

## Exploratory model of institutionalism in the COVID-19 era

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### Abstract

Institutionalism has been studied from an isomorphic approach, which supposes the reflection of state policies in institutional procedures, as would be the case of flexibility (intensive division of labor), informality (runaway job protection) and multilateralism (process synchronization). The objective of this article was to specify a model for the study of the phenomenon, by establishing the reliability and validity that measures three of the dimensions in question. A non-experimental study was carried out with a non-probabilistic selection of 100 teachers, administrators and students from a public university in central Mexico subject to certification processes. From a structural model it was found that flexibility was established as the reflecting factor of the new institutionalism construct, recommending the contrast of the construct that was explained by three factors up to of its variance

**Keywords:** *Institutionalist, culture, unilateralism, climate, model*

### Introduction

As of March 2022, the pandemic has claimed the lives of eight million, although underreporting of atypical pneumonia suggests that the figure could double (WHO, 2022). The anti-COVID-19 policies adopted the strategies of distancing and confinement until the distribution of vaccines that immunized and reduced the risks of contagion to vulnerable groups such as older adults and fully grown adults (PAHO, 2022). Very soon, the risk traffic light system was adopted: the red color represented the maximum risk probability and the green color the minimum risk possibility (OECD, 2022). In both colors, the use of face masks, alcohol gel, hand washing, mask and gloves prevails (SSA, 2022). Based on these strategies, the policies were oriented towards the transition from the traditional classroom to the virtual one (Romaniuk, 2021). As immunization progressed, the scenario was reversed, although the hybrid system that consists of combining classroom attendance with the use of platforms is adopted as a transition towards deconfinement (Matkin et al., 2019).

Precisely, the government's risk communication towards educational institutions opened the

discussion on autonomy and risk co-management in the prevention of infections, diseases and deaths from COVID-19 (Vargas, 2018). In the face of anti-COVID-19 policies, university governance suggests the hybrid model as a preventive protocol before the immunization of professors, administrators, and students (Rahman, 2021). In contrast, the institutionalist model that supposes the implementation of anti-COVID-19 public policies based on the epidemiological traffic light (Hsu et al., 2018).

Broadly speaking, institutionalism is an instance in which factors such as authoritarianism, conformity, and unilateralism prevail, which contrast with factors such as flexibility, formality, and multilateralism, which are indicators of complexity (Carreón et al., 2017a). HEIs have the dilemma of being instruments of development at different levels and areas, but they are also areas of social exclusion. In this sense, they guarantee access to satisfiers that imply a better quality of life, but reduce subjective well-being to its minimum [removed] Sánchez et al., 2017). This is so because in their eagerness to correspond to the demands of the market, HEIs train professionals trained to produce, although limited in terms of their

occupational health, since employment opportunities are becoming fewer and more precarious (Izcarra, 2011). In this way, HEIs have set out to train entrepreneurs who encourage the economy of micro and small businesses, not only because they provide 90% of jobs, but also because the prevention of accidents and illnesses depends more and more on the individual and their lifestyles, motivations, dispositions, skills and knowledge (Carreón et al., 2017b).

However, by encouraging occupational health through entrepreneurship and the quality of services and products, HEIs significantly reduce collective well-being because it legitimizes public policies aimed

at individual well-being (Carreón, 2016). This is how public safety, essentially food safety, increasingly depends on the individual's abilities to manage diets that reduce diseases related to overweight and obesity (García et al., 2017). A food health would guarantee production whatever it may be, but if food is compromised, then the productive systems would be on the verge of collapse (Aguilar et al., 2016). Consequently, the security that the stewardship of the State represented has now been reduced to perceptions of insecurity on the part of its actors; rulers and ruled (Carreón et al., 2017c). Even public security is now spread across national, human, citizen and private (see Table 1).

