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THE PROFILE OF PEER EVALUATOR IN THE ARCU-SUL SYSTEM

O perfil do avaliador no Sistema ARCU-SUL

El perfil del par evaluador em el Sistema Arcu-Sur

Rogério Dentello[1]
E-mail: rogeriodentello@gmail.com
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5839-0929

Dilvo Ilvo Ristoff[2]
E-mail: ristoff.dilvo@gmail.com
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2113-1309

Abstract: This article outlines and discusses the expected profile of professionals who evaluate undergraduate programs in the International Accreditation System of Mercosul and Associated States, Arcu-Sul. Based on (a) definitions from specialized literature; (b) the principles established by the National Accreditation Agencies of the Mercosul Region; (c) the specific experience of Inep in establishing its Bank of Evaluators (Basis); and (d) the empirical analysis of participants' performance in this international evaluation process for program accreditation, it is inferred that the desired profile for evaluators within the scope of Mercosul´s evaluation cooperation must go beyond the simple requirement of expertise and experience in the area of the evaluated programs. From the Arcu-Sul evaluator, as he is part of an international evaluation process, of a cooperative and supportive nature, of building mutual trust between the countries and agents involved, a significant list of other qualities is also expected, qualities such as familiarity with evaluation processes for the purposes of accreditation and mutual recognition; ability to adapt to different contexts; good communication skills in the official languages of Mercosul; overcoming biases and pre-conceived nationally oriented judgments; uncompromising commitment to the work agenda defined by the accrediting agencies; full awareness of possible difficulties in logistics related to travel, accommodation and eating habits in the country of the programs under evaluation; academic management experience; ability to carry out teamwork; ethical behavior; commitment to the search for quality, among many other virtues.

Keywords: Arcu-Sul; accreditation; evaluators.

[1] Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, Brasília, DF, Brasil.
[2] Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil.

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Resumo: Este artigo delineia e discute o perfil esperado dos profissionais que avaliam os cursos de graduação no Sistema Internacional de Acreditação do Mercosul e Estados Associados, o Arcu-Sul. A partir (a) de definições da literatura especializada, (b) dos princípios estabelecidos pelas Agências Nacionais de Acreditação da Região do Mercosul, (c) da experiência específica do Inep na constituição do seu Banco de Avaliadores do Sistema (Basis) e (d) da observação da performance dos participantes deste processo de avaliação internacional para acreditação de cursos, infere-se que o perfil desejado para os avaliadores, no âmbito da cooperação avaliativa do Mercosul, deve ir além da exigência de notório saber e de experiência na área dos cursos avaliados. Do avaliador do Arcu-Sul, por estar inserido em um processo de avaliação internacional, de natureza cooperativa e solidária, de construção de confiança mútua entre os países e agentes envolvidos, espera-se, além dessas, um rol significativo de outras qualidades, entre elas: familiaridade com os processos avaliativos para fins de acreditação e reconhecimento mútuo; capacidade de adaptação a contextos diversos; boa comunicação nas línguas oficiais do Mercosul; superação de eventuais preconceitos e juízos pré-concebidos e nacionalmente orientados; compromisso inarredável com a agenda de trabalho definida pelas agências acreditadoras; plena consciência das eventuais dificuldades de logística, viagem, hospedagem e hábitos alimentares distintos no país dos cursos sob avaliação; experiência de gestão acadêmica; capacidade para realizar trabalho em equipe; comportamento ético; compromisso com a busca da qualidade, entre muitas outras virtudes.

Palavras-chave: Arcu-Sul; acreditação; avaliadores.

