

# Alumni in the postgraduate evaluation process: a comparative analysis between Brazil and Spain

## Os egressos no processo de avaliação da pós-graduação: uma análise comparativa entre Brasil e Espanha

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### Abstract

This study aimed to establish a comparative analysis of graduate program evaluation processes in Brazil and Spain, focusing on the role of alumni in these evaluations. To achieve this, a basic, descriptive, and qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing a questionnaire administered at two Spanish higher education institutions, as well as bibliographic sources and official documents related to the graduate evaluation process in both countries. The main findings highlight that alumni are considered in the evaluation criteria and indicators of graduate programs in both educational systems, although there are subtle differences in how these evaluations are operationalized in Brazil and Spain.

**Keywords:** alumni; postgraduate; assessment; Brazil; Spain.

### Resumo

Este estudo teve como objetivo estabelecer uma análise comparativa entre os processos de avaliação da pós-graduação no Brasil e na Espanha e o papel dos egressos nessa avaliação. Para tanto, foi elaborada uma pesquisa básica, descritiva, de abordagem qualitativa, utilizando como técnica de coleta de dados um questionário aplicado em duas IES espanholas, além de bibliografias e de documentos no que se refere ao processo de avaliação da pós-graduação no Brasil e na Espanha. Como principais conclusões, destaca-se o fato de que os egressos são considerados em critérios e indicadores da avaliação da pós-graduação em ambos os sistemas educacionais dos países analisados, ainda que haja diferenças sutis na operacionalização da avaliação dos programas de pós-graduação no Brasil e na Espanha.

**Palavras-chave:** egressos; pós-graduação; avaliação; Brasil; Espanha.

### INTRODUCTION

Historically, in the Western context, higher education originated in Italy at the end of the 11th century, with its epicenter at the University of Bologna in 1088. Subsequently, universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) began to play a crucial role in the creation of the European Higher Education Area (Borges, 2013).

In the context of the expansion of higher education in Europe, the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 with the aim of promoting employability and enhancing the international competitiveness of the European education system (Leite; Ramos, 2015). To achieve this, the Declaration introduced several key measures for the signatory countries, including: adopting a degree system that allows for comparability; implementing a two-cycle system (undergraduate and graduate); establishing a credit transfer system (European Credit Transfer (and

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Accumulation) System - ECTS) to facilitate educational mobility; ensuring international mobility by providing access and opportunities for students, faculty, researchers, and administrative staff; fostering cooperation in quality assessment across Europe; and promoting curriculum development and interinstitutional collaboration (Dias Sobrinho, 2007).

With regard to higher education in Brazil, the first school of higher education was founded in 1808 by King João VI in the state of Bahia, called the School of Surgery and Anatomy (currently the Faculty of Medicine of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and since then other schools and courses have been created (Conceição; Santos, 2021). The first university was founded in 1920, the University of Rio de Janeiro, followed by the University of the Federal District in 1935 and the University of São Paulo in 1938 (Führ, 2022), which were the forerunners of a process of university expansion in the country.

Given the expansion of higher education worldwide, whose origins date back to the 11th century, countries began monitoring and assessing science from the 1960s onward (Ghenot et al., 2019), aiming to ensure the quality of higher education. Through evaluation systems, student monitoring and learning also emerged as key concerns, a topic explored in various studies that highlight the connection between assessment and learning (Pereira; Flores; Niklasson, 2016).

In Brazil, the establishment of universities occurred later compared to Europe, which has influenced the way higher education assessment is structured. At the undergraduate level, assessment was implemented through the creation of the National Higher Education Assessment System (Sinaes), established by Law no. 10,861/2004 to evaluate undergraduate programs and students' academic performance (Brasil, 2004). Regarding graduate education, in 1951, the Brazilian government established the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes), a foundation linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC), with the objective of evaluating, monitoring, and promoting *stricto sensu* graduate programs (master's and doctoral degrees) (Brasil, 2023a).

Among the criteria evaluated by Capes, alumni - graduates of the programs - have become a significant factor, as this agency considers "alumni tracking" in its assessment process, among other criteria. This information is provided by the programs in their annual reports as part of the four-year evaluation cycles submitted to Capes (Cabral et al., 2022). Consequently, maintaining contact with alumni has become essential, as they provide valuable insights to higher education institutions (HEIs). As graduates, they can assess the education they received and the professional growth opportunities offered by the institution (Oliveira, 2021). However, alumni tracking has remained a secondary concern in the management agendas of Brazilian HEIs (Simon; Pacheco, 2017).