Table 1: Dimensions of the determinants of the HEI dilemma

Dimension	Quality of life	Subjective well-being
<b>Territorial</b>	<i>The authoritarian state delimits its sphere of influence based on the defense of its territory and with it the knowledge of its population, as well as its potential victims of dispossession or oppression.</i>	<i>The subjects develop risk perceptions that guide them to the collective identity for the defense of a territory.</i>
<b>National</b>	<i>The security that privileges the identity towards a territory, customs and values supposes a patrimony of ruler and ruled.</i>	<i>The governed assess and calibrate their values and identity based on the delimitation of an ideology that legitimizes them and distinguishes them from other entities.</i>
<b>Human</b>	<i>The construction of a National State depends on the freedoms and individual guarantees of those who make it up.</i>	<i>Citizenship develops the capacities according to the freedoms that the State grants.</i>
<b>Public</b>	<i>The construction of an agenda is carried out from the dissemination of issues concerning the stewardship of the State.</i>	<i>Civil society establishes issues with respect to their rulers, but based on their local impact.</i>
<b>Citizen</b>	<i>The State includes citizens in public administration and management based on deliberation, consensus and co-responsibility.</i>	<i>Citizenship develops spheres and networks of entrepreneurship, while excluding the State from central issues such as security.</i>
<b>Private</b>	<i>The State delegates its security to the individual and the groups to which it belongs or wants to belong.</i>	<i>Civil spheres and entrepreneurial networks build their monitoring and risk prevention systems.</i>

Source: Elaborated with literature review

It is precisely these dimensions that envision the transformation of the State and the emergence of a governance that, in the case of higher education, takes on special relevance, since the production of knowledge is the main currency of this new system of government (Pérez et al., 2017). In the context of governance, the leadership of the State administered and managed the reproduction of knowledge, skills and innovations. In this way, two educational axes were established: science and technology (Espinal and Gutiérrez, 2014). Countries developed in science and technology disseminated their contributions and transferred their findings to dependent countries. Talent from emerging countries even migrated to developed countries.

In the current context, the proliferation of civil spheres and networks generates knowledge around State institutions, even when financing is determined or sponsored by government action, the production of

knowledge is already the heritage of organized groups of civil society. Although the administration of the State has been reduced to knowledge management, the institutionalism and isomorphism of HEIs has expanded to the areas of knowledge. During the period from the industrial revolution of 1780 to the digital revolution of 1930, organizations adjusted to productivity standards, effort paradigms and profit logics.

In parallel, isomorphic institutionalism was complemented by sociopolitical patrimonialism and had repercussions on educational credentialism. In such a process, HEIs adjusted the quality of their processes and products to the guidelines of public policies consisting of evaluation, accreditation and certification, but the distance between the curriculum and market demands determined the emergence of credentialism. In other words, educational quality includes three phases related to **evaluation** –

establishment of indicators and measurement of individual, group and institutional capacities in the face of market requirements and educational policies—; **accreditation – establishment of** the parameters determined by the educational policy and the corresponding financing; **certification –** recognition of achievements in relation to objectives and goals in accordance with institutional development programs—.

Unlike isomorphism and patrimonialism, credentialism is encouraged by the HEIs while the influence of the State in them is rather a feature of their stewardship. In the case of increased enrollment and academic merit, they are common in HEIs. In the

case of neo-institutionalism, the emergence of civil actors in public administration and management revealed the dilemma of HEIs: academic cooperation versus opportunism. Thus, the emphasis on information processing for individual advantage contrasts with information dissemination and content monitoring. In other words, institutionalism versus the new institutionalism crystallizes the dilemma of HEIs that, on the one hand, train individuals and, on the other, encourage the construction of knowledge. The difference is substantial, since the entrepreneurship of civil spheres and knowledge networks underlie the new institutionalism while civil mobilization and collective action are symptoms of institutionalism (see Table 2).