Resumen: Este artículo esboza y discute el perfil esperado de los profesionales que evalúan carreras de grado en el Sistema Internacional de Acreditación del Mercosur y Estados Asociados, Arcu-Sur. A partir de (a) las definiciones de la literatura especializada, (b) los principios establecidos por las Agencias Nacionales de Acreditación de la Región del Mercosur, (c) la experiencia específica del Inep en la constitución de su Banco de Pares Evaluadores (Basis) y (d) la observación del rendimiento de los participantes en este proceso de evaluación internacional para acreditación de cursos, se infiere que el perfil deseado para los evaluadores en el ámbito de la cooperación evaluativa del Mercosur debe ir más allá de la exigencia de poseer experiencia y especialización en el área de la carrera evaluada. Del par evaluador Arcu-Sur, al estar inserto en un proceso de evaluación internacional, de carácter cooperativo y solidario, de construcción de confianza mutua entre los países y los agentes involucrados, se espera una lista significativa de otras cualidades, entre ellas, familiaridad con los procesos de evaluación con fines de acreditación y reconocimiento mutuo, capacidad de adaptación a diferentes contextos, buena comunicación en los idiomas oficiales del Mercosur, superación de prejuicios y juicios preconcebidos y orientados según las características de su nación, compromiso inquebrantable con la agenda de trabajo definida por las agencias acreditadoras, pleno conocimiento de las

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posibles dificultades en logística, viajes, alojamiento y diferentes hábitos alimenticios en el país de los cursos bajo evaluación, experiencia en gestión académica, capacidad de trabajo en equipo, comportamiento ético, compromiso con la búsqueda de la calidad, entre otras muchas virtudes.

Palabras clave: Arcu-Sur; acreditación; evaluadores.

1 PRESENTATION

This article focuses on the peer evaluator—an expert professor duly trained for the role—who plays a central part in the evaluation activities of the Accreditation System for Undergraduate Programs of Mercosur and Associated States, known as the Arcu-Sul System. Examining the profile of this professional is important for improving a system that aims to ensure the quality of higher education at the regional level. Overcoming the national boundaries of evaluation requires a new type of evaluator, with interdisciplinary characteristics, since their performance goes beyond technical knowledge or expertise in their academic field. They must adapt to the language, social, and economic characteristics of the location visited, work effectively in teams, and be prepared to face diversity in its many forms.

Brazilian regionalist Fábio Régio Bento uses the term internationalism, which could be applied to the particular role of an international evaluator. According to the author:

> The internationalist operates from a local experience, which could be a State, a company, an international NGO, and identifies strategies to advance the interests of the group they represent in the world. The internationalist is not stateless, not without a country, state, or specific culture. The internationalist is a locally situated citizen-professional, with a native language and a native culture, but who broadens their scope of responsibility and action for professional or ideological reasons [...] (Bento, 2013, p. 3).

The evaluator, who is sometimes feared for having access to institutional details, must be a critical observer without assuming the role of a judge detached from the evaluative process's collaborative spirit.

As a peer to the faculty members being evaluated, the evaluator acts as the eyes of the national accreditation agency and is entrusted by their country to capture a "snapshot" of the academic program applying for regional accreditation. Such accreditation establishes a quality equivalence with the best programs in other member countries of the Arcu-Sul[3] System and triggers a series of academic, scientific, and social benefits.

[3] The countries in which the System is currently operational are Brazil, Argentina, Paraquay, Chile and Colombia.

A good evaluator may be recognized by their capacity to engage in role-playing within the appropriate thematic context—placing themselves in the position of institutional administrators, faculty, students, and technical staff. This ability allows them to set aside preconceived notions shaped by prior experiences. It entails fostering what Scriven (1991) describes as bias control, which he considers a crucial element of evaluation. According to Scriven, this is "not an attempt to exclude the influence of definite viewpoints, but a way to limit the influence of unjustified perspectives, e.g., premature and irrelevant conclusions" (Scriven, 1991, p. 69).

