STUDENTS’ COMPLEX TRAJECTORIES: EXPLORING DEGREE CHANGE AND TIME TO DEGREE

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Introduction

• Higher education enrollment has increased in developing countries in recent decades  
• The increasing diversity of the student population, as well as of higher education institutions and programmes, has encouraged the diversification of trajectories  
  • dropping out, stopping out for a time, transferring across programmes or institutions, enrolling part-time, and taking longer to conclude the degree programme  
• In this study, we focus our analysis on students with a complex trajectory, namely those who have transferred to a different programme from the one in which they enrolled at university.

Objectives

• To propose a method that can assist programme managers, counselling and tutoring services in determining the time to degree completion for each student  
• Having identified those likely to take longer, higher education institutions can design policies to prevent longer pathways

Data and methodology

• Machine learning approach:  
  • The reasons justifying non-accreditation substantially replicate the conditions for conditional accreditation

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education sector</th>
<th>Accreditation</th>
<th>Conditionally accredited</th>
<th>Non-accredited</th>
<th>Accredited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eng., manuf. and construction industry</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences, commerce and law</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science, math and computing</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and social care</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accreditation conditions

- Third mission activities  
- Interinstitutional collaborations  
- Infrastructures and material resources  
- Teaching skills  
- Research  
- Organisation  
- Curricular plan

- Practically any condition was more often pointed out for doctoral programmes in private universities than in public ones  
- In both sectors, the doctoral programmes’ curricular plan, organisation and research were the aspects mostly addressed by the conditions

Conclusions

• Portuguese QA system in operation since 2009 has indeed been contributing to the reorganisation of doctoral education  
  • Close down of doctoral programmes  
  • Identification of conditions aiming programmes’ improvement  
• Accreditation had more impact on the doctoral education offer of private universities than of the public ones

- There is an overlap between the reasons justifying programmes’ non-accreditation and the conditions put forward for their conditional accreditation  
- The external QA system implemented in Portugal indeed affected the quality of doctoral education