**Table 2:** Political dimensions between the actors of the educational systems

Dimension	Institutionalism	New institutionalism
<b>Evaluation</b>	<i>The State, through public administration and management, selects educational systems through institutional management or adjustment to the values that deserve more emphasis and attention to government action and political intentionality.</i>	<i>The State, with the participation of experts in education, generates instruments for measuring the opportunities and capacities of HEIs.</i>
<b>Accreditation</b>	<i>The management of the State in the matter not only consists in the establishment of quality indicators, but also lies in the anticipation of external accrediting institutions to the governmental action.</i>	<i>The inclusion of experts in the field guarantees the legitimacy of the educational administration and policies. HEIs sponsor and legitimize other HEIs.</i>
<b>Certification</b>	<i>The management of educational quality culminates in this phase and this represents an indirect evaluation of government performance, as well as the legitimacy of the processes of exclusion of HEIs.</i>	<i>The hegemonic HEIs establish shared management and administration systems with other HEIs in order to dispense with State institutions.</i>

Source: Elaborated with literature review

It is possible to observe two mutually exclusive processes: the State guides the participation of enlightened sectors in educational quality, but the citizenry becomes independent of the budget and experience of the institutions to configure associations and governing bodies of higher education. In the evolution of the governance of HEIs, networks and civil and digital spheres proliferate with the intention of building or rebuilding a common future between the actors (García, 2013). The differences between the rulers and the ruled that served to legitimize the model of governability and stewardship of the State, are now dissolved in mainly digital scenarios such as distance, online or open education mediated by some ICT.

Knowledge networks underlie public administration to the extent that it moves away from the agenda established in the media and ICTs. Unlike civil spheres that seek to legitimize the internal

organization of groups, networks are rather instruments of production and dissemination of knowledge based on the symbolic representation of reality. In this way, the discussion that characterizes civil spheres differs from the persuasion that digital networks entail. The consensus established through dialogue in the spheres is now rather established by the association between current issues with respect to shared symbols (Vega, 2010).

The digital networks rather reflect the complexity and not the institutionalist of the civil sectors. The politically correct speeches that are highly valued in the spheres, in the digital networks are only attached to the images. The existing relationships between spheres and networks with respect to management and public administration are useful to the extent that one seeks to differentiate the citizen sectors that build an alternative governance to the stewardship of the State (see table 3).

**Table 3:** Dimensions of political and citizen action around education

Dimension	Government administration	Public Management
<b>Civil spheres</b>	<i>The State controls the quality of educational-academic processes and products because it establishes issues on the civil agenda through the instrumentation of propaganda in favor of its rectory and the dependence of citizens on the institutions in charge of reproducing knowledge.</i>	<i>The State is a mediator of educational quality; evaluation, certification and accreditation are phases in which the enlightened civil society can participate as long as it does not contravene public policies.</i>
<b>Citizen networks</b>	<i>The State regulates the contents of the media and spreads its propaganda on digital networks with the intention of reducing the information production generated there.</i>	<i>The State guarantees freedom of expression and association to include in its objectives and goals the most advanced sectors in the handling of information, discussion and content broadcast.</i>

Source: Elaborated with literature review

The dilemma of HEIs is accentuated if it is considered that the State has left the administration of educational processes and products to delegate the broadcast of its propaganda to civil spheres and networks.

However, in the dynamics of civil spheres and networks, informal relationships are noted that in the case of the economy, employment and tourism represent 40% of the cases in developed countries. This is so because the actors; Governors and governed are capable of carrying out processes of flexibility, informality and multilateralism not only to differentiate themselves, but to identify themselves as part of a plural government. Flexibility refers to the adaptation to changes generated by the system itself, or to contingencies external to the system (Rodríguez, 2011). Informality is another response of the actors towards changes in the environment that reduce the value of formal relationships and enhance that of informal ones (Vargas, 2008). Multilateralist refers to the effectiveness of organizational flexibility and relational informality (Ovalle, 2009). To the extent that flexibility, informality and

multilateralism are exacerbated, they not only reduce the power of the leadership of the State, but also disassociate public administration from management and the latter is only valued if it allows and facilitates the proliferation of three civil traits.

