
**Quality Assurance in the higher education institutions in
Algeria:
Constraints and Levers for the implementation of the change**

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Abstract

This article deals with the levers and constraints encountered during the implementation of Quality Assurance in higher education in Algeria. First, a review of literature is done on the constraints and facilitating factors identified by previous scholars. Secondly, a content analysis is done on 20 Quality Assurance Managers (QAM) interviews during 2015 in the central academic region of Algeria. Our results indicate that stakeholders support is a lever for the implementation of Quality Assurance (QA) in Algeria. Among the constraints are the unfinished legal framework, the need for training in the field of QA and the resistance of stakeholders. Lastly, difficulties are linked to the type of the establishment, University and School.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Change Management, Higher Education

JEL Code: I23, M19

الملخص:

تتناول هذه المقالة المسهلات و المعوقات أثناء تأسيس ضمان الجودة في التعليم العالي في الجزائر. سنتطرق إلى البحوث السابقة ثم المسهلات و المعوقات التي تم تحديدها من خلال المقابلات مع مسؤولين ضمان الجودة في المنطقة الوسطى للجزائر. تشير نتائجنا إلى أن دعم أصحاب المصلحة وسيلة لتأسيس ضمان الجودة في الجزائر. من بين الصعوبات الإطار القانوني الغير المكتمل , الحاجة إلى التكوين في مجال ضمان الجودة ومقاومة التغيير من أطراف أصحاب المصلحة. أخيرا، ترتبط الصعوبات بنوع مؤسسات التعليم العالي. الكلمات المفتاحية : ضمان الجودة ، إدارة التغيير ، تعليم عالي

تصنيف جال : 123,M19

Introduction

This article is from the first survey (qualitative) conducted as part of my doctoral thesis¹. At the time of our survey, the implementation of Quality Assurance was not yet finalized in 2015, hence the interest to review the constraints and factors facilitating change. First, we will present the results obtained by the research conducted so far. In a second time our results and their discussion will be revealed.

1. Quality assurance: a change in the Higher Education

Quality Assurance (QA) is a worldwide phenomenon which appeared first in higher education in England in 1832 and in the United States in 1913, which ended up being implemented in several countries of the world. In Algeria, we consider the advent of QA as an organizational change. According to Brassard (2003), "*organizational change refers to the process by which an aspect of an organization (or more broadly, a collective action system), which the alteration or modification is*

¹ Musette, Yasmine (2018). *Quality Assurance and the reactions of actors in higher education in Algeria*, Faculty of Economics, Management and Trade, University of Bejaia, Algeria. 459p + Annexes.

Three surveys have been conducted in this thesis. The first one was with Quality assurance managers, the second concerns stakeholders in four higher education institutions. The third one was a national survey by questionnaire with teachers and students.

equivalent to the addition, to the removal or replacement, in whole or in part, of one or more or all the elements of an organization and any of the characteristics of those” (Damaj, 2013)

QA in higher education is defined by Vroeijenstijn (1995) (according to CSE, 2012) as *"systemic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of maintenance and improvement"*.

Several authors have highlighted the constraints and levers encountered during the implementation of QA in ES. We will focus on those identified nationally and found in international research. Six elements seem to be recurrent and will thus be explored: the legal framework, the reaction of the actors, the training, the quality culture, the information system and the size of the institution.

The legal framework: In Ethiopia, Mulu (2012) mentions the existence of a "legal framework" as a facilitating element. In Algeria, Similarly, the survey conducted by Regad (2013), there are three types the constraints, one of them is the aspect *"leadership at the level of the ministry"*. The most important elements are in this regard: *"the lack of clarity of the policy of application of the QA system and the lack of attention of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research regarding the development of documents for this policy"* (Regad, 2013, Regad et al, 2016). Benhocine (2015), notes *"the absence of the system"* AQ standard which gives the impression of the *"absence of an organizational and legal framework"* that allows the realization of *"internal evaluation"*.

Stakeholder response: Obtaining stakeholder support is presented as a factor that facilitates the change (Nguyen, 2016, Mulu, 2012). According to Mulu (2012), *"having engaged and committed employees and students are considered to allow the practice of quality assurance"* (our translation). Nguyen (2016) in Vietnam evokes the resources (e.g. financial resources, *"feedback on the study program and courses"*) and

opportunities (example: employment) that the actors can offer. They mention Alumni, businesses and industries.

