

Quality Education (SDG 4) and Quality of Education: Perspectives, Similarities, and Differences

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Abstract

This paper analyses the concepts of Quality Education (SDG 4) and Quality of Education, exploring their perspectives, similarities, and differences. Education is recognized as a vital component in developing individual potential, influencing social standing, labour market competitiveness, and quality of life. The study highlights the necessity of equitable access to quality education as a means to foster innovation and productivity. While Quality Education reflects a global commitment to inclusive education as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality of Education examines the processes and resources that underpin educational outcomes. The research employs scoping reviews and content analysis to systematically synthesize existing knowledge on these concepts, elucidating their multifaceted nature and their contributions to societal progress and educational quality.

Keywords: Quality Education, Quality of Education, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), Educational Quality

Introduction

Nowadays, education is widely acknowledged as a crucial element in the development of an individual's potential, which in turn affects their social standing, labour market competitiveness and, in many respects, their quality of life (Demina *et al.*, 2020).

A fairer society can only be created by giving the general public access to proper education and training. This will enable continuous innovation and productivity improvements. In this context, Barrichello *et al.* (2020) conducted a study to investigate education as a determinant of a country's competitiveness, as well as its significance in the context of innovation generation. According to the findings, education is the precursor of innovation and competitiveness. Already Demina *et al.* (2020) concluded that quality of education is, first and foremost, one of the driving forces for the development and growth of not only the individual's personal potential, but also the labour potential of organizations, industries, regions, the country, and society as a whole. According to these same authors, quality of education is a determinant factor in the establishment of a specialist's competitive advantages in the

labour market, as well as the organization, region, and country as economic systems and receivers of investment.

Nevertheless, there are numerous definitions of quality of education, demonstrating the concept's complexities and diverse nature (UNICEF, 2000). According to UNICEF's document, Quality Education, according to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) includes 5 important elements: learners, environments, content, processes and outcomes.

Concerning Quality Education (SDG 4), Johnstone, Schuelka and Swadek (2020) state that the SDG 4 has drawn 3 main philosophical lines: education for all means that those who have not benefited from mass education must be given special attention; equity of educational experience must be the focus of policy and resources; and these commitments are best achieved through inclusive education.

Currently, higher education institutions (HEIs) are forced to associate one or more SDGs to their curricula. As an example, see what Chaleta *et al.* (2021) say in their study on mapping the SDGs in the curricular units (CUs) of the undergraduate courses offered by the School of Social Sciences at the University of Évora. The university's top management bodies defined the association of SDGs to all the courses taught, in addition to the obligation to associate SDG 4 to all of them, without understanding the exact justification for this obligation. The importance of HEIs' contribution to sustainable development and quality education through the SDGs is corroborated by the study by Leal Filho *et al.* (2023), but in no case does it mention the obligation to associate SDG 4 with course curricula. Therefore, is the association of SDG 4 - Quality education - to all the CUs really correct, or is there some confusion between the concepts of quality education and quality of education that has led to this obligation? This was the main reason for carrying out this analysis.

As noted, "Quality Education" (SDG 4) is often confused with "Quality of Education" and vice versa. But these are two distinct expressions. If, on one hand, "Quality Education" refers to the level of success achieved by schools in various fields such as academics, skills, and the overall condition of the school (Sampul *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, "Quality of Education" encompasses the planning, resources, and management of the educational process, including the quality of educational materials and services (Kastrati, 2014; Dimou & Kameas, 2016; Bekebayeva, 2022). The quality of education is also related to the achievement of educational goals efficiently (Niku, 2023), and is influenced by factors such as teacher professionalism, competency, and intellectual capital (Kyamuhangire *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, it is essential for the government to ensure the implementation of education with quality (Suhartini *et al.*, 2021).

Quality Education (SDG4) and Quality of Education are related concepts but with distinct nuances. If, on one hand, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) aims to promote inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Sustainable Development Goal 4). This goal emphasizes the importance of enhancing the overall_quality of education, ensuring that it is accessible to all individuals, and fostering inclusivity. On the other hand, the Quality of Education encompasses various dimensions, including educational outcomes, educational services, and the educational system (Sampul *et al.*, 2020). It is a multifaceted concept that involves the effectiveness of the educational process, the satisfaction of students, and the impact on economic development (Saputra, 2018; Ciarko, 2022).