In the context of HEIs, flexibility is a condition of knowledge production and therefore of the quality of the process and product. It is an organizational trait that delegates production to talents (García et al., 2015). In this way, government action is reduced to resource management and surveillance or monitoring of objectives, conflict mediation or achievement motivation. The stewardship of the State has now been transformed into the training of civil society. This supposes a growth of the people and the groups to which it belongs. In such a process, flexibility is not only admissible, but also indispensable, as well as informality and multilateralism, since it is the objectives and goals that guide the synergy between public servants and citizens (see Table 4).

**Table 4:** Dimensions of the governance of educational systems

Dimension	Evaluation	Accreditation	Certification
<b>Flexibility</b>	<i>Civil networks are organized around instruments that privilege trust, commitment and satisfaction over reliability and validity related to the production and reproduction of knowledge.</i>	<i>Civilian networks develop adaptive systems to the imponderables that state discretion and corruption entail.</i>	<i>Citizen networks carry out internal recognition of their achievements to the extent that the State exacerbates its precautionary measures and bureaucratic protocols.</i>
<b>Informality</b>	<i>Citizen networks dedicated the measurement of achievements emerge as a result of the gaps that institutions ignore.</i>	<i>The citizen networks exalt the recognitions whenever the institutions do not contemplate it in their internal processes.</i>	<i>The civil networks sponsor, with other formal sectors, the recognition of face-to-face, digital or open systems.</i>
<b>Multilateralist</b>	<i>The weighting of citizen action Organized in networks supposes a transparency that differentiates it from institutions.</i>	<i>The measurement of civil achievements and goals differs from institutional ones in so far as the emotions and feelings that build a collective identity is weighted.</i>	<i>The recognition of forms of civil organization in digital networks not only imply the advent of new education systems, but also the emergence of vertical and cooperative structures.</i>

Source: Elaborated with literature review



Starting from considering that 1) the rectory of the State has been displaced by civil governance; 2) public security has been transformed into perceptions of insecurity, mistrust and civil emotions towards their rulers; 3) the institutions have ceased to be isomorphic and emerge as spheres and networks of production of knowledge, knowledge and emotions; and 4) the quality of educational processes and products is established more and more from the evaluation, accreditation and certification of academic sectors, so it is necessary to assume future scenarios derived from the culture of organizations dedicated to the production and reproduction of knowledge .

The objective of this study was to specify a model for the study of institutionalism by establishing the reliability and validity of an instrument that measures complexity factors in a sample of teachers, students and administrators of a Higher Education Institution (HEI) affiliated with the National Association of Faculties and Schools of Accounting and Administration (ANFECA).

Do the theoretical relations of dependency between the indicators –flexibility, informality and multilateralism– with respect to educational institutionalism adjust to the weighted data?

The premises that guide this work suggest: 1) Governance emerged when official risk communication about COVID-19 was relativized to distancing and confinement (Meri, 2018). 2) The institutionalism that should have emanated from risk communication disintegrated into an irregular isomorphism in the face of the pandemic mitigation and containment protocols (Du, 2018). 3) The inescapable differences between governance and institutionalism converged in a hybrid mode that recovered both positions (Kalufya & Nyello, 2021). 4) The hybrid posture of educational institutions in the face of the anti-COVID-19 policy made it possible to observe a governance structure coexisting with institutionalism (Marks et al., 2020).

### Method

A non-experimental, cross-sectional and exploratory study was carried out. A non-probabilistic selection of 100 students, teachers and administrators from a public university in the State of Mexico was carried out.

The Educational Institutionalism Scale of Carreón (2016) was used, which includes dimensions related to flexibility - employment expectations derived from evaluation, accreditation and certification policies-, informality - expectations of job opportunities outside the institution during the process of evaluation, accreditation and certification– and multilateralism –governance expectations regarding the administration of resources and based on market demands–. Each of the items is answered with one of five options ranging from “not at all likely” to “very likely”.

*Institutionalism.* It refers to the expectations, intentions and strategies of a university with respect to educational policies (Caliskan, 2020).

*Flexibility.* It refers to the expectations that education professionals have regarding evaluation, accreditation and certification policies, as well as their impact on their

functions and responsibilities (Mott & Toshiro, 2019).

