous format, the above problems are revealed even more clearly. In order to equate the semantic content of the concept of "quality" in the virtual environment, the article compares the theoretical and practical levels of its operation in the faculties of Law, Political and Social Sciences, Administrative, Accounting and Economic Sciences, and Education of the Popular University of Cesar. The basis of the study is the work dedicated to the generalization of traditional approaches to rethinking the concept of quality in higher education and the tools to work with it in the synchronous and asynchronous environment. There is a stream of dissimilar definitions of quality that move on to systems of generalization. It reveals quality comprehension manuals in an asynchronous format that are potentially applicable in a synchronous format. The main differences between the categories of quality assurance in synchronous and asynchronous format are established and their continuity is shown. Based on the analysis, an approach is proposed to work on the quality of virtual university programs, combining theory and practice.*

**Keywords:** *Quality, Higher education, Online educational quality, Virtuality.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is today on the threshold of large-scale transformations (Alenezzi, M. 2023). Among the processes that accompany the changes underway are digitalization and globalization, individualization and the widening of the circle of actors involved. (Altbach, P., 2016); (Klimova, T. 2023) In the current situation, when the usual frameworks are dynamically replaced by new ones, the question is: what is quality comes to the fore (Arzhanova, I. 2018). If we talk about virtual programs in universities as a manifestation of digitalization, it is worth highlighting their scaling in the last two decades (Seaman, J. 2018). The growth in the number of programs was progressive until the abrupt transition to a synchronous environment during the pandemic, when 220 million students in 175 countries were forced to switch to online learning almost instantly.

This transition became a kind of "robustness test" of how well virtual work was debugged and how the mechanisms for working with the quality of virtual programs were verified before (Mishra, L. 2020). Having surpassed the milestone of the years 2020-2021. And by rethinking the challenges facing virtual education, the world's leading universities have set new and more ambitious goals. Thus, for example, by 2030 the University of Arizona plans to educate 100 million students online. Harvard has



seen a significant increase in interest in its online programs since the pandemic. (Vides, S. et al. 2023)

The updated context for the implementation of online university programs requires not only new effective systems. However, research on this concept in higher education focuses on how it is defined in traditional formats. Existing definitions are combined into a system, which is subsequently modified and supplemented. (Harvey, L. 1993); (Jensen, H. 2006); (Schindler, L. 2015). Each of the proposed generalizations is also studied separately. University students' perceptions of quality as a transformation should be analysed (Cheng, M. 2014). Student satisfaction and their educational experience are studied. (Vides, S. et al. 2023b). The relationship between students' academic performance and their quality assurance success in the virtual environment, but also a rethinking of the very concept of quality, position in the labor market. Establishing a relationship between the quality of education and the quality of teacher training and teachers' editorial activity (De Armas, D. et al. 2023)

These works, although they create a good picture of the theoretical foundations included in one or the other definition of quality, do not have a clear potential for their application in practice. In addition, summarizing and rethinking the interpretation of quality in its conventional perspective, they do not take into account the particularities of the virtual format. On the contrary, the corpus of publications in the field of practical work with quality is represented by a description of specific tools for quality assessment or management that do not have a theoretical foundation. In asynchronous format, these are guidelines for the development of quality assurance tools (Zhao, F. 2003). and approaches to measuring the effectiveness of these tools (Vides, S. et al. 2023). In the synchronous format, there are general recommendations to organize the educational process, increase its productivity and evaluate the results obtained. (Shuang, G. 2015)

These tools, although they allow to solve emerging problems, are criticized for the lack of a theoretical basis (Brasher, A. 2022); (Rodríguez, J. 2022) Among the studies that point out the weak theoretical roots of practical work, there are those that indicate ways to combine the levels of theory and practice. For the offline format, this is working with a culture of quality. (Elken, M. 2020); (Meshkova, T. 2010); (Harvey, L. 2008) and enter into practice based on theoretical concepts. For the synchronous format - you must work with quality based on your traditional formulations. Although they set the direction for combining the theoretical and practical levels, these few studies do not take into account the continuity of the Synchronous and Asynchronous formats. At the same time, virtual training is more vulnerable to criticism for the disconnect between theory and practice, since, in the context of a variety of tools for quality work, it shows a lack of theoretical basis. However, their need is becoming more and more tangible. (Plata, R.M. et al. 2023).