The literature suggests that the Quality of Education is influenced by factors such as educational planning, stakeholder involvement, and the allocation of educational resources (Kastrati, 2014; Saputra, 2018; Ismail *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, the quality of education is closely linked to the concept of educational material, learning support, and student outcomes (Dimou & Kameas, 2016). It is evident that the quality of education is a complex construct that encompasses not only the educational process but also the broader societal impact and the fulfilment of individual and collective potential (Saputra, 2018; Bekebayeva, 2022; Ciarko, 2022).

In contrast, SDG 4 (Quality Education) represents a global commitment to ensuring that education is of quality, inclusive, and accessible to all. It underscores the significance of education as a fundamental driver of societal progress and well-being, aligning with the broader agenda of sustainable development (Bandola-Gill *et al.*, 2022; Pal & Sarkar, 2022).

Corroborated by Boeren (2019) and Jamali, Ebrahim and Jamali (2022) the confusion between the concepts arises due to overlapping terminology and objectives, complexity of educational terminology, objectives, and measurement criteria as well as variations in their scopes and emphasis. So, the distinction between these two concepts is crucial. While “quality education” (SDG 4) focuses on the outcomes and success of educational institutions, the “quality of education” delves into the processes, resources, and management that contribute to achieving those outcomes. Thus, it is evident that “quality of education” and “quality education”, for various authors, do not mean exactly the same thing.

This article therefore aims to analyse these two concepts: the “Quality Education” within the framework of sustainable development and UNESCO's 2015 Goals (SDG 4) and “Quality of Education”, seeking to uncover similarities and differences between these expressions and to understand their relationship.

Therefore, in addition to trying to clarify the confusion that exists between the expressions, this paper intends to answer to the following research question:

What are the perspectives, similarities, and differences between the concepts of Quality Education (SDG 4) and Quality of Education?

Method

To answer the objective of this study and the research question, the method used is the Scoping reviews, a type of research that synthesizes knowledge, methodically analyse information about a specific topic to uncover key ideas, theories and concepts, sources, and gaps in understanding, i.e., for mapping the key concepts within a research area and identifying the main sources and types of evidence available (Tricco *et al.*, 2018).

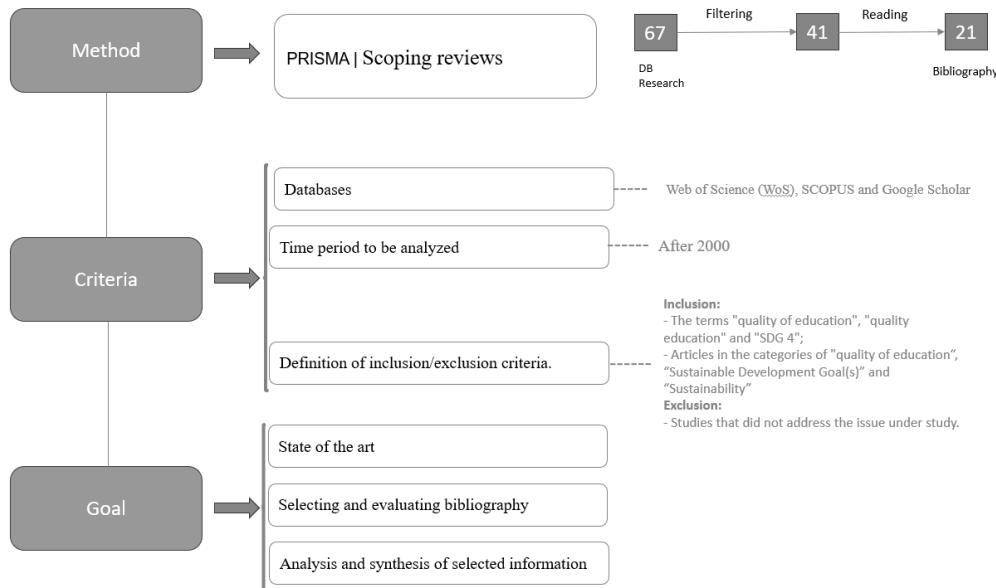
To select the adequate articles for the discussion, the methodology Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was used because is a widely recognized methodology for conducting Scoping reviews and simultaneously it provides a checklist to ensure transparent reporting and methodological rigour in these types of studies (Panić *et al.*, 2013). According to Arya *et al.* (2021) PRISMA aims to improve the reporting of studies, standardize methodology, and include all relevant evidence to avoid reporting biased results or analytic estimates, which allowed it to be considered the most appropriate methodology to be used in this study.