Regad (2013) mentions as a constraint in Algeria, the "*behavioral aspect of the stakeholders concerned by the application of the QA system*" ("resistance to change"): At this level, the main constraint is "*the fear of evaluation and provide extra effort, as well as losing autonomy and influence*". Likewise, she presents "*the support of management with its different levels of application of the QA system*" as a key success factor.

The case of the University of Zagreb shows the difficulty of conducting a survey of students. The challenge mentioned is to convince teachers that they are not threatened "*as individuals*" and the difficulty of involving students at the beginning, who did not understand "*the rationale for such a questionnaire*" (Reilly and Jongsma, 2009). In Tunisia, for Safi (2012), the lack of motivation and commitment is one of the reasons for the non-continuity of improvement projects. According to the latter, people abandon the project along the way.

Training: According to El-Abidi (2008), among the eight constraints that limit the effectiveness of QA in higher education institutions mainly in developing countries figure "*the lack of competence of the administrators and certain academic leaders*" (Belhadeb and Ferahi, 2013). In Morocco, "*the Presidents' Conference had expressed concern about the quality of the evaluation and the need to train evaluators*" (Reilly and Jongsma, 2009). Similarly, "*The lack of training of managers in methods of improvement*" is noted by Ahmed Beni Ahmed and Haouamada (2011). In Algeria, following the survey conducted by Bouzid and Benhocine (2017). There is an average level which tends towards the low level of adequacy between "*the capacities of the higher education and the requirements of the QA*" according to the members of the National Commission designed to Implement Quality Assurance

(CIAQES). This result can be explained by several factors, including the "*low level of training in the field*" of QA.

The quality culture: The research conducted by Yahyaoui and Mechnen (2013) with teachers in a faculty of the University of Batna, indicates that "*the improvement of its implementation (QA) faces a difficulty of change in the organizational culture*". In addition, the survey conducted by Regad (2013) notes that one of the most important elements is "*achieving a change in the organizational culture*". Nguyen (2016) discusses the type of regenerative culture, the latter "*focuses on internal improvement while fully taking into account external requirements*" (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008), which facilitates the implementation of QA.

Information System: Reilly and Jongsma (2009) cite the fact that faculties have "*erroneous and outdated*" data as one of the difficulties encountered in implementing QA. In some cases, departments and faculties "*do not easily share their information*" at the university to which they belong. In the same vein, in Algeria, Regad (2013) presents "*The concern given to the establishment of effective information systems*" as one of the key success factors according to the QAMs surveyed.

The size of the establishment: Both the small and the large size of the organization have a positive effect on the change. Some authors argue that larger organizations would have a greater need for change and the resources to achieve it. Other authors argue that small organizations would be more flexible. Still others explain this difference by "*correlating the size of the organization with other variables, such as structure, strategy and culture*" (Frambaeh & Schillewaert, 2002: 165).

Given the lack of empirical research on the subject in our context, our main question is as follows: How to facilitate the establishment of QA in higher education institutions in Algeria? To answer it, three sub-

questions are formulated: What are the obstacles to change? What are the levers for change? Is there a difference between schools and universities?

Our assumptions are as follows:

- The establishment of QA is hindered by three factors: (a) the unfinished legal framework and the expectation of the approval of the national QA reference system, (b) the need for training in the field QA and (c) Stakeholders' resistance;
- Factors that facilitate change are three-fold: (a) stakeholders' support (b) the organizational culture of some institutions and (c) the setting up of effective information systems;
- There is no difference between schools and universities regarding brakes and Key factors of success

2. Methodology

For the realization of our investigation we decided to concentrate on the Center region (School and University), knowing that these HEIs represent 44% of the establishments at the national level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, face-to-face, or by telephone or email, with 20 RAQs in 2015. We also consulted the websites of all universities and schools of MESRS, which have a link on QA. An interview guide was designed in three parts: (a) the actions carried out in QA, (b) the main constraints and (c) the element that help the implementation. We chose a thematic content analysis that identified: the trends in QA, the steps taken, the constraints and the main facilitating factors.