The purpose of this study is to identify what is included in the theoretical foundations of the modern concept of quality in the virtual training of university programs. The concept is being rethought with a view to its subsequent use in the process of creating internal quality assurance practices in the virtual environment, evidencing the research questions and its possible formulation would be as follows:

1. To what extent should approaches be determined? Can quality research be used in a traditional format synchronously and asynchronously?
2. Can quality work be complemented with a theoretical understanding of training terms or formats and to what extent does it depend on the format?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study is composed of four stages: comparison and generalization of the description of "conceptualizations of quality", comparison of "categories" of quality work in two formats, comparison of categories and conceptualizations and "reverse" comparison, when elements of categories with a similar theoretical basis, and grouped around a conceptualization.

A generalization of the description of conceptualizations was carried out in order to form a homogeneous theoretical basis for the concept of quality. The comparison of categories of practical



work in the Synchronous and Asynchronous environments aims to identify the continuity of formats and virtual characteristic features that complement the existing differences at the theoretical level. Giving space to the comparison of categories with conceptualizations of quality - to correlate the levels of theory and practice. The inverse comparison of categories with conceptualizations that aim to synchronize the theoretical and practical levels and can be used by university managers to work with the quality of online programs.

The materials for the main part of the study were selected using the "snowball" method and through a Google Scholar search (function-Related Articles). The key papers were those that were found in the corpus of the literature studied on quality topics the most often or were related to them. (Vides, S. et al. 2023c)

The analysis of the theoretical level of the concept of quality was carried out based on the work of L. Harvey, H. Jensen and L. Schindler. The first is an article that contains a description of existing conceptualizations of quality definitions with a focus on higher education. The second is the report of the Association of European Universities (European University Association), based on a slightly modified system of conceptualizations. The third, also based on L. Harvey's system, adds definitions of quality created by researchers in the field of higher education and is the latest publication of its kind. Subsequent works related to the conceptualization systems described above are devoted to the culture of quality. (Bloch, C. 2022) (Vides, S. et al. 2023d) and the perception of quality by students, professors and university staff. All of them are focused on studying the quality characteristics of traditional formats. We did not find any publications dedicated to rethinking the theoretical foundations of quality in the Synchronous and Asynchronous virtual environment. (Dicker, R. 2019)

The basis for analysing the practical level of quality work was the lists of quality assurance categories in synchronous and asynchronous formats developed by L. Schindler and E. Ossiannilsson, respectively. Both lists were created based on an analysis of publications and tools to work with quality. In L. Schindler's article, the categories were identified based on a generalization of about 50 indicators of quality work, extracted from the literature studied. In the work of E. (Ossiannilsson, E. 2015), which is a report by the International Council on Open and Distance Education (International Council for Open and Distance Education), the categories are identified as a result of the analysis of 40 models of quality work in the online environment. Both studies date back to 2015 and are the latest publications to summarize previously existing practical tools for quality work in each format. In the process of comparing conceptualizations with categories, common themes determined the points of intersection between the levels of theory and practice. They also served as a basis for grouping categories around each of the conceptualizations in the final stage of the study.