On the other hand, this study also used content analysis in addition to PRISMA, since this is a research method used to analyse the content of communication, that can benefit from PRISMA by ensuring transparent reporting and methodological rigour in studies (Page *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, PRISMA emphasizes the importance of justifying meta-analyses, which is crucial in content analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis process (Spreat & Roszkowski, 2022).

For this investigation, articles were collected from the Web of Science (WoS), SCOPUS and Google Scholar databases, with the search equation based on the terms "quality of education" AND "quality education" AND "SDG 4" in the topic, obtaining 67 articles. These terms were chosen on the basis of the research topic.

After filtering by the categories, "quality of education", "sustainable development goal(s)" and "sustainability", and admitting only "article" type documents, in the period after the year 2000, 41 articles were obtained, which after reading were reduced to 21 articles, which specifically focused on the issues of quality and education. The application of filters was considered essential for structuring the study and analysing the perspectives, similarities, and differences between the concepts of Quality Education (SDG 4) and Quality of Education. Moreover, the justification for defining these categories can be supported by various studies. By investigating how students' expectations shape educational outcomes, the study by Kocot *et al.* (2024) provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding educational quality and its alignment with sustainability goals. This aligns with the task of structuring the study around the definitions of "quality of education," "sustainable development goal(s)," and "sustainability," as it highlights the necessity for educational strategies to incorporate students' perspectives to enhance both educational quality and sustainability in higher education. The paper by Shapovalov, Slipukhina and Shapovalov (2023) emphasizes the integration of sustainability principles into educational practices, thereby aligning with the definitions of "quality of education", "sustainable development goal(s)" and "sustainability." This alignment underscores the necessity of incorporating motivational and socialization factors into educational quality assessments, thereby enriching the discourse on sustainable education and its implications for achieving broader educational objectives. Beniermann *et al.* (2021) suggest the importance of further validation and argumentation in justifying category systems, which can be applied to the definitions of the above-mentioned categories. Studies that did not address the problem under study were defined as exclusion criteria. Figure 1 illustrates the process used to collect and select the articles, which was based on PRISMA.

Fig. 1 – Process of collecting and selecting articles



Source: Own elaboration

Next step was concerning the content analysis adopting a deductive approach, allowing the identification of key concepts based on theory and using it as the initial coding category. Thus, Quality, Education and Sustainable Development were considered the initial categories deriving from these subcategories based on literature.

The next phase was the extraction from each selected document the main subjects that could corroborate the key differences, similarities, and relationship between Quality of Education and Quality Education associated with SDG 4. Simultaneously it was also important to identify how different dimensions of quality education, such as learners' characteristics, teaching processes, and outcomes, could interact with each other to enhance overall educational quality.

From the analysis of the literature, it was possible to understand that there are parameters associated with Quality of Education and Quality Education that highlight the multifaceted nature of these concepts, and the importance of addressing various dimensions and stakeholders in ensuring educational quality.

The term "parameter" is typically used to refer to a measurable factor that helps define a system, while "dimension" is often used to describe the scope or aspect of a concept being considered. Parameters are specific variables that can be measured or quantified within a study, providing numerical values for analysis, whereas dimensions are broader categories or perspectives under which various parameters may fall, helping to structure the understanding of a topic or phenomenon. Parameters are more concrete and directly measurable, while dimensions provide a framework for organizing and interpreting data within a study, highlighting different facets or aspects of the research topic (Tricco *et al.*, 2018). Table 1 presents the parameters and dimensions used in this study to analyse the concepts of Quality Education (SDG 4) and Quality of Education.

Table 1 – Parameters and dimensions under study

| PARAMETERS | Success Metrics | Jungblut <i>et al.</i> (2015); Parvaiz <i>et al.</i> (2020); Shah <i>et al.</i> (2021) |
|------------|-----------------|--|
|------------|-----------------|--|

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Planning</i> | Hoi (2022); Khairi <i>et al.</i> (2023); Ostojić and Šimić (2021) |
| <i>Provision of Infrastructure</i> | Aditia <i>et al.</i> (2021); Khairi <i>et al.</i> (2023) |
| <i>Stakeholder Involvement</i> | Eagle and Brennan (2007); Grant <i>et al.</i> (2022); Lomas (2002); Petruzzellis <i>et al.</i> (2006); |
| <i>Educational Outcomes</i> | Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016); Ashwin <i>et al.</i> (2013); Petruzzellis <i>et al.</i> (2006); Shah <i>et al.</i> (2021) |
| <i>Role of Teachers</i> | Korthagen and Evelein (2016); Sustainable Development Goal 4 |
| <i>Provision of Infrastructure</i> | Aditia <i>et al.</i> (2021); Khairi <i>et al.</i> (2023) |
| <i>Student Satisfaction</i> | Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016); Petruzzellis <i>et al.</i> (2006) |
| <i>Development of Programs</i> | Annamdevula (2017) |
| <i>Environmental Sustainability</i> | Poza-Vilches <i>et al.</i> (2021) |
| <i>Students' Involvement</i> | Dicker <i>et al.</i> (2019); Grant <i>et al.</i> (2022) |