3. Results and discussions

To present our results we will begin with a description of the implementation of QA at the level of schools and universities. Then we

will present the facilitating factors followed by the difficulties encountered in the HEIs.

3.1.Steps for the implementation of QA

Comparing the projects and actions followed, we find that the universities and schools converge on certain stages, namely: the selection of the QAM, the training of the QAM by the CIAQES, the nomination the QA cell's members and the adoption of a internal rules, information, training, awareness raising, self-evaluation, evaluation of teaching and the development of an action plan for quality improvement, the establishment of a self-assessment cell. We note, on one hand, that the progress status and order are not the same. On the other hand, the two types of establishments were different in some aspects.

Universities in the central region had benefited, unlike the schools, of projects and programs with foreign partners that supported self-evaluation. Some also encouraged students' participation in the quality approach by integrating them into the QA's cell. Universities had to set up cells at the faculty level and one for the university as a whole. The schools, unlike the universities, had tried to implement the ISO 9001 standard. Other actions were noted at the school level, namely: the realization of a SWOT-type diagnosis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), the proposal of quality criteria or the conduct of census to determine teaching capacities in the field of Quality and Metrology.

3.2.Many facilitating factors common to both types of HEI

The interviews conducted, allow us to identify a certain number of elements common to both types of institution (schools and universities) that facilitate the implementation of QA. The majority of factors have not been addressed by previous QA research. Of all the factors, there is

no indication that an element facilitating implementation is related to the type of establishment. Indeed, all elements can be transposed to schools and universities. We confirm our initial hypothesis: The factors that facilitate change are: (a) stakeholder support (b) the organizational culture of some institutions, (c) the establishment of effective information systems. Nevertheless, we add to these, other factors such as: having a QA standard and consultants, reinforcing training in QA and any element to enrich the knowledge of the QAM on QA, networking, material means, the power of the QAM, the characteristics of the QAM, the management and the completion of the changes underway for improvement.

AQ standard and Consultants

Indeed, if a school in the central region had used the service of a consulting company, the universities were able to benefit from foreign projects or programs and therefore also from consultants. This factor was explicitly mentioned: "*No factor helped me except the consultant*" (E4). The fact that some institutions, both school and university, had the national QA standard and therefore a working tool, is also a common advantage. For Marc Thiébaud, (2013) "*having a competent, informed, relevant involved team and being able to rely on organizational systems that support change*" are the initial factors that make change successful. With regard to QA, consultants can strengthen work teams. However, this benefit is obtained if the said experts have the necessary skills.

Strengthen QA training and any elements to enhance QA knowledge of the QAM

According to Ganseuer (2017), it is important to take care of "*staff development*". In our situation, it is the improvement of knowledge in terms of QA. This point of view is explained by the still recent and current implementation of QA in the HE. The following expression illustrates this idea: "*... Our training, me and my colleague help us to understand more the quality approach. I teach ISO 9001*" (E3)

Networking, material means

Networking has been noted by Farges & Grimault (1999) as one of the key success factors for the success of a quality approach. In general, Nguyen (2016) mentioned the resources and opportunities that the actors can offer for the quality approach. According to a QAM, the positive point of a region is *"that they have brought together Eastern universities to conduct meetings on QA. A first meeting, a second meeting in Skikda, I was in the second meeting. Thus, the financial and logistic support is available at their level"* (E9).

The power of the QAM

Implicitly, it appeared that the QAM has also a professional status within his institution or at the level of a ministry. In general, Pineault et al (2005) according to Racine et al. (2005) cite *"sufficient resources to allow the introduction of change, organizations that promote the desired change and support the professionals responsible for its achievement"* as conditions of success. This principle therefore applies to any type of resource. The resource, in this case, is the power conferred by the status. Other resources will also be mentioned in the following section on means. The opinion expressed by a QAM on another establishment is as follows: *"for example, at establishment X ... they did a lot of things, why? because the quality assurance manager is (at the head management of the university), that is to say he has access to the data, he can do surveys, he has a staff,"* (U7)

Support from people whose direction

The focus is more on the head management of the university but can be explained by the fact that the QAMs interviewed are those of the entire university and not the Faculty. This reinforces the results of Farges & Grimault (1999) who noted, "the will of management" among the four key factors of success of a quality approach. Similarly, gaining the support of actors for change was also highlighted by Nguyen (2016) and Mulu (2012). Regad (2013) cited in Algeria, "the support of management". Support can be manifested by the means: *"... while the*

head management of the university he committed to facilitate ..., they" gave "a local, a laptop, consummables, we wait for the chairs ... I said that it is not the most important, ... "(U2).