Given the historical, legal, and cultural differences between Brazil and European countries, particularly those adhering to the Bologna Process, with Spain as a representative case, the following research question emerged: In what aspects do the graduate program evaluation processes in Brazil and Spain converge and diverge? Based on this, the objective of this study is to establish a comparative analysis of the graduate evaluation processes in Brazil and Spain, with a particular focus on the role of alumni in these assessments.

This research is particularly relevant, as no scientific studies have been found that provide such a comparison. Furthermore, investigations on the topic of "alumni" represent advancements in the scientific field and are of interest to higher education institutions (HEIs), given that a university's core activities (teaching, research, and outreach) do not conclude with a student's departure from the institution, a reality reflected in assessment systems.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the key topics that structure this study and provides information on higher education assessment systems, with a particular focus on graduate-level evaluation. The discussion delves into the Brazilian and Spanish evaluation systems, further exploring the role of alumni as a consistent element in graduate program assessment.

### Higher education assessment systems

The assessment of higher education is a fundamental step in analyzing the quality of education provided by higher education institutions (HEIs), national education systems, and undergraduate and graduate programs across various fields of knowledge and different countries (Oliveira et al., 2022). Higher education assessment systems are implemented differently across nations, each serving a specific purpose.

In Europe, according to Vasconcelos et al. (2012), the ministers of education from the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Germany signed a declaration in Paris in 1998 – the Sorbonne Declaration. The following year, the education ministers of 19 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, aiming to establish a coherent, compatible, attractive, and, above all, competitive European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Process, which marked a significant milestone in the reform of European higher education institutions, had as its main goal the creation of a European Higher Education Area that would promote the internationalization of HEIs, facilitate the mobility of the academic community (both students and faculty), enhance employability for European citizens, and contribute to Europe's economic and social growth (Morgado, 2009).

Following this Declaration, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was established in 2010, encouraging other nations to develop higher education systems that ensure the quality and evaluation of academic programs. The EHEA also defined the recognition of degrees offered in different European countries, ensured the compatibility of higher education systems, and facilitated student mobility within the academic space (Guerra; Leite, 2022).

In Brazil, the assessment process has undergone two distinct phases, considering undergraduate and graduate levels. Regarding undergraduate education, the process officially began in 1980 with the creation of the Executive Group for the Reformulation of Higher Education (Geres). However, the system evolved with the establishment of the Sinaes System in 2004 (Araújo; Oliveira Dias, 2021), which consists of three main components: the evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs), the assessment of undergraduate programs, and the evaluation of student performance. As a result, Sinaes provides “[...] a description of the program, including its challenges and potential, from a historical perspective, positioning it within the social, political, and economic context of the state and the country” (Oliveira; Pietro Zorzi; Piovesan, 2020, p. 3).

Regarding graduate education, in order to ensure the quality of postgraduate studies in the country, the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) carries out, among its main functions, the evaluation of the National Graduate System (SNPG) (Brasil, 2023b). This assessment encompasses master's and doctoral programs, which constitute the central theme of this study and will be further explored in the following sections.

### Graduate program assessment in Brazil

Regarding graduate program assessment, the Brazilian government established Capes, a foundation linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC), whose mission is the “[...] expansion and consolidation of *stricto sensu* graduate programs (master's and doctoral degrees)” (Brasil, 2023c). Graduate programs in Brazil are categorized into **lato sensu** and **stricto sensu**: the former includes specialization courses, including professional development programs, while the latter comprises master's and doctoral programs. These programs must be authorized, recognized, and approved by the MEC, with requests submitted to the National Education Council (CNE) based on Capes' evaluation and recommendations (Brasil, 2023c).

Capes evaluates graduate programs through two distinct processes: entry assessment, which pertains to the evaluation of new course proposals (APCNs), and ongoing assessment, which involves the periodic evaluation of existing programs. Both processes are based on the principles of recognition and reliability, ensuring quality through peer review and standardized criteria that are periodically updated by the academic and scientific community. Additionally, these processes are grounded in transparency, as all decisions, actions, and results are made publicly available (Brasil, 2023d).