DIMENSIONS

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Focus</i> | Munn <i>et al.</i> (2018) |
| <i>Scope</i> | Levac <i>et al.</i> (2010) |
| <i>Measurement</i> | Febres (2018) |
| <i>Outcomes</i> | Meiqari <i>et al.</i> (2019) |

Source: Own elaboration

By considering these parameters in Table 1, the study can comprehensively evaluate the multifaceted aspects of quality education, address the perspective, similarities, and differences in educational systems, and contribute to the advancement of educational practices aligned with global development goals.

To define a concept, several dimensions play a crucial role. "Focus" directs attention to the central theme of the concept, highlighting its core idea (Munn *et al.*, 2018). "Scope" outlines the range of applicability of the concept, setting boundaries for its relevance (Levac *et al.*, 2010). "Measurement" involves quantifying the attributes of the concept, aiding in empirical validation (Febres, 2018). "Outcomes" refer to the results or implications of applying the concept, providing insights into its practical significance (Meiqari *et al.*, 2019). By incorporating these dimensions into the study, we can ensure a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis of quality education, focusing on its core aspects, defining its boundaries, providing a means for empirical validation, and showcasing its practical implications. This structured approach enhances the depth and breadth of the research, contributing to a more robust understanding of quality education and its role in achieving sustainable development goals. The analytical development of the parameters and dimensions will be developed in the next section.

Results and Discussion

The multifaceted nature of the concepts of quality education (SDG 4) and quality of education makes them complex constructs to define and measure, that, together with the debate on SDG 4, which

underlines the global commitment to ensuring quality education for all, reflects a wider recognition of education as a fundamental human right and a driver of social progress on a global scale.

The comparative analysis presented in Table 2 sheds light on the multifaceted nature of education quality and the diverse considerations involved in assessing and improving educational systems, according to the parameters and dimensions under study.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Education Quality Perspectives and Sustainable Development Goals Alignment: Parameters and Dimensions

| PARAMETERS | PERSPECTIVES | |
|--|---|---|
| | Quality of Education | Quality Education (SDG 4) |
| <i>Success Metrics</i> | Students' perception of quality, value for money (Jungblut <i>et al.</i> 2015; Parvaiz <i>et al.</i> , 2020) | Academic success, intellectual and social development (Shah <i>et al.</i> , 2021) |
| <i>Planning</i> | Resources, management (Hoi, 2022; Ostojić & Šimić, 2021) | Resources, educational facilities and infrastructure (Khairi <i>et al.</i> , 2023) |
| <i>Stakeholder Involvement</i> | Stakeholder involvement, students as customers (Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Petruzzellis <i>et al.</i> , 2006) | Stakeholder involvement, students' involvement (Grant <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Lomas, 2002) |
| <i>Educational Outcomes</i> | Transformation, value for money, satisfaction (Petruzzellis <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Shah <i>et al.</i> , 2021) | Achievement of learning outcomes, students' satisfaction (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016; Ashwin <i>et al.</i> , 2013) |
| <i>Role of Teachers</i> | Importance in fulfilling students' needs (Korthagen & Evelein, 2016) | Qualified teachers: qualification through international cooperation for teacher training (Sustainable Development Goal 4) |
| <i>Provision of Infrastructure</i> | Provision of educational infrastructure, materials (Khairi <i>et al.</i> , 2023) | Infrastructure, materials, conducive learning environment (Aditia <i>et al.</i> , 2021) |
| <i>Student Satisfaction</i> | Measurement of service quality, students as customers (Petruzzellis <i>et al.</i> , 2006) | Measurement of satisfaction, student motivation (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016) |
| <i>Development of Programs</i> | Reputable study programs, specialization (Annamdevula, 2017) | Alignment with societal needs, student knowledge level (Annamdevula, 2017) |
| <i>Environmental Sustainability</i> | Alignment with SDGs, greening of syllabi (Poza-Vilches <i>et al.</i> , 2021) | Contribution to SDG4 through environmental awareness (Poza-Vilches <i>et al.</i> , 2021) |
| <i>Students' Involvement</i> | Active involvement and commitment (Dicker <i>et al.</i> , 2019) | Embracing differences, unique contexts and challenges (Grant <i>et al.</i> , 2022) |
| DIMENSIONS | | |
| <i>Focus</i> (Munn <i>et al.</i> , 2018) | Emphasizes the processes, inputs, and mechanisms used in the educational system to achieve desired learning outcomes. It looks at factors such as | It places a broader emphasis on ensuring inclusive, equitable, and accessible education for all individuals. It aims to promote education that is |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | teaching methods, curriculum design, resources, and educational support services. | relevant, empowering, and of high quality. |
| Scope (Levac <i>et al.</i> , 2010) | It delves into the effectiveness and efficiency of educational practices, including the quality of educational materials, teaching methodologies, assessment processes, and overall educational environment. | It encompasses various dimensions beyond the educational processes, including outcomes, services, and the overall impact on individuals, communities, and sustainable development goals. |
| Measurement (Febres, 2018) | It is often assessed through indicators related to teaching effectiveness, curriculum relevance, student performance, and the overall educational experience. | It is measured through indicators related to accessibility, inclusivity, educational outcomes, and the contribution to sustainable development objectives. |
| Outcome (Meiqari <i>et al.</i> , 2019) | The goal of focusing on the quality of education is to ensure that the educational processes and inputs are of high standard, leading to positive learning outcomes and student development. | The objective of quality education is not only to improve the educational system but also to promote social equity, economic development, and individual empowerment through education, aligning with broader sustainable development goals. |