### **2.1. Products of the systems for conceptualizing definitions of quality in higher education: Theoretical Bases.**

In the 1980s, when the concept of "quality" was just beginning to be actively used in higher education, the industry's borrowing package included the conceptual basis (total quality management (total quality control), (focus on consumers, systematic process optimization) and tools for working with it (general understanding of the process, efficiency assessment, identification of areas of growth) (Crosby, P. 1986); (Tenner, A. 1992). This situation had several advantages: the companies (Universities) in the sector had more experience in practical work with quality, their vision of it was more rational and their approach to work was more comprehensive. The definitions of quality they propose have been "tested for robustness." Disadvantages include the fact that higher education is a different realm of industry, and for quality work to be effective, the concept of quality needs to be rethought. Over time, the indebtedness of the business environment begins to disappear. Quality work moves from creating unique definitions to aggregating them. This process leads to the emergence of a system of conceptualizations of definitions of the concept of quality in higher education with development. Conceptualization involves narrowing the focus and identifying the main and essential meaning, determines the direction of the practical work and becomes the point of refraction of the theoretical content on the practical level based on technologies in the form of digital transformation. (Valera, R.E. et al, 2023)



The system proposed by L. Harvey includes five major groups of definitions of quality, united around its key characteristics, presented in the form of conceptualizations. In H. Jensen's work, this system is slightly transformed: the number of conceptualizations increases because those proposed by L. Harvey are divided into several smaller sessions. Three of the four conceptualizations proposed in L. Schindler's review remained close in meaning to the first options, and the other two ("Operational Excellence" and "Cost Recovery") were transformed into one ("Transparency, Accountability"). The changes that have occurred reflect adjustments to a greater extent taking into account the characteristics of time and context, rather than those of everyday life. This fact shows that, first of all, approaches to determining quality are not being developed in a revolutionary way, but in an evolutionary way. Second, it demonstrates a certain stability of existing conceptualizations. The synthesis of descriptions of conceptualizations proposed in the systems allows us to speak of four large groups of definitions:

- "Exclusivity", where the central idea is the meaning of exclusivity, the desire for the highest level of achievement and superiority over competitors.
- "Fit for Purpose", where everything related to the mission, purpose and plan of the educational institution is discussed, to maintain a common vision at all levels of work and to create standards at the university level.
- "Transformation", which emphasizes the role of changes in the cognitive and non-cognitive spheres imposed by the educational process and, more broadly, the students' own stay in universities, as well as the experience lived during their studies.
- "Transparency, is shaped by merging two conceptualizations of the education system, hence, the elements that create meaning are the clarity of the university's activities for stakeholders, the competent management of resources, and the added element is
- the return of funds spent on training.

Conceptualizations reflect all the spectrums of meanings of the definitions of quality included in them, so that, at different times, one or the other becomes dominant. At the same time, none of the conceptualizations completely disappear from the field of work of the universities, and the secondary ones become the background of those that come to the fore. Thus, the conceptualization of "Fitness for purpose" is updated in the "White Paper on Higher Education in Every University Entity" (White Paper 1986), which emphasizes the primacy of the mission of universities and their proper functioning at all levels. At the same time, external evaluation bodies were formed and the idea of standardization appeared, an important part of this conceptualization. Today, the role is growing and reflected in a critical rethinking of its importance to the field of higher education. Conceptualization is becoming more widespread at a time when the goals of educational programs, focused on the needs of employers, are beginning to change more rapidly than the high-level goals of universities, and there is a need to synchronize them. (Celis, S. 2022).

"Transparency, or accountability" was the most popular in the early 1990s. Siglo XX (Henkel, M. 2000); (Newton, J. 2000). The pragmatic nature of this conceptualization was the beginning of working with quality through clearly defined categories, measurable criteria and indicators that were convenient and understandable to stakeholders. The characteristics of education systems, focused on the quality control of nations, indicate that "Transparency, or accountability" will remain relevant for quite some time. Therefore, in such a situation, the state acts as the main stakeholder and universities are faced with the need to be accountable to external evaluation bodies. Even though with the launch of reforms misnamed "regulatory reforms" aimed at reducing the number of standards, such reforms generated a gradual move towards internal practices, the accountability of universities that will continue to play an important role in their work. This applies to a greater extent to asynchronous formats in higher education, as there are currently no institutionalized external evaluation bodies for virtual education or synchronous training.