Furthermore, a good evaluator exercises ethical authority by respecting the local context in which the academic community operates, as well as the institution's mission and autonomy—ensuring that the rigor of external evaluation does not suppress imagination, creativity, or cognitive flexibility. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing the principles of pertinent knowledge as proposed by the French philosopher Edgar Morin (2000, p. 14):

> There is a critical, often ignored problem: the need to promote knowledge that can grasp global and fundamental problems and insert partial and local knowledge into them. [...] It is necessary to develop the human mind's natural ability to place all this information into context and into a whole. We must teach the methods that allow for the establishment of mutual relationships and reciprocal influences between the parts and the whole in a complex world.

There is a substantial body of literature on educational evaluation that discusses the role of the evaluator, including works by Nevo (1997), Stufflebeam (2014), Patton (2002), and Ristoff (2024). It is not difficult to find agreement among these authors regarding this figure—the body of evaluators—as a plural collective. Even when an agency provides comprehensive training—covering legislation, ethical principles, and key conceptual frameworks—there is no guarantee that the evaluation process will fully meet expectations.

In this sense, one might say that just as our efforts to lead a healthy lifestyle do not grant us full immunity against unexpected illnesses, the training of evaluators cannot entirely prevent unforeseen or adverse events during on-site evaluations.

Ristoff (2024), a prolific contributor to the literature on this subject, coordinated the evaluator pool of the National System of Higher Education Evaluation (Sinaes) and had firsthand experience with the challenges evaluators face in the day-to-day functioning of such a vast evaluation system. In his book Revisitando o Sinaes (2024), Ristoff addresses concerns regarding evaluator quality and dedicates a chapter to various fallacies, including: (a) the Harvard Fallacy; (b) the Homeopathic Fallacy; (c) the Irrelevant Expertise Fallacy; (d) Ethical Fallacies and Conflicts of Interest; (e) the Halo Effect; and (f) the Intentional Fallacy. These fallacies offer philosophical insight into the evaluator's reality. Ristoff (2024, p. 160) concludes that:

> The reliability of an evaluation system such as Sinaes largely depends on its ability to remove or reduce the negative effects of these and other identifiable fallacies.

Vianna (2014, 1999), in his discussion of the complexity of educational evaluation and the challenges of proper evaluator training, draws on his own experience as an evaluator.

Dias Sobrinho (2007), a leading scholar linking theory and evaluative practice, addresses the epistemological foundations of evaluation, emphasizing the importance of contextualization to understand the various paths and timely applicability of evaluation processes. In his analysis of the effects of educational evaluation, he highlights the value of democratic evaluation, which promotes self-evaluation and individual experience, as well as external evaluation aimed at the public good.

Stufflebeam (2014) dissects the profile of an ideal evaluator, describing the necessary traits as: technical competence; impartiality and objectivity; ethics and integrity; clear and comprehensible communication; cultural and social sensitivity; flexibility and adaptability; and management and organizational skills.

Scriven (2007) advocates the use of a checklist to guide evaluators in preparing their reports. This checklist should be revisited throughout the evaluation process and updated as new information becomes available. Its purpose is to provide a systematic framework that ensures evaluators address all relevant aspects and can (a) draw more robust and well-supported conclusions and (b) gain a deeper understanding of the evaluation's impact and effectiveness.

Drawing on insights from both national and international literature, the importance of the evaluator's role in developing reliable and well-structured evaluation processes becomes evident. Rather than proposing a fixed model of evaluator qualities and behavior, this article—guided by expert perspectives and observations from the Arcu-Sul System—aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in evaluator performance and to outline a path toward improving this crucial educational quality assurance system within Mercosur.

2 INTRODUCTION

In 2008, during a meeting of the Ministers of Education (RME) of Mercosur, a resolution was adopted establishing the foundation of the Accreditation System for Undergraduate Programs in South America. The term Arcu-Sul—short for Acreditación Regional de Carreras Universitarias—came to define the scope of this evaluation and accreditation system.

Arcu-Sul replaced the Experimental Accreditation Mechanism (Mexa), which had been created in 1998 and conducted evaluations between 2002 and 2006. Mexa was a

pioneering initiative designed to promote regional integration in the field of higher education.