Source: Own elaboration

This table presents a comparative analysis between "Quality of Education" and "Quality Education" across various key parameters and dimensions, providing a structured framework to do it.

The concepts of "Quality of Education" and "Quality Education" differ in priorities and perspectives. "Quality of Education" emphasizes subjective metrics like student satisfaction, value for money, and the role of teachers, viewing students as customers and prioritizing educational infrastructure and materials and reputable study programs and specialization. In contrast, "Quality Education" focuses on objective outcomes such as academic success, intellectual development, and learning achievements, adopting a holistic and human-centric approach with inclusivity, diversity, and alignment with societal needs. While both frameworks acknowledge environmental sustainability, their planning perspectives differ, with "Quality Education" stressing resources, facilities, and conducive environments, and "Quality of Education" focusing on transformation and satisfaction as educational outcomes.

Table 2 also offers a comparative analysis between "Quality of Education" and "Quality Education (SDG 4)" and provides a valuable comparison between these two frameworks of educational quality, highlighting their different focuses, scopes, measurement approaches, and ultimate objectives or outcomes (dimensions). While "Quality of Education" zooms in on internal educational processes like teaching methods and curriculum design, "Quality Education (SDG 4)" broadens its scope to encompass societal objectives such as inclusivity and sustainable development. Measurement methods differ accordingly, with the former focusing on teaching effectiveness and student performance, and the latter considering inclusivity, accessibility, and contributions to sustainable development goals. Ultimately, while both frameworks aim to enhance education, "Quality Education (SDG 4)" uniquely strives for societal equity, economic development, and individual empowerment in alignment with sustainable development objectives, emphasizing a holistic approach to educational quality assessment.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted nature of quality education, drawing from a synthesis of various scholarly references, it is observed that the concept of "quality of education" as a complex construct with diverse dimensions and perspectives, as highlighted by Parvaiz, Hussain and Rehman (2020). This multifaceted perception is further explored through studies emphasizing students' varied perspectives, particularly regarding 'quality as transformation/added value' and 'quality as value for money' (Jungblut *et al.*, 2015).

The transition towards market competition and entrepreneurial orientation in higher education institutions, as noted by Ostojić and Šimić (2021), adds another layer of complexity to the quality discourse. The struggle between a marketized, consumerised definition of quality and definitions based on the transformation of students is evident in higher education policy documents (Ashwin *et al.*, 2013).

The discussion then shifts towards understanding quality of education as the fulfilment of students' needs, excellence, and transformation, supported by the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the significance of addressing students' basic psychological needs (Shah *et al.*, 2021). This includes the provision of educational infrastructure, materials, and a conducive learning atmosphere (Hoi, 2022). Additionally, the measurement of students' perception of service quality, meritocratic indicators, and knowledge development are identified as crucial aspects of quality education (Petruzzellis *et al.*, 2006).