*Informality.* It refers to the expectations that education professionals develop in the face of corruption associated with educational policies (Bingham, 018).

*Multilateralist.* It refers to the diversification of initiatives and strategies by education professionals in the face of the challenges and opportunities of educational quality policies (Rudenko et al., 2021).

The Delphi technique was used to homogenize the meanings of the words that were included in the scale. The application of the questionnaires was carried out in the lobby of the public university. Respondents were informed that the results of the study would not affect their academic or employment status. The information was processed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Reliability was estimated with Cronbach's alpha, sphericity with Bartlett's test, adequacy with KMO, validity with exploratory factorial analysis of principal components with varimax rotation, correlations with Pearson's r, adjustment with chi square, GFI and CFI, as well as the residual with RMSEA.

### Results

The general reliability (alpha 0.783) and the internal consistency of the flexibility (alpha = 0.713), informality (alpha = 0.795) and multilateralism (0.788) subscales were higher than those reported by the state of knowledge (alpha = 0.701). Consequently, the instrument obtained values that would guarantee similar measurements in different contexts and samples (see Table 5).

Adequacy and sphericity [ $\chi^2 = 324.13 / 56gl$ ]  $p = 0.000$ ; KMO = 0.682] allowed the estimation of factorial weights whose values greater than 0.300 allowed establishing the structure of principal components of flexibility (34% of the total explained variance), informality (26% of the total explained variance) and multilateralism (20% of the total explained variance).

The correlations between the established factors – flexibility, informality and multilateralism– made it possible to specify a model and contrast their dependency relationships (see Figure 1).

It is a trifactorial structure in which each of the three factors correlates positively with respect to its seven indicators, as well as the adjustment and residual values [ $\chi^2 = 146.36$  (57df)  $p = 0.015$ ; GFI = 0.990; CFI = 0.975; RMSEA = 0.005] which shows the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

### Discussion

The contribution of this work consists in the measurement of three factors of educational institutionalism: flexibility, informality and multilateralism. Each of these factors explains the effects of educational quality policies on the expectations, intentions and strategies of education

Table 5: Descriptive, reliability and validity of the instrument

Item	M	SD	A	F1	F2	F3
<b>Flexibility subscale</b>			<b>0.713</b>			
r1 The evaluation will generate more places	1.32	0.92	0.754	0.513		
r2 Accreditation will establish more scholarships	1.45	0.84	0.782	0.542		
r3 Certification will finance more projects	1.90	0.72	0.715	0.476		
r4 Assessment will foster more skills	1.32	0.71	0.793	0.514		
r5 The accreditation will determine the merits	1.45	0.63	0.755	0.578		
r6 The certification will affect the curriculum	1.76	0.14	0.732	0.416		
r7 Assessment will influence enrollment	1.21	0.25	0.732	0.732		
<b>Informality subscale</b>			<b>0.795</b>			
r8 Accreditation will generate temporary jobs	1.20	0.45	0.762		0.731	
r9 The certification will promote more places without benefits	1.11	0.56	0.763		0.843	
r10 The evaluation will determine positions without health insurance	1.91	0.32	0.791		0.932	
r11 The accreditation will dissolve the opposition contest	1.82	0.57	0.793		0.613	
r12 The certification will reduce the merits to their minimum expression	1.84	0.43	0.726		0.832	
r13 The evaluation will cause the proliferation of extra courses	1.05	0.44	0.746		0.743	
r14 Accreditation will encourage educational privatization	1.36	0.37	0.757		0.568	
<b>Multilateralist Subscale</b>			<b>0.788</b>			
r15 Certification will foster the advent of academic groups	3.20	0.54	0.790			0.436
r16 Assessment will increase teacher participation	3.54	0.65	0.780			0.614
r17 Accreditation will generate new student proposals	3.67	0.81	0.786			0.746
r18 The evaluation will encourage educational privatization	3.42	0.93	0.778			0.832
r19 Accreditation will encourage discussion of study plans	3.94	0.72	0.788			0.578
r20 Certification will encourage curricular deliberation	3.12	0.71	0.798			0.542
r21 The evaluation will establish managerial agreements	3.21	0.84	0.790			0.687