Table 1 – Accreditations carried out by Mexa, by year of result issuance, academic area, and country

Year of result issuance	Academic Area	Country						
		Total	Argentina	Brazil	Paraguay	Uruguay	Bolivia	Chile
Total.....		62	14	12	7	8	13	8
2004.....	Agronomy	17	4	3	1	1	3	5
2005.....	Agronomy	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
2006.....	Agronomy	1	-	-	-	-	1	-
	Engineering	27	6	6	5	5	5	-
	Medicine	7	3	3	1	-	-	-
2007.....	Engineering	3	-	-	-	1	2	-
	Medicine	3	-	-	-	1	2	-
2008.....	Medicine	3	-	-	-	-	-	3

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on analysis of Accreditation Resolutions (available at arcusur.org).

The operationalization of Mexa—namely, the on-site evaluations—was carried out from 2002 to 2006. The table above shows the year in which the Accreditation Resolution was issued for the evaluated programs.

"Integration" became a key term in regional international relations across different country blocs worldwide. Mercosur, which originated from mutual commercial interests, expanded its scope into various areas, including education—much like similar movements in other parts of the world.

The Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (Inep), an autonomous federal agency linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC), ceased to operate solely at the national level in 2012 and began to engage in international activities. One such initiative was a collaboration project via the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with Cape Verde, which included the establishment of a higher education evaluation system in that country. Another example is the growing integration with evaluation systems within the Ibero-American Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RIACES)[4].

In the context of higher education, Inep's most prominent international engagement has been with the System for the Accreditation of Undergraduate Programs of Mercosur and Associated States, known as Arcu-Sul. This system was jointly planned and agreed upon by the member countries and is subject to ongoing self-evaluation aimed at its improvement and expansion. Currently, it encompasses the

[4] The participation of Brazil in Riaces, which began in 2004, deserves detailed explanation and will be the subject of another document.

four Mercosur member countries—Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay—as well as the associated countries Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru (although the latter two have not yet implemented the accreditation process in their territories). Other countries have also expressed interest in joining the system.

Each country is represented by its respective National Accreditation Agency (ANA) and regularly participates in meetings to, among other responsibilities, plan, define common operational guidelines, and train peer evaluators who will work within the Arcu-Sul System.

The system also provides for the training of technical coordinators from the National Accreditation Agencies. These individuals are responsible for accompanying and supporting the peer committees, especially in logistical matters and in acting as intermediaries between the committee and the institution being evaluated. This figure plays a crucial role in the efficiency of the evaluation process, as evaluators are relieved of administrative tasks during the preparatory period and on-site visit. Additionally, the technical coordinator evaluates the evaluators, enabling RANA to understand the level of ethical and professional commitment of its collaborators.

The system's procedures also include guidance for institutions that apply to have their programs accredited, so they can carry out self-assessments and fully understand the process.

The Network of National Accreditation Agencies (RANA) is the decision-making and administrative body of the system, meeting at least twice a year. The host country rotates among the four Mercosur member states, following the bloc's rotating presidency schedule, which lasts six months. The rotation follows alphabetical order: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

The only administrative body of RANA is its Secretariat, which also rotates among the member countries, but for a longer term: two years. The Secretariat is responsible for ensuring compliance with decisions made in RANA meetings and for managing the network's documentation and information.

The accreditation system is not universal, as it includes only certain academic disciplines in its evaluation process. Until 2018, the system covered seven degree programs: Agronomy, Architecture, Nursing, Veterinary Medicine, Engineering, Medicine, and Dentistry. In 2019, Pharmacy, Geology, and Economics were added to the list.

