

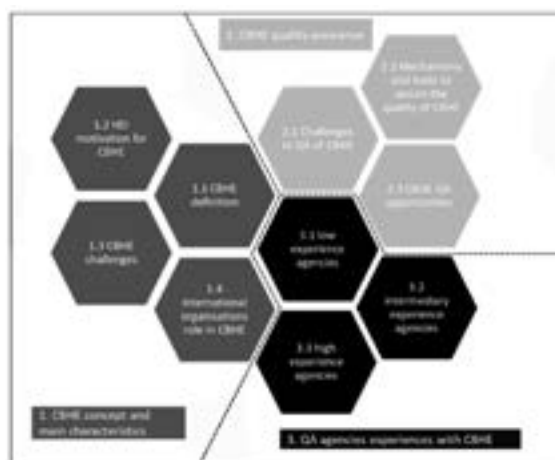
Cross-border higher education in Europe and the role of quality assurance agencies

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Over the years, with the increased internationalisation on the agenda of higher education systems and institutions, cross border higher education (CBHE) has gradually become present in the higher education scenario. CBHE can be defined as the offer of educational services in a country different from that where the higher education institution is based (UNESCO and OECD 2005).

This study discusses, from the perspective of the European quality assurance agencies (QAA), the development of CBHE in Europe and the challenges it entails, namely regarding its quality and how to assure it. Empirically, it is based on the material collected through interviews conducted with the responsible for QAA from 10 European countries: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Interview guidelines were drafted, with three main sets of questions organised around: i) CBHE conceptualisation and main characteristics; ii) CBHE quality assurance and iii) the agency's experience with CBHE quality assurance.

The results reveal that almost all QAA have at least partial experience with CBHE provision, mainly related to the evaluation of joint-degree programmes offered by European higher education institutions. The cooperation between countries and agencies emerges as one of the main challenges to the development of a common tool to enhance CBHE, which could facilitate the quality assurance process for all stakeholders. The development of policies at the European level to bind and raise the awareness of governments towards the particularities of the QA of CBHE could be a good solution to deal with this phenomenon and force actions to be put in place. The use of common guidelines specifically created for CBHE provision at the European level would contribute to increase the trustability of this type of educational offer.



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FIGURE 1

Map of the main categories and subcategories resultant from the content analysis of the data collected in the interviews with QA agencies.

References

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2005. Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education. Paris: UNESCO.