Capes currently conducts its evaluation on a quadrennial basis through the Sucupira Platform. Established on May 30, 2012, the Sucupira Platform has become the primary system used

by graduate programs (PPGs) to input information and meet Capes' assessment criteria (Brasil, 2023e). These criteria encompass three main components, as applied in the 2017-2020 quadrennial evaluation: Program, Training, and Societal Impact, along with specific subcriteria and respective weightings in the evaluation process conducted by Capes (Brasil, 2019).

Based on these criteria and subcriteria, graduate programs (PPGs) are evaluated and assigned scores ranging from 1 to 7. Scores 1 and 2 indicate programs that either do not qualify for accreditation by Capes or are subject to discreditation if previously included in the evaluation system. A score of 3 is the minimum required for accreditation, with programs rated 3, 4, and 5 classified as Graduate Support Programs (PROAP). Meanwhile, programs receiving the highest scores, 6 and 7, are recognized for international excellence and are designated as Academic Excellence Programs (PROEX) (Maccari et al., 2014).

Unlike Brazil, higher education assessment systems in Europe vary according to governmental objectives and the specific realities of each country. The following subsection will address Spain's higher education assessment system, which is the focus of this study.

### **Higher education and graduate program assessment in Spain**

The regulation of higher education in Spain has distinct characteristics compared to other countries within the European Higher Education Area (Ríos, 2015). In Spain, the education system is overseen by the Ministry of Education, which holds specific responsibilities regarding the country's higher education system, in coordination with regional administrations. Under the Ministry of Education, there is a Secretariat of Education (Secretaría de Estado de Educación, Formación Profesional y Universidades) and a General Secretariat of Universities (Secretaría General de Universidades).

Each of these entities has its own leadership and specific responsibilities concerning higher education institutions (HEIs). The system is guided by the following principles: quality, equal opportunities, merit, academic freedom, cooperation, efficient allocation of public resources, transparency, and accountability (Sebastião, 2019).

Santos (2011) highlights that with the establishment of the First National Plan for University Quality Assessment in 1995, the Spanish higher education system began systematically implementing quality assurance procedures. The objectives included promoting institutional assessment, providing evaluation methodologies aligned with ongoing developments within the European Union, and offering objective data to support decision-making by relevant authorities.

Spain's higher education law, known as the Organic Law of Universities (Espanha, 2001), was enacted in 2001 by King Juan Carlos I. This law regulates the university system and is commonly referred to in legislation as LOU/2001. The Second National Plan, introduced in 2001, led to the creation of agencies responsible for evaluating Spanish higher education institutions (HEIs), notably the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (Aneca). Aneca was established on July 19, 2002, "[...] in accordance with the provisions of the LOU – it is a state foundation aimed at ensuring the external quality of the university system [...]" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, p. 19). The LOU was amended in 2007, becoming the Modified Organic Law of Universities – Lomlou (Espanha, 2007). More recently, in the first half of 2023, a new law, Organic Law 2/2023, came into effect (Espanha, 2023). However, this new legislation did not introduce substantial changes regarding the assessment of Spanish graduate programs.

Aneca is the institution responsible for the evaluation, certification, and accreditation of the Spanish university system, aiming for its continuous improvement and adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation, 2023). Thus, Aneca assumes responsibility for ensuring the quality of education, university degrees, courses, faculty members, and institutions in general, in collaboration with the Agencies of the Autonomous Communities. Aneca's evaluation programs include faculty assessment, degree evaluation, and institutional evaluation (Sebastião, 2019).

Regarding graduate program assessment, scientific studies indicate that there is no distinction between the evaluation of graduate and undergraduate education in Spain. This is primarily

due to the Bologna Declaration (European Higher Education Area, 2023), which, among other measures, promoted the adoption of a two-cycle education system, undergraduate and graduate, and established the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The ECTS system facilitates academic mobility among member countries (now totaling 49 nations) and ensures the recognition of credits earned at participating institutions.

In conjunction with this process, the National Plan for the Evaluation of Universities (PNECU) was formulated, implemented between 1995 and 2001, with one of its main objectives being the promotion of quality in Spanish universities (Hortale; Mora, 2005). Thus, based on the PNECU, the LOU (2001), and the Aneca (2011), the Spanish government has demonstrated a commitment to evaluating higher education at all levels (undergraduate and graduate), aiming to ensure excellence in education quality.

## METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Regarding methodological characterization, this research is classified as basic in nature, with a qualitative approach and a descriptive objective, as it conducted a detailed investigation through the interpretation and analysis of information (Marconi; Lakatos, 2010) and the description of the characteristics of a population or phenomenon (Silva; Menezes, 2005). Thus, the study sought to analyze the information obtained to understand the functioning of graduate program evaluations in Brazil and Spain and how graduates participate in this process.

Regarding data collection techniques, the data were initially obtained through bibliographic and documentary research (secondary sources). For the bibliographic search in the Google Scholar database, the following keywords were used: "Graduate Management," "Higher Education Evaluation in Brazil," "Higher Education Evaluation in Spain," "Graduate Studies Evaluation in Brazil," and "Graduate Studies Evaluation in Spain." This process led to the theoretical framework addressed in this study.

The documentary research included government documents from Brazil and Spain regarding the evaluation of graduate studies. In the case of Brazil, the Capes evaluation regulations were consulted, allowing access to the evaluation forms of graduate programs and the criteria used by the agency in this process. The available documents, combined with the aforementioned bibliographic research, proved sufficient to achieve the objectives of this study.

In the case of Spain, documents were obtained from the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (Aneca), and the Ley Orgánica del Sistema Universitario, which regulates the Spanish university system, was also considered. Unlike the data collected on the Brazilian context, the Spanish documents were not sufficient to fully achieve the objectives of this study. However, they were essential for understanding that, in Spain, the graduate evaluation process is carried out in a decentralized manner, leading to variations among the different autonomous communities.

This scenario highlighted the need to return to the field for further data collection, enabling the identification of how graduate evaluation is conducted in practice and which criteria are applied in this process in Spain. To this end, primary data were collected through the application of a questionnaire, which was answered by representatives working at the time of the research in the department responsible for institutional evaluation and quality at two Spanish higher education institutions (HEIs) located in the Community of Madrid. In compliance with research participation terms, these institutions were anonymized in the presentation of the results and are identified as IE1 and IE2.

Additionally, this additional data collection phase within the Spanish context aimed to deepen the understanding of situations that spontaneously and contingently emerge in professional practice, without disclosing any data that could identify the subjects. Therefore, this research was exempt from registration and evaluation by the CEP-Conep system, in accordance with Resolution no. 510, of April 7, 2016, which establishes the regulations applicable to research in Human and Social Sciences whose methodological procedures involve the use of data directly obtained from participants.



The questionnaire was administered during the first semester of 2021 as part of the doctoral sandwich program undertaken by one of the authors of this article. A summary of the questionnaire questions is presented in Chart 1.

**Chart 1.** Summary of the question in the questionnaire sent to Spanish HEIs.

Question	Text
1	Which agency(ies) is/are responsible for evaluating the graduate programs at the Institution?
2	Describe how the evaluation is conducted at each level of graduate education (specialization, master's, and doctoral).
3	How is the quality of the programs measured (concept, grade, scale, etc.) and where can this information be found?
4	What can lead to the non-renewal of graduate program accreditation? What are the consequences of this for the Institution?
5	How does the evaluation result contribute to the improvement of the programs?
6	What is the role and impact of alumni in the evaluation of graduate programs?
7	How do graduate programs maintain contact with their alumni?
8	What indicators are used for alumni management (e.g., employability, publications, application of research results, etc.)?

**Source:** Prepared by the authors of this article.

The data obtained were analyzed using an interpretivist analysis approach, which, according to Triviños (2012), involves the triangulation of collected data, theoretical foundation, and researchers' experience. This process led to a comprehensive understanding of the objective proposed in this study, namely, the comparative analysis of graduate program evaluation processes in Brazil and Spain, as well as the role of alumni in this evaluation. The following section presents the results and discussions based on the theoretical framework.