The conceptualization of "Exclusivity" reflects the traditional perception of quality associated with excellence, exclusivity and competence (Pfeffer, N. 1991). It became more popular in the 2000s, when the focus gradually shifted to the "Transparency, Accountability" Quality Scorecard Manual



(2014). Where universities are reaching a new level of competition, participating in the race for positions in international rankings. Simply to outperform competitors, and such a method becomes insufficient; it seems that it will be necessary to be better in all possible parameters (Antonoz, D. 2017). Even though after the 2000s. The importance of the "exceptional" is somewhat reduced, it does not disappear completely from the field of vision of universities in the face of the different types of training that exist and are about to be transformed.

Conceptualization "Transformation" was first recorded in education systems, and subsequently the demand for "Transformation" developed, which has been gradually increasing since the 2010s. And it is undergoing large-scale development in modern times. This conceptualization is becoming popular simultaneously with the growing popularity of the online format of university programs, on the basis of which it can be assumed that it includes "focal" aspects for the online format. Thus, the meanings inherent in the concept of "quality" are actualized through ever-changing contextual factors. (Valera, R.E. et al, 2023b). Today, one of these factors occurs in virtual education in the synchronous format. Considering that at the level of the theory behind the conceptualizations, the difference between synchronous and asynchronous formats is not clearly indicated, just as the answer to the question of what constitutes the theoretical basis of "quality" in virtual training is not obvious. (Aparicio, E. Et al. 2023)

## 2.2. Quality Work - Synchronous and Asynchronous: Practice

These two approaches are highlighted to develop a definition of quality. The first is through one of the conceptualizations described above ("from theory"). The second is through the formation of a list of categories of which it consists ("from practice"). Both approaches are relevant, but they are not correlated with each other. However, the correlation of two levels of work with quality, theoretical and practical, occurs regardless of whether it is a "spontaneous" or intentionally constructed process (Leiber, T. 2018); (Squeeze, M. 2020). The "spontaneous" formation of the theoretical level is due to the fact that universities use quality assurance practices based on their own positioning. Determining a position or point of view on internal processes before starting practical work implies that the tools selected are based on one or another idea of what quality is at a given time. Next, we will present a "snapshot" of how the levels of theory and practice are related without their intentional synchronization, and propose an approach that allows them to be correlated with each other. In the process of correlation of the two levels, abbreviated names of conceptualizations were used: SN - "Fit for Purpose", PP - "Transparency, Responsibility", I - "Exclusivity", T - "Transformation".

Comparing the categories of practical work in synchronous and asynchronous formats will allow us to see the degree of their continuity and take into account the main differences when building a framework for working with quality in practice.

A comparison of categories and their comparison with conceptualizations showed that the category "Administrative" (Asynchronous) or "Managerial" (Synchronous) is based on the conceptualizations "Fit for Purpose" and "Transparency, Accountability". "Fit for purpose" prioritizes synchronizing work at the program level with work at the institutional level. When working with quality from this perspective, programs focus on reflecting the values of all universities. The high-quality work and smooth functioning of the programs here is an important condition for the effectiveness of the university of which they are a part. "Transparency, accountability" implies clarity of the mechanics of the work of educational organizations for stakeholders. The categories "administrative" or "managerial", with a focus on mission and resource management, are therefore a practical reflection of what is theoretically implicit in the two conceptualizations of quality that underlie them. Both conceptualizations manifest themselves equally in synchronous and asynchronous formats.

The category "Support" (Asynchronous) or "Service" (Synchronous) is clearly defined through the conceptualization "Transformation". Quality through the prism of "Transformation" is the "living" by the student the educational experience, their development and well-being and their elements of psychology, organizational support and information for students, continues this conceptualization in practice. The "transformation" in this category manifests itself equally in synchrony and asynchrony formats.