Further, the discussion highlights the evolving role of students as customers in education, emphasizing the importance of meeting their preferences and needs (Eagle & Brennan, 2007). It also addresses the significance of reputable study programmes, specialization, and the measurement of student satisfaction, motivation, and intellectual development (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2016). Moreover, the complexity of defining quality education is acknowledged, considering the tension between market-driven and student transformation-based definitions (Lomas, 2002).

In alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the discussion extends to the various initiatives undertaken by universities to promote quality education, such as systematic SDG mapping and the integration of digital skills (Sonetti, Barioglio and Campobenedetto, 2020; Mejía Benavides *et al.*, 2023). The integration of SDGs into curricular units and the use of open educational resources are also emphasized as crucial contributions towards achieving SDG 4 (Chaleta *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the discussion underscores the importance of recognizing and embracing differences in pursuing quality improvement within education (Grant *et al.*, 2022). Overall, the synthesis provides a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of quality education and the diverse efforts towards its enhancement within the context of SDG 4.

Table 3, presented below, outlines the similarities between Quality of Education and Quality Education (SDG 4), emphasizing their multifaceted nature and shared objectives in enhancing educational outcomes.

Table 3 – Similarities between quality of education and quality education

| Similarity | Justification | Author(s) |
|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Multifaceted nature | Both concepts are multifaceted, encompassing various dimensions and perspectives | (Parvaiz <i>et al.</i> , 2020) |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Student-centered | Emphasize the fulfillment of students' needs, requirements, and desires, reflecting excellence and transformation | (Hoi, 2022) |
| Importance of infrastructure and materials | Recognize the crucial role of educational infrastructure and materials in meeting students' needs and ensuring a conducive learning environment | (Khairi <i>et al.</i> , 2023) |
| Student satisfaction and engagement | Highlight the significance of addressing students' basic psychological needs for increased engagement and academic achievement | (Shah <i>et al.</i> , 2021) |
| Students | Acknowledge the role of students as customers of education, emphasizing the importance of meeting their preferences and needs | (Petruzzellis <i>et al.</i> , 2006). |
| Embrace differences and unique contexts | Stress the importance of recognizing and embracing differences in the pursuit of quality improvement, considering unique contexts and challenges within education | (Grant <i>et al.</i> , 2022) |
| Contribution to SDG 4 | Actively contribute to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) - Quality Education, aligning with global sustainability goals | (Mejía Benavides <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Sonetti <i>et al.</i> , 2020) |
| Focus on Educational Outcomes | Both concepts aim to ensure that the educational system provides positive learning outcomes for students. They both seek to improve the quality of education and promote student development. | (Hoi, 2022; Parvaiz <i>et al.</i> , 2020). |
| Emphasis on Teaching and Learning Processes | Both concepts recognize the importance of effective teaching and learning processes in achieving desired educational outcomes. They both focus on factors such as teaching methods, curriculum design, and educational support services. | (Jungblut <i>et al.</i> , 2015) |

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3 outlines the similarities between Quality of Education and Quality Education (SDG 4), emphasizing their multifaceted nature and shared objectives in enhancing educational outcomes. Both concepts adopt a student-centered approach, prioritizing the fulfillment of students' needs and desires, thus reflecting excellence and transformation. They recognize the critical role of educational infrastructure and materials in facilitating effective learning environments. Additionally, both highlight the importance of student satisfaction and engagement, addressing psychological needs to boost academic achievement. They view students as customers of education, underscoring the need to meet their preferences. Furthermore, both concepts stress the importance of embracing differences and unique contexts within educational settings, and they actively contribute to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), aligning with global sustainability objectives. Overall, Table 4 illustrates that despite their distinct focuses, Quality of Education and Quality Education (SDG 4) share significant commonalities aimed at improving educational experiences and outcomes.