Source: Elaborated with data study; Extraction method: Principal components –exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation–, adequacy and sphericity [ $\chi^2 = 324.13 / 56gl$ ]  $p = 0.000$ ; KMO = 0.682]. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Alpha = Reliability, F1 = Flexibility (34% of the total variance explained), F2 = Informality (26% of the total variance explained), F3 = Multilateralist (20% of the total variance explained). Alpha value excluding the item, each one includes five response options: 0 = not at all likely to 4 = very likely.

Table 6: Correlations between factors

	Flexibility	Informality	Multilateralist
<b>Flexibility</b>	1,000		
<b>Informality</b>	0.649**	1,000	
<b>Multilateralist</b>	0.714*	0.892***	1,000

Source: Elaborated with data study \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

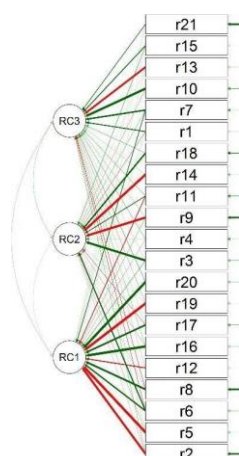


Fig 1: Structural model of reflective dependency relationships

Source: Elaborated with data study; F1 = New Institutionalism, F2 =

Neo Institutional Flexibility, Neo Institutional Informality, F3 = Neo Institutional Multilateralism, r = Reactive, e = Error measurement

professionals at the public university under study, but the non-probabilistic selection of the sample and the percentages of variance explained by the first factor shows that educational institutionalism is circumscribed to flexibility. In addition, the sum of the explained variance of the three factors (80%) assumes the inclusion of other factors that are not modeled or weighted.

Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other institutions and samples of students, teachers or administrators, but the work contributes with an instrument to measure the three factors of academic institutionalism. The reliability and validity of the

instrument that measures three factors of educational institutionalism shows a structure of dependency relationships in which each of the indicators is linked to its corresponding factor. Therefore, the measurement of educational institutionalism could be carried out assuming that the effects of evaluation, accreditation and certification policies generate expectations in the actors that will determine their decisions and actions.

García et al., (2015) showed that welfare is linked to institutionalism insofar as both are part of the educational system, since to the extent that support for poor sectors with infrastructure is intensified in electoral periods, institutionalism is exacerbated.

However, in the present work it has been shown that assistance would be contrary to the informality that educational policies suppose, since while support increases before the elections, the informality of educational services worsens. In this sense, Aguilar et al., (2016) established sociopolitical attitudes – dispositions against and in favor of the authorities and their performance as public officials– as indicators of educational institutionalism. Sociopolitical attitudes reveal general beliefs about public administration and move away from the internal organizational culture of universities and higher education institutes. In other words, the actors –teachers, students and administrators– may have negative or positive dispositions from their authorities, but since these are very general, they will not affect their decisions and actions as a union of education professionals. García (2013) warns that sociopolitical attitudes are collective responses to State propaganda that often turn into counter-propaganda to the extent that the actors have more contact with decisions and experience the effects of institutional decisions. In this way, educational institutionalism assumes three factors related to academic flexibility, educational informality and university multilateralism. Future lines of research could include sociopolitical attitudes as antecedents of institutional expectations, but without determining the decisions and actions of the actors.

### Conclusion

The objective of this work has been to specify a model based on a factorial structure of educational institutionalism, indicated by flexibility, informality and multilateralism, but the type of exploratory study, the type of intentional sampling and the type of statistical analysis limit the results. to the study sample, suggesting the contrast of the model in other scenarios. The total explained variance reached 90%, which suggests the adequacy of the neo-institutional multilateral factor that could be strengthened with the

inclusion of manifest variables such as the relationship between the educational institution and other state institutions such as research, evaluation, accreditation and certification centers.

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