As a delimitation, it makes sense to mention that the analyzed data reflect the process within the Autonomous Community of Madrid, which, according to data from the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Universities, accounts for approximately 20% of the country's universities. Although the evaluation of graduate programs in Spanish universities follows the same legislation across different autonomous communities, it is estimated that studies encompassing a broader national context may yield complementary results to those obtained in this study, which will be presented in the following sections.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initially, it is essential to emphasize that the term "graduate" refers to a student who has successfully completed their program (Cabral, 2021). Graduate management is a topic of interest to higher education institution (HEI) administrators, as it is through graduates (internationally known as alumni) that programs are evaluated in an impartial manner (unlike students who are still enrolled in the courses), this allows for feedback on the learning process and the quality of education offered by the institution (Oliveira, 2021).

The exchange between the theoretical training offered and the practical experiences lived constitutes the relationship between HEIs and their graduates, even though maintaining contact with former students after graduation proves to be a challenge. This information also resonates with university evaluation agencies, as is the case in Brazil through Brasil (2023b). Therefore, research on graduates is considered relevant so that institutional managers may understand the importance of graduate follow-up, regardless of the level of education, since the university's commitment does not end with graduation (Cabral et al., 2022). Furthermore, according to Cabral et al. (2022), in addition to representing a link between the university and

society, graduates constitute a permanent element of the outcome of a process of personal and social transformation.

In a study on the proposition of guidelines for managing the relationship with alumni from a Graduate Program in Administration in Brazil, Cabral et al. (2022, p. 160) found that Capes, the foundation responsible for evaluating graduate programs in Brazil, emphasizes the relevance of alumni in the evaluation process.

The information requested by Capes during the annual follow-ups reveals the agency's concern with potential inconsistencies between the objectives proposed by graduate programs and the competencies expected to be developed in their alumni. It also becomes evident that programs must offer a curriculum aligned with the desired graduate profile, including the necessary content for training in the program's field of concentration. Furthermore, it is clear that Capes aims to identify, through the data provided by the programs, the alumni's contributions to society, scientific advancement, and the graduate programs themselves (Cabral et al., 2022, p. 160).

In fact, in the Capes evaluation form proposed for the 2017–2020 four-year period, alumni are assessed through the following sub-criteria: 2.1, titled "Quality of the production of students and alumni" (intellectual production related to students and/or alumni and/or others deemed relevant by the area); 2.3, which addresses the "Placement, performance, and evaluation of alumni in relation to the education received"; and 3.2, also titled "Placement, performance, and evaluation of alumni in relation to the education received" (Brasil, 2019). This demonstrates that the Brazilian government regards alumni as key stakeholders in ensuring the quality of graduate education in the country.

Globally, as cited by Romero (2004, p. 319, our translation), "[...] among all the groups from whom information is requested in order to evaluate different aspects of the programs, the most frequently mentioned in the literature is, without a doubt, the alumnus".

In the Spanish context, when verifying the agency(IEs) responsible for evaluating graduate programs (PPGs) at the institution, both IE1 and IE2 reported that the same agency carries out this role, namely the one designated to evaluate the university system of the Autonomous Community of Madrid (Ríos, 2015). In contrast, in the Brazilian context, there is only one entity responsible for evaluation across the entire national territory, which encompasses different subject areas that conduct the evaluation of graduate programs.

Regarding the evaluation process at each level of graduate education (specialization, master's, and doctoral programs), it was identified from the questionnaires answered that, according to current legislation, master's and doctoral programs must renew their accreditation every four years for master's programs and up to six years for doctoral programs, starting from the date of their verification by the Council of Universities or from the date of their last accreditation. Furthermore, in order to maintain their recognition as official degrees, programs must obtain a favorable accreditation report, as established by Royal Decree no. 1,393/2007, which regulates the organization of official education programs, as amended by Royal Decree no. 861/2010.

In this regard, it is observed that the evaluation timeline for graduate programs is similar to that adopted in Brazil, which, however, applies a four-year evaluation cycle for both master's and doctoral levels. As for the process of renewal and accreditation of official degrees and programs, it is structured into three phases: the self-assessment report (IA), in which the university describes and evaluates the status of the degree or doctoral program in relation to the established criteria and guidelines; the external visit, in which a group of external reviewers analyzes the self-assessment report along with all available information and visits the center(s) where the program is delivered to verify the information collected, conduct interviews with key stakeholders, inspect facilities, and issue a reasoned opinion based on the evaluation criteria and guidelines (resulting in the External Visit Report - IVE); and the final evaluation, in which the Foundation's Evaluation and Accreditation Commission reviews the IA and IVE to issue a favorable opinion or indicate the aspects that must be necessarily modified in order to obtain a favorable opinion. The university may appeal the decision, in which case the Committee will issue a Final Report (IF). Additionally, it was identified that the evaluation occurs through different processes: verification, monitoring, and accreditation renewal.