The characteristics of the QAM.

The social network, the professional conscience, the personal will, the personality and the expected consequences constitute the characteristics revealed by our interviewees which help the implementation of QA. For the self-assessment in the context of Aqi Umed, one of the respondents explains that they chose where there is the QAM because it is easier, to meet people. We note also that this QAM was also a member of the CIAQES. These results are in partial agreement with Ganseuer (2017) that the "*purpose and benefit*" of applying quality improvement processes should be "*clear and transparent*". According to our results, it is more about the consequences expected by the actor himself. Our remarks are partly similar to the "*exemplary leadership*" that is highlighted as a facilitator by Nguyen (2016). One of the aspects of this leadership according to the author is to be an example oneself in order to encourage the staff. In our case, it is less a matter of encouraging others than having the characteristics that push the QAM to begin the process of change in an HEI where QA is not sufficiently supported by the legislation.

Management and completion of ongoing changes for improvement

Completing the changes underway for improvement before self-assessment, facilitate change. The formalization and the change management can also be helpful. All of these elements are mentioned only by the schools QAMs. One of the interviewees highlights the importance of change management as follows: "*I can't say that it will succeed at 100% everything depends on adherencethe adherence of the management and people. I sensitize gradually my colleagues*"(E6). In addition, the existence of compensation has been mentioned by an QAM in a School but does not seem to have a great impact on behavior.

3.3. The difficulties are related to the size of the establishment

Regardless of the type of the institution (school or university), the answers indicate that the constraints are at three levels: the national environment, the internal environment, the characteristics of the people in charge of setting up the QA (QAM and/or other people) and management issues. In both types of institutions, common difficulties have emerged at different levels. Others have been mentioned only by the QAMs of the Schools or Universities. Size is therefore related to difficulties. We will start first by dealing with the common aspects and then those specific to each level.

a) The national environment including the legal framework

The problem of legislation (inexistence of official standard and status for the QAM) and the progress of other institutions with regard to QA are mentioned in both schools and universities. The following excerpt gives more details: "*The structure does not exist in the school's organization chart. The Ministry must oblige to put it in place, attach it to the management. It has no status; it is done on a voluntary basis. Whoever does it, is one who is convinced*" (E8). The importance of the "legal framework" was also noted by Mulu, (2012) previously.

In Algeria, the lack of attention given to the development of official documents, and the non-existence of the QA cell in the HEI organizational chart are cited among the obstacles by Regad (2013). In addition, the argument of the state of progress of the other HEIs is in line with the observation made by Benhocine (2015) concerning the low efficiency of QA cells in three Algerian universities. Pilot sites and problems with experts appeared to be barriers only at the university level. One of the advantages of institutions benefiting from a program or project with foreign partners is the support of consultants. A QAM explains the situation as follows: "*There were two faculties that did not accept the different specialists who came from the European Union and*

therefore there was a delay There were some QAMs who disagreed, who did not like some people sent and who (specialists) did not have the required skills "(U10). In addition, for the Schools, the characteristics of higher education, "lack of autonomy" and "restrictive external regulations" are mentioned. This last observation joins Farges & Grimault (1999) for whom "the autonomy of the establishments" is one of the key factors of success of a quality approach.

b) The internal environment of the institution

The environment can discourage the QAM. Five constraints are revealed by our interviewees in both schools and universities:

i) The non-existence of compensation (more specifically the non-existence of remuneration of the QAM and peoples responsible for implementing QA) is an obstacle to the implementation. In addition, the absence of incentive measures is noted in both cases. However, there is a divergence with regard to the type of measures. This result is consistent with the explanation given by Benhocine (2015) regarding the low efficiency of QA cells. This author explains that by "*not taking into account the motivational factor so that the members of the cell carry out the functions and objectives of the cell*". For some QAMs, The non-existence of compensation is a real obstacle, as this excerpt shows: "*Lack of motivation on the part of the administration, there is neither reduction (of workload) nor remuneration (...) ... if I am not remunerated, I will not do more self-evaluation*" (U3).