Table 4 – Relationship between Quality of Education and Quality Education (SDG 4)

| Quality of Education | Quality Education (SDG4) | Authors |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| <i>Comprehensive Approach</i> | | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| The focuses on the processes, inputs, and mechanisms within the educational system to achieve desired learning outcomes. | On the other hand, emphasizes a broader and more inclusive approach to education, ensuring that education is accessible, relevant, and of high quality for all individuals. | (González García <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Hoi, 2022) |
| Shared Objectives | | |
| Both concepts share common objectives of promoting positive learning outcomes, student development, and educational excellence. They aim to create an environment where students can thrive, learn effectively, and achieve their full potential. | | (González García <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Hoi, 2022) |
| Continuous Improvement | | |
| Both concepts advocate for continuous improvement in the educational system, emphasizing the need for ongoing assessment, evaluation, and enhancement of educational practices to ensure that students receive a high-quality education that meets their needs and prepares them for the future. | | (González García <i>et al.</i> , 2020) |
| Mutual Enhancement | | |
| Improving the quality of education, such as enhancing teaching methods, curriculum design, and educational resources, directly contributes to the provision of quality education. By ensuring that the educational processes and inputs are of high standard, the overall quality of education is elevated, aligning with the goals of quality education. | | (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Khairi <i>et al.</i> , 2023) |
| Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals | | |
| Quality education and quality of education are aligned with broader sustainable development goals, emphasizing the importance of education in promoting social equity, economic development, and individual empowerment. By focusing on improving educational quality and accessibility, both concepts contribute to the advancement of sustainable development objectives. | | (González García <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Ismail Pawero & Umar, 2021; Kocot <i>et al.</i> , 2024) |

Source: Own elaboration

Table 4 presents the similarities between Quality of Education and Quality Education (SDG 4), establishing an important connection to the earlier discussions in Tables 1 and 2. In Table 1, the distinctions between "quality education" and "quality of education" are outlined, emphasizing their differing focuses: while "quality education" aligns with the broader societal outcomes and objectives defined by Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), "quality of education" delves into the essential processes, resources, and management practices that drive those outcomes. This foundational understanding sets the stage for analyzing their interconnectedness.

Table 2 further complements this framework by detailing the methodology used to filter relevant literature on both concepts, leading to a refined selection of articles that specifically address quality and education. The rigorous analysis of the 21 articles included in Table 2 supports a nuanced examination of the perspectives, similarities, and differences highlighted in Table 4. Through this methodical approach, Tables 1 and 2 collectively inform the insights presented in Table 4, illustrating how both concepts, despite their unique emphases, converge on shared goals aimed at improving educational quality and outcomes. This synergy reinforces the significance of a comprehensive understanding of educational quality, as both "quality of education" and "quality education (SDG 4)" play vital roles in achieving holistic educational excellence and sustainability.

By identifying the key differences and similarities between the two concepts, it was also possible to verify the existence of a relationship between them. The comprehensive approach to education,

highlighted by authors such as Hoi (2022) and García *et al.* (2020), emphasizes processes and mechanisms within the system, while quality education, particularly under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), as discussed by the same author, ensures accessibility and relevance for all individuals. Both concepts share common objectives of promoting positive learning outcomes, student development, and educational excellence (García *et al.*, 2020; Hoi, 2022).

Table 4 presents five specific aspects of both quality of education and quality education, emphasizing their comprehensive approach, shared objectives, continuous improvement, mutual enhancement, and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It's important to remember that the purpose of this research is to elucidate about the distinctions, similarities, and relationships between the concepts of "Quality Education" as defined by Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and "Quality of Education." This inquiry is for enhancing educational policies and practices, allowing stakeholders to better navigate and implement frameworks that promote effective learning outcomes.

Considering the research purpose, Table 4 illustrates the multifaceted relationship between Quality of Education and Quality Education (SDG 4), emphasizing their shared objectives, such as promoting positive learning outcomes, ensuring student development, and fostering continuous improvement. By analyzing these elements, we can delineate how enhancing the quality of education reinforces the broader goals of quality education, ultimately driving educational excellence aligned with international development objectives.

The distinctions drawn in Table 1 highlight how "Quality Education" targets overarching outcomes such as accessibility and inclusivity, while "Quality of Education" concentrates on the internal processes that yield these results. Understanding these differences allows for a more nuanced appreciation of how the aims outlined in Table 4 can be realized through targeted initiatives in educational practice and policy.

The methodological rigor presented in Table 2 provides the foundation for the insights in Table 4. By employing a scoping review methodology guided by the PRISMA recommendations, this research ensured comprehensive and transparent reporting of existing evidence related to both quality frameworks. The results and patterns identified through this method give credence to the relationships defined in Table 4, affirming that quality education initiatives benefit from a robust understanding of quality of education metrics.