The theoretical basis of the category "Educational" (Asynchrony) or "Product" (Synchrony) can be the conceptualization "Exclusivity" or "Transformation". The choice of conceptualization depends on the university's vision of specific elements in these categories. Thus, the quality of the disciplines, the educational materials and the professionalism of the teachers are considered and positioned mainly as a competitive advantage of the program. However, the theoretical basis is "Exclusivity". Since, if these same elements work to improve the quality of the student's educational experience, the correct basis would be the "Transformation", and both conceptualizations would take into account the variability of their use in this category, manifesting themselves equally within the two formats presented in the study.

The theoretical basis of a category called "Achievement" (asynchrony) or "Product" (synchrony) is heterogeneous and may consist of one, two, or three conceptualizations, depending on each specific element. Thus, the integration of students and the process of their development are based on the conceptualization of "Transformation", the scaling of the programs is based on "Exceptionality". The increase in the amount of knowledge can be based on one of the two conceptualizations mentioned above, and the acquisition of skills and abilities that lead to successful employment, in addition, can be based on "Transparency - Accountability" if the university plans to use this element as an indicator in the final report provided to stakeholders, the conceptualizations "Exclusivity" and "Transformation" in this category are equally manifested in the two aforementioned virtual training formats.

**Table 1: Categories to create a quality concept in synchronous and asynchronous formats.**

Category	Asynchronous Format	Synchronous Format
<b>Asynchronous:</b> Administrative	I. Administrative function of institutions	• Institutional Strategy (IS)
	I. Mission & Vision (MV)	• Mission (SN)
<b>Synchronous:</b> Managerial	I. Establishment of Legitimate Institutions (SN)	• Vision (SN)
	I. Compliance with internal/external norms, standards and goals (SP)	• Planning
	I. Resources and acquisitions necessary for the operation of the university (PP)	• Resources (RP)
		• Accounting for the use of technologies (dashboards, forms, tools, etc.) (PP)
Synchronous Format Differences		Technology & Platform Accounting
<b>Asynchronous:</b> Student Support	I. Availability and accessibility of the Student Support service (processing of new students, etc.) (T)	• Support for students and staff (including psychological adjustment of new students, etc.) (T)
<b>Synchronous:</b> Services	complaints, applications, etc.) (T)	• Information Resources (T)
		• Timeliness of information (T)
Synchronous Format Differences		Psychological and informational component support
<b>Asynchronous:</b> Educational	• Relevance and quality of education content (I, t)	• Quality of Educational Programs, Materials, and Course Components (I, T)
<b>Synchronous:</b> Groceries	• Competence of teachers (I, T)	• Level of education (I, T)
Synchronous format differences.		Programs and courses, focused work with materials.
<b>Asynchronous:</b> Academic performance	• Degree of student participation in the educational program (T)	• University & Student Development Process (T)
	• Interaction with university staff and professors (T)	




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<b>Synchronous:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the amount of knowledge (T, I)</li> <li>• Acquisition of skills and abilities, leading to successful employment (PP, I,T)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Escalation (I)</li> <li>• Focus on scaling programs</li> </ul>
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The weaker expression of the element of accountability in virtual programs can be seen as evidence that the external quality control framework for synchronous and asynchronous formats is not fully developed, is not widespread, or is not widely used.

Comparing the categories of the two formats, in addition to continuity, allows us to identify the characteristic features of the synchronous format. So, in the "Management" category, one of the elements of the management strategy is resource management.

In the asynchronous format, these are resources in the traditional sense; In synchronous format, they are elements of the digital space or virtual training.

In the "Support" or "Service" category, the common element to both formats is the work with student feedback, which is enhanced online with psychological and informational support components. Thus, through more careful support for students, the lack of elements of the university's physical space is compensated.

In the "Educational" or "Product" categories, the basis is the quality of the educational process, synchronously, more attention is paid to working with educational materials. When studying virtually, students are often left alone with learning resources, and at their convenience, and of course high effectiveness plays a bigger role in the quality of the program than in an asynchronous format.