ii) Resistance to change: An QAM expresses this constraint as follows: "*You find yourself working alone*" (E3). Several forms of resistance on the part of management, teachers, students and responsible staff for implementing of QA are mentioned by the QAMs. Moreover, the behavior of the administrators is also a constraint. If at the level of the university one speaks about refusal, another one in a school, stress rather on the necessity to change their habits. Habits are

one of the components of the organization's culture. This last point reminds us of the observation made by Yahyaoui & Mechnen (undated) concerning QA concerning the culture. Regad (2013) also referred to resistance to change as an obstacle. She adds the fact is that "*the senior management of the university did not follow the progress in the implementation of the system AQ*". Our findings show that management can have a variety of behaviors, including resistance to change.

iii) The lack of means in terms of staff is a constraint during the change.

The QAMs, either from a school or university, propose that there is a department responsible for quality assurance. The availability of sufficient human resources is indeed one of the key success factors according to Ganseuer (2017). He proposes solutions to this type of situation. On our part, we observe that this difficulty appears at the beginning of the change. In addition, the time limit is another obstacle to implement QA at university while the lack of financial means and absence of office are mentioned at the school level. This distinction is more supportive of the hypothesis that size of the establishment has an impact on the constraints.

The introduction of QA at the university level require more time while the material means are more available at the university. This point confirms the consulted literature which shows that both the small size of the organization and the large size have a positive effect on change. In other words, each one would have advantages and disadvantages. For Ganseuer (2017), one of the key success factors is the need to take into account "duration" when formulating the action plan. This advice responds to the time constraint mentioned above.

Regarding funding, Ramrajsingh & Hassanaly (2010) had mentioned the investment for certification which is among the constraints. In our case, the question of funding is not just about certification but also to

other QA activities. For example, this excerpt states that: "*there was the problem of the establishment who did not pay the costs of the website to the company that makes the hosting. After payment of the sum, the website has been given back. This later delayed the page and the mailbox.*" (E9)

(iv) Strikes may impel the QAM to delay the implementation, regardless of the type of the institution. In addition, at the university level, a conflict between teachers and students was perceived. The latter is also likely to hinder the necessary changes. Regarding a student strike, one of the interviewees explains the problem as follows: "*It seems that there are double standards in the history of transfers (...) Have there been exceptions ...? ... Students do not have to forbid exceptions for the children of teachers and workers*" (U2). This point also leads to the fact that the quality is relative (Kis, 2005; Liu, 2016) hence the interest of reaching a consensus between the different actors of the establishment.

(v) Other various difficulties have arisen only at the level of schools. We note three obstacles: the existence of another change underway (the relocation of the school), the workload of department heads, the succession of directors in one year. The following discourse illustrates this last obstacle: "*instability ... succession of directors, each time it (QA's implementation) is postponed. I hope this year it will start*" (E2).

Indeed, Collette (2008) stated among the practices that could negatively impact change: i) "*changes that are too frequent*" (waves of change succeeding each other at a high rate, with no period of consolidation and respite) ii) "*too many changes (too many different projects at the same time in the organization)*". The first problem is found in one school, which has experienced instability in management. In addition, [relocation](#) is closer to the second constraint mentioned by the author. However, in our case, it is the climate generated by [relocation](#) and the logic of the QAM in terms of self-evaluation that

explains the delay. For the latter the result of the self-evaluation will be better after the relocation.

c) The characteristics of the people responsible for implementing QA

The workload of the QAM, as well as the resignation of the QAM, are common constraints. Safi (2012) in Tunisia noticed that people are abandoning the improvement project along the way. This phenomenon must therefore be examined. Schools have put more emphasis on other people in charge of QA. Thus, the difficulties are related to: the initial training of persons in the quality's cell, the lack of training of the persons constituting the quality's cell in the field of QA, the workload of persons designated for the establishment of QA (excluding QAM). The lack of training of the people who are responsible for the implementation of the QA in Algeria was mentioned in 2012 by Berrouche and Berkane, which shows that 3 years later, the problem is still relevant. As for the workload issue, it reminds us of Reilly & Jongsma (2009) who explained that the QA services of large HEIs should include permanent staff. Following this latter, the services are composed of teachers who work part-time. At the university level, other personal constraints are mentioned, this is sickness, retirement and family reasons.

d) Problems related to management.