Quality of education focuses on the internal processes and mechanisms of the educational system to achieve desired learning outcomes, while quality education, particularly under SDG 4, adopts a broader and inclusive perspective, ensuring equitable access and relevance for all individuals. Despite their differences, both concepts converge on promoting positive learning outcomes, student development, and continuous enhancement within the educational landscape. In addition, the way in which improving the quality of education contributes directly to the provision of quality education is underlined, highlighting the interconnection between these concepts and their mutual reinforcement in promoting educational excellence and sustainable development goals.

At the end, the above-mentioned authors collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and nuances of quality education, aligning with the multifaceted nature of SDG 4 and

emphasizing the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach to education and quality of education. They also allow to answer to why does it seems to be a confusion between both concepts, namely quality of education and quality education.

Final Considerations

This study allows us to answer to the initial question: "What are the perspectives, similarities, and differences between the concepts of Quality Education (SDG 4) and Quality of Education?". Both concepts share several similarities and differences and aim to ensure positive learning outcomes, student development, and similar goals of promoting educational excellence. It is emphasized the importance of effective teaching methods, curriculum design, educational resources in achieving desired educational outcomes, and advocate for continuous improvement in the educational system through ongoing assessment and evaluation. However, Quality Education under SDG 4 takes a broader and more inclusive approach, focusing on ensuring education is accessible, relevant, and of high quality for all individuals, aligning with broader sustainable development goals. On the other hand, Quality of Education primarily focuses on the processes, inputs, and mechanisms within the educational system to achieve desired learning outcomes.

While both concepts overlap in their goals of promoting educational quality and accessibility, they differ in their scope and emphasis on sustainable development objectives. The interchangeable use of terms and the complexity of education lead to confusion, as stakeholders and contexts may interpret them differently. Moreover, diverse implementations and measurements further blur their distinction. Clearing up terms and establishing precise frameworks for comprehension and evaluation can alleviate this confusion.

After what has been studied, it is also important to delineate the concepts of "Quality Education" and "Quality of Education," as their definitions and implications are central to advancing educational practices and policies aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Therefore, Quality Education refers to a holistic and inclusive educational framework that emphasizes equitable access, relevance, and high standards of learning for all individuals. This concept aligns with the objectives of SDG 4, which aspires to ensure that every learner, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to receive a transformative education that promotes intellectual, social, and emotional development. Quality Education incorporates not only academic success but also the inclusivity and diversity necessary to meet societal needs and foster sustainable development. It prioritizes the outcomes of education, ensuring that learners emerge as capable and engaged citizens who contribute positively to their communities. On the other hand, Quality of Education focuses on the underlying processes, resources, and management practices that shape educational experiences and influence outcomes. This concept delves into the mechanisms of teaching, curriculum design, educational infrastructure, and the professional development of educators. Quality of Education encompasses parameters such as teaching effectiveness, student engagement, and the availability of educational materials, all of which are critical to fostering an environment conducive to effective learning. By investigating the internal aspects of educational systems, Quality of Education helps pinpoint areas for improvement that can lead to enhanced learner outcomes.

A conclusion of the study is that quality education as well as quality of education are complex concepts with various dimensions, but at the end both move forward to give all a good educational system, leaving no one behind.

One limitation of the study lies in the selection and inclusion criteria of the articles, as excluding articles can lead to a narrow representation of perspectives and potentially overlook relevant knowledge from related domains and valuable contributions discussing similar concepts under different terminologies or frameworks. Further limitations to this study include the strategic choice of research, the databases used and the centralization of the study in existing literature and theoretical development, limiting the exploration of empirical evidence, case studies and the impact of quality education initiatives.

Given the complexity involved in constructing and analyzing information, authors must demonstrate profound dedication when compiling, elaborating, and interpreting it. The vast number of scholars exploring this topic suggests that additional pertinent documents may exist in WoS, Scopus, and other databases, potentially omitted. Nonetheless, this subjectivity paves the way for further avenues of research, emphasizing the growing importance of understanding this phenomenon. Despite existing studies on the subject, more are needed.

This work has led to questions that would be relevant to answer in future studies, such as why there are institutions that require SDG 4 to be associated to all curricular units and whether in doing so, they are making inappropriate use of this association? Is everyone involved in education aware of what quality education is and what it entails? What results would be obtained by mapping SDG 4 in educational institutions other than higher education? Is there similar confusion in the context of SDG 3, namely regarding the distinction between the concepts of quality of health and health quality? This question could launch a discussion about the complexities and nuances in the field of healthcare and whether the knowledge gained could be used to formulate strategies to promote equity, access and health outcomes in line with Sustainable Development.

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