Regarding the evaluation phases, it is noteworthy that the site visit conducted by the evaluation team to the facilities used by the program is foreseen, in the context of the Spanish evaluation process, as a means of verifying the information presented in the self-assessment phase. In contrast, under the evaluation carried out by Capes, no such visit takes place, as the process is based on the data submitted by graduate programs through the Sucupira Platform (Brasil, 2023e).

Regarding the possibility of measuring the quality of graduate programs (PPGs) and where this information can be accessed, IE1 reported that the evaluation process is based on three main elements: management, resources, and outcomes. These elements are composed of specific criteria and guidelines that outline the aspects to be considered when assessing the condition of a course or program, ultimately determining whether it is eligible to receive a favorable report for the renewal of its accreditation. Furthermore, IE1 noted that each accreditation criterion is assessed on four levels: exceeded with excellence (exceeds basic requirements); achieved (fully meets the criteria); partially achieved (meets minimum criteria, although some aspects need improvement); or not achieved (does not meet minimum criteria).

IE2, in turn, briefly stated that the assessment of graduate programs is carried out through indicators and analyses aligned with the Bologna Process. This division of the evaluation process into criteria and measurement levels is similar to the approach adopted by Capes for Brazilian graduate programs. In general, the structure of the process is also comparable, encompassing aspects such as program structure, planning, material and human resources; quality of education and scholarly output; and the outcomes and impacts generated by the training (Brasil, 2019). However, it is worth noting that the result of the Capes evaluation assigns numerical scores to graduate programs, whereas, in the Spanish system, it is the individual courses that are formally evaluated. Additionally, it appears that, in the Spanish case, greater emphasis is placed on the result of the process specifically, (the recognition or non-recognition of the program).

Regarding the factors that may lead to the non-renewal of postgraduate program accreditation and the consequences for the institution, it was found that, in the Spanish context, an unfavorable evaluation result occurs when four criteria receive a grade of D (unfavorable). In this regard, IE1 reported that, if the Provisional Report is unfavorable, it will include "aspects that must necessarily be modified in order to obtain a favorable opinion". In such a case, the university must submit, within the stipulated deadline, a document containing an Improvement Plan. Once the deadline for submitting arguments and/or the Improvement Plan has passed, the Full Committee for Evaluation and Accreditation will review the documents and issue the final reports for the renewal of accreditation. If the unfavorable opinion is upheld, and a feasible Improvement Plan has been submitted, the program will be subject to special monitoring. Upon receipt of the final report, the University Council will issue the corresponding resolution. If the resolution remains unfavorable, the degree program will be declared terminated, and the university must take the necessary measures to ensure the academic rights of the students enrolled in the program. Ultimately, non-renewal results in the discontinuation of the degree.

A similarity can be observed between the Brazilian programs and the Spanish system with regard to the procedural flow, although there are differences in the terminology used in the Spanish context. In Brazil, non-accreditation is associated with the assignment of scores "1" and "2" by Capes, as highlighted by Maccari et al. (2014), which corresponds to the assignment of an unfavorable rating in the Spanish system. In both cases, there is a time frame for submitting an appeal regarding the decision, and if the unfavorable stance on accreditation persists, the degrees lose their official recognition.

Regarding the extent to which evaluation results contribute to program improvement, the data analyzed indicate that when prescriptions or recommendations are included in the Final Evaluation Report, the program receives relevant information to guide enhancements. The process of preparing the self-assessment report itself contributes to identifying the program's strengths and weaknesses, fostering the recognition of opportunities for improvement. In this regard, IE2 indicated that the outcome of the evaluation leads to the continuous improvement of the degree offered by the institution. Furthermore, it was observed that the evaluation process of the Spanish university system demonstrates favorable elements



in relation to its intended purpose, the ongoing enhancement of the university system, and its alignment with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation, 2023).