The common problems in management are: the low level of presents of people to attend the awareness sessions, the need for QAM training, the need of assistance of the QAMs for the implementation of QA, the constraints encountered during the evaluation of teaching, the constraints during a survey (satisfaction survey or self-evaluation) and the workload of the quality manager induced by the quality approach. The last point is therefore closely linked to the lack of staff. Problems related to the evaluation of teaching are confirmed by Reilly &

Jongsma's (2009) comments. They claim the difficulty of conducting a survey of students due to teachers' beliefs. The need for assistance and training of the QAM is consistent with the importance of "empowering the people concerned, increasing their skills, helping them throughout the transition" (Thiébaud, 2013).

The latter being one of the success factors of the change according to the same author. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between training and supervision. In the Public administration, people do not know exactly what to do. The emphasis is mainly on training and general orientations (Collerette 2008).

The university is differentiated by: the perception that it is more difficult to implement QA compared to a school, the difficulty of convincing and the fear of the teachers' reactions towards the evaluation of teaching. The following illustration is an example "*I did not do it, because I was afraid that I would have problems with teachers*" (U7) If Ramrajsingh & Hassanaly (2010) mentioned the difficulty to make people adhere and the time required for this adherence, our results suggest that this difficulty is accentuated at the university level. The difficulty of implementing QA in a university is related to different variables, in QAM speeches, including the quality level.

This opinion is shared by El-Abidi (2008) following Belhadeb & Ferahi (2013) but also by Mulu (2012). These latter do not explicitly mention the concept of quality level but refer to a set of criteria that describes the current quality of HEIs or the constraints that HEI encounters to improve its quality, such as the number of students compared to the capacity of the establishment. Likewise, this result confirms that "*simple changes are more likely to be adopted than complex ones*". (Rogers, 1995 according to Austin's reading, 2008). In our opinion, it is important to simplify and clarify the implementation of QA for universities' QAMs.

Other benefits have been attributed by the universities' QAMs for schools. This element supports the idea that the impact of the size on change depends on the "size correlation of the organization with other variables" (Frambaeh & Schillewaert, 2002: 165). The other variables cited by the QAMs are: i) the number of people, and the number of specialties, ii) good interpersonal relationships, the social network and the perception of people's adherence. The number refers to the size of the establishment that seems close to the idea of complexity mentioned above.

Moreover, if we return to the previous research, good interpersonal relationships and the social network facilitate readiness for change. Similarly, Pineault et al. (2005) according to Racine et al. (2005) mentioned among the conditions of success of a change "*the development of a relationship of trust between the professionals involved and the managers* «. In addition, the need to "*train people*" which requires "*a lot of time*" and work, has been raised only in one school. This information completes the finding made by Benhocine (2015) that QA cells focus more on training of their members rather than on information and self-assessment.

Other constraints have been mentioned only in schools and are related to the mode of implementation of QA. Thus, the difficulties are fivefold: the rank of some members of the quality's cell which weakens the leadership of the QAM, the large number of subordinates as element that can make difficult the role of motivator of the QAM, the duration of occupation of the function, some aspects of the ISO 9001 standard and combine between the implementation of the standard of ISO 9001 version 2008 and the need to go to the national standard. All of these factors are therefore more related to the nature of choices related to the QA's implementation than to the type of institution. The following expression illustrates the idea concerning the ISO 9001 standard: "*During the audit they dealt more with non-conformities*

documentary, which was not very interesting" (E4). Indeed, our survey focused only on the central region, but if we look at the institutions in the other regions, we notice that a university has also tried to implement the ISO 9001 standard.

Conclusion

Our findings indicate that schools and universities have common facilitating factors. Other facilitating factors are not shared, but can be transposed. Regarding levers, the results of previous research on quality assurance are confirmed, such as stakeholder's support. Regardless of the type of institution, the constraints are at four levels: the national environment, the institution's internal environment, the characteristics of those who are responsible for implementing QA and management issues. Some of the obstacles include the incomplete legal framework and the waiting for approval of the national QA standard, the need for training in the field of QA and the resistance of stakeholders. Some results indicate that difficulties are related to the type of institution.

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