In the "Achievement" or "Product" categories, the point of intersection of the formats is the learner's development process, which is presented in more detail in the asynchronous format category description. At the same time, in the synchronous format, the development of the university adds to the development of students, which is complemented by a focus on program scaling. Thus, the elements of quality work, both at the level of practice and at the level of theory, are transferred almost entirely synchronously and asynchronously. Minor adjustments are explained by the different functioning of the individual elements of the asynchronous format, as well as by the "complete" and intentional synchronous formation of what is a natural part of the asynchronous educational space (e.g., the educational environment).

The result of comparing categories with conceptualizations was a "snapshot" of the current state of theory and practice, which walk in relation to each other without intentional synchronization. An "inverse" comparison of categories and conceptualizations, in which similar elements of practical work are grouped around a certain point of view on quality, and shows how work can be structured when levels of theory and practice are related to each other (Table 2).

If a university/program prioritizes superiority over competence and the achievement of high standards (conceptualization "Exclusivity"), in asynchronous practice, the focus is on the professionalism of faculty and the competitiveness of graduates, synchronously mediated in virtual environments - on expanding programs, increasing their number. What the two formats have in common here is the work on the quality of educational materials. At the same time, for the asynchronous format, it's mainly about the content of the disciplines; For the synchronous format, it also includes resources that the student works with independently. When a university's focus is on its mission ("Fit for Purpose"), quality in practice, in both synchronous and asynchronous formats, is primarily about developing a strategy and creating a unified vision at all levels.

The Asynchronous format works with the listed elements and is accompanied by the establishment of legitimacy. If the quality for a university is, above all, the well-being and development of students ("Transformation"), then the work in practice in two formats is carried out with the service of attention to students and their applications, much more exhaustive if it becomes virtual. Therefore, this format worked and is complemented by a greater participation of students in the educational



process. In the synchronous format, student support is extended through psychological and informational support. If the first place in the perception of quality of a university is the transparency of its work mechanisms for stakeholders and the minimization of errors ("Transparency, Accounting"), then the comparative analysis of categories of practical work in synchronous and asynchronous format in relation is conceptualized in an integral and clear way with the concept of quality

**Table 2 Analysis of practical quality work in the modes of quality conceptualizations.**

<b>Exceptionality</b>	<p><b>Educational</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance and quality of new content education (as pre-competitive property)</li> <li>• Teachers' competence</li> <li>• (As a competitive advantage).</li> </ul> <p><b>Student Performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the amount of knowledge (when, if there is an objective, to improve academic performance);</li> <li>• Acquisition of skills and abilities leading to successful employment (when, if there is an objective to increase the rate of employment,</li> <li>• Employment Awards)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Grocery store.</b></p> <p>Quality of educational programs, materials, and course components. (as a competitive advantage);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of education (as a competitor - advantage).</li> </ul> <p>Grocery Store</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scaling up the program (as a tool it should strengthen the influence of universities)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Administrative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission and vision.</li> <li>• Establishment of institutions and legitimacy.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Managerial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional strategy</li> <li>• Mission</li> <li>• Vision</li> </ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	<p><b>Student Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability and accessibility of the student support service (processing of complaints, applications, etc.).</li> </ul> <p><b>Educational</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-being orientation, educational experience.</li> <li>• Relevance and quality of education ° content.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student &amp; Staff Support (including the psychological adaptation of new students, etc.);</li> <li>• Informational resources;</li> <li>• Timeliness of information.</li> <li>• Wellness orientation, educational experience)</li> <li>• Quality of educational programs.</li> </ul>

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**Student Performance**

- I. Degree of student participation in the educational program.
- II. Interaction with university staff and professors.
- III. Increase the amount of knowledge (as part of educational experience);
- IV. Acquisition of skills and abilities leading to successful employment (increasing students' values as professionals)



In practice, this means efficient, digital resource management when working in synchronous format. To this can be added the use of graduates asynchronously as a reporting indicator.