With regard specifically to graduates (Cabral, 2021), the study sought to investigate the role and impact of alumni in the evaluation of graduate programs. In this context, it was found that, in the Spanish system, during the external visit, the panel of experts conducts a hearing with representatives of the program's alumni, who are given the opportunity to express their opinions. In doing so, alumni contribute by identifying weaknesses and suggesting necessary improvements to the graduate programs. Given this, the participation of alumni in the evaluation process of graduate programs in Spain is clearly relevant, as previously emphasized by Romero (2004). It is also important to highlight that alumni play a fundamental role in the evaluation of Brazilian graduate programs, and that graduates are indeed capable of assessing the impact of the education they received and proposing improvements both to the institution's infrastructure and to the overall educational process (Cabral et al., 2022).

In order to identify the platforms and mechanisms used by Spanish institutions to maintain contact with their alumni, IE1 reported that each program implements different strategies. One of the most common actions is to contact graduates to carry out satisfaction and employability surveys. IE2, in turn, stated that this contact is made via email. It is observed that the mechanisms used by both Spanish and Brazilian institutions are specific to the strategies adopted by each program or course; however, they are aligned with the information that programs are required to monitor and provide for accreditation purposes.

Finally, regarding the indicators used by graduate programs (PPGs) for alumni management, the indicators vary depending on whether the program is a master's or a doctoral program. In the case of master's programs, the focus is mainly on satisfaction and employability. In contrast, doctoral programs also analyze research impact in terms of publications, patents, technology transfer to industry, among other aspects. Different indicators are used, such as: dropout rate; graduation rate (doctoral level); mobility rate; number of theses; percentage of part-time theses; percentage of theses defended in the "Publications" format; percentage of theses defended with "International" distinction; percentage of theses defended with "cum laude" distinction; percentage of theses defended under international joint supervision; percentage of theses defended with "Industrial" mention; scientific contributions resulting from the thesis; doctoral students' satisfaction with the Doctoral Program; graduates' satisfaction with the Doctoral Program; satisfaction with mobility; and employment placement rate. Additionally, both supply and demand indicators are taken into consideration.

In this regard, it was found that both Spanish and Brazilian graduate education systems rely on indicators linked to alumni management to ensure the quality of the programs offered. A noteworthy distinction is that, in the Brazilian system, master's and doctoral programs are evaluated based on the same items, with variations only in the weighting of these items depending on the program type (academic or professional) (Brasil, 2019). Although the terminology presents some differences, the underlying objective remains the same namely, to gather data concerning the outcomes of student training, primarily through alumni monitoring, in order to demonstrate the impact of the education provided (Cabral, 2021).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to establish a comparative analysis between the graduate program evaluation processes in Brazil and Spain, with a particular focus on the role of alumni in such evaluations. To achieve this, a basic, descriptive, and qualitative research was conducted, employing data collection through a questionnaire applied to Spanish higher education institutions, in addition to bibliographic sources and official documents regarding the evaluation processes of Brazilian graduate programs.

The main difference between the evaluation models of Spain and Brazil lies in the fact that, in Brazil, the evaluation is centralized and conducted by Capes, whereas in Spain, despite the existence of a National Agency responsible for the evaluation process of higher education institutions, it relies on local agencies from the Autonomous Communities to carry out

evaluations. Additionally, it is worth noting that, in Brazil, different bodies are responsible for evaluating undergraduate and graduate education levels. In Spain, however, due to the education system adopted by countries that signed the Bologna Treaty, there is no such separation, and the evaluations are conducted by the agencies of the respective Autonomous Communities.

In general, it was noted that in the university systems of both countries, the evaluation time frame, procedural flow, criteria, levels, assessment items, and results are similar. Finally, it is important to highlight that, although there are differences in the evaluation process, the inclusion of criteria and indicators related to graduates is present in the systems of both countries, suggesting the relevance of this topic for assessing the quality of postgraduate programs offered both in Brazil and in Spain.

For future studies, it is suggested to deepen the analysis regarding evaluation in the European context and to examine, in specific documentation, the relative weights of the assessment criteria related to graduates in the Spanish university system.

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#### Authors contribution

TLOC: Conceptualization; methodology; management, data collection and analysis; project administration; writing; review. FCS: Conceptualization; methodology; data analysis; review. ES: Methodology; data analysis and visual preparation; writing. ASVP: Conceptualization; methodology; project administration; review. CSA: Project administration and review.

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