### 3. DISCUSSION

This study continues the line of work with the concept of quality through a system of conceptualizations or generalizations of its definitions around the key characteristics of quality, established by national laws and supplemented by regulations of international organizations. The results obtained showed that, during the two decades of its existence, this system has undergone a series of transformations that affected its shape, but it has not fundamentally changed. The correlation of the system with the categories of practical work with quality in higher education revealed its potential applicability as a theoretical foundation of virtual programs. The Small Differences

that emerged between synchronous and asynchronous formats confirm the conclusions of previous studies (Marciniak, R. 2018); (La Rotta, D. 2020); (Aparicio, E. Et al. 2023b)

Moving towards the development of theoretically grounded tools to work with the quality specified by (E. Brasher 2022), proposes a method to synchronize the levels of theory and practice in online university programs. This method develops the idea of the need for a philosophical basis in modern management approaches, which allows strategic management objectives to be taken into account in short- and long-term planning. A flexible theoretical basis in the form of a system of conceptualizations, which is analogous to such a base, makes it possible to focus on the priorities of the university at the stage of developing a definition of quality and to "translate" them to the level of practice. (Aparicio, E. et al. (2023c).

Likewise, the process of rethinking the concept of "quality" is part of the concept of "quality culture", which is gradually gaining popularity in research and became dominant among foreigners. Working in this direction implies that quality becomes a concept internalized, personalized and rethought by each of the actors in the educational process. The concept becomes part of the worldview of each of them, allowing them to contribute to the construction of internal work practices. The flexibility of L. Harvey's system of conceptualizations remained provided sufficient room for such a rethinking. Thus, this study continues the discussion on the semantic content of the concept of "quality" in higher education, the last significant point of which was 2020 and 2021 (pandemic). Options are proposed to use the established system of conceptualizations of quality in the updated context of higher education, of which the virtual format has become a part.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Quality in general is a rather voluminous phenomenon, including a wide range of meanings that interact with each other in complex ways. Some meanings form the core of the concept, others are built around it, in resonance with the characteristics of the context of which the online format is a part.

The description of each quality concept, if necessary, is broken down into indicators, with the help of which it is possible to restore what theoretical basis underlies the internal quality assurance system of a particular university, even if this was not purposely established. There is an opportunity to "re-assemble" a concept whose theoretical basis has not yet been formed, as is the case with online programs.

The method used, based on the combination of two levels, in addition to reconstructing the theory of quality online, allowed us to draw a conclusion about the degree of continuity of the formats and how the analysis of the practical level complements the understanding of quality.

The results of the study indicate that, both at the theoretical level and at the practical level, a similar pattern of continuity between quality in synchronous and asynchronous formats is visible. Understanding quality online is generally consistent with your understanding offline. At the same time, some of the meanings that are relevant to the asynchronous format take a back seat in the



synchronous format and vice versa. Conceptualizations "Exclusivity" and "Fit for purpose" appear equally in both formats.

"Transparency and accountability", which is of fundamental importance for the asynchronous format, is not well demonstrated in the synchronous format. On the contrary, transformation, which came to the fore much later than the others, plays a key role for the synchronous format, focusing on the educational experience of students, and the asynchronous format, this conceptualization to appear sporadically within virtual training programs.

The analysis of the level of practice in two formats showed that quality work in them is based on similar categories related to areas such as management and administrative resources, support to the educational process, and the learning process itself, which may aim to transform the student or academic outcome. Despite the similarity

With the quality of the two modes, there are differences in each category due to the specific format. Since programs are deployed in a virtual space, and resources that are an element of the management category are primarily considered digital resources.

Considering that students' transformative educational experience comes to the fore in synchronous ways and that the natural university campus environment for the asynchronous format is absent, there is a need for more careful support of the educational process, psychological and informational support. Another characteristic feature of the synchronous format is the closer interaction of students with educational materials than asynchronous ones, and therefore more time is spent working with the latter.

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