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Table 2 – Accreditations carried out in Arcu-Sul between 2009 and June 2024

Year	Country								
	Total	Argentina	Brazil	Paraguay	Uruguay	Bolivia	Chile	Colombia	Venezuela
Total.....	587	110	99	39	47	172	25	79	16
2009	15	12	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
2010	29	15	-	5	2	-	-	-	7
2011	54	9	-	12	8	10	-	6	9
2012	48	3	-	-	1	34	10	-	-
2013	58	9	49	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014	21	3	15	-	-	-	-	3	-
2015	13	1	12	-	-	-	-	-	-
2016	14	7	4	-	3	-	-	-	-
2017	56	35	-	5	1	6	2	7	-
2018	59	7	-	12	2	18	5	15	-
2019	88	2	8	-	11	59	8	-	-
2020	3	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-
2021	5	-	-	3	2	-	-	-	-
2022	86	-	-	-	12	26	-	48	-
2023	26	7	-	-	1	18	-	-	-
2024	12	-	11	-	1	-	-	-	-

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data available at arcusur.org.

It is worth noting that Venezuela participated in the system until its suspension from Mercosur in 2017, which explains the 16 accredited programs from that country at the time.

3 BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

Although the Agreement on the Creation and Implementation of a System for the Accreditation of Undergraduate Programs for the Regional Recognition of Academic Quality in Mercosur and Associated States was signed by the Ministers of Education in 2008, the Arcu-Sul System was not immediately implemented in Brazil.

Between 2004 and 2006, during the operation of Mexa—the precursor to the Arcu-Sul System—the Secretariat for Higher Education (Sesu) of the Ministry of Education (MEC) conducted evaluations of 12 programs, with the National Education Council (CNE) serving as Brazil's representative. From 2006 onward, Brazil's representation within RANA was assumed by the National Commission for the Evaluation of Higher Education (Conaes). However, due to limited human and financial resources, Conaes was unable to carry out the evaluations directly and was instead tasked with establishing the criteria for the implementation of the Arcu-Sul System in the country. As a result, accreditation evaluations under Arcu-Sul were only effectively carried out starting in 2012, when responsibility was transferred to Inep.

The responsibilities assigned to Conaes were fulfilled in the first half of 2012 through meetings between its representatives and the technical team at Inep. From that point forward, all activities related to the Arcu-Sul System were incorporated into Inep, given that the implementation of the process required ongoing analysis and the development of detailed evaluation procedures.

Following the initial evaluation visits for program accreditation under Arcu-Sul, Brazil was faced with the challenge of aligning with other member countries in meeting the goals of the evaluation cycle—especially since Agronomy and Architecture programs had already been assessed in the other participating states. Brazil also faced a relative disadvantage due to the significantly higher number of programs seeking accreditation. Nevertheless, within just six months, it was possible to carry out evaluation visits for 28 programs in Agronomy and Architecture, as well as seven additional programs in Engineering, Veterinary Medicine, and Nursing.

The planning of these evaluations was led by Inep, drawing on its extensive experience with national evaluation systems, particularly through the National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education (Sinaes). For the implementation of Arcu-Sul, Inep utilized the electronic e-MEC system, which supports the processing and operationalization of procedures within the Ministry of Education. The positive experience gained through national evaluations was adapted to the specific requirements of Arcu-Sul accreditations, with a substantial portion of the procedures for these international evaluations conducted via the electronic platform.

Participation in the Arcu-Sul accreditation process is voluntary. National accreditation agencies define the prerequisites for the selection of programs. Once a program is accredited, it is recognized as being equivalent in quality to those in other South American countries that have successfully completed the same process. The accreditation is valid for a period of six years.

In Brazil, the accreditation evaluation process begins following the selection phase, the program's self-evaluation, and the verification of documentation. Approximately 30 days prior to the on-site visit, a preliminary evaluation phase is initiated. During this stage, the evaluator professors are designated, and the institution's documentation is made available to the peer review committee. The site visit itself spans five days[5], from Monday to Friday, with evaluators arriving in the host city on Sunday and departing on Saturday. The evaluation committee is composed of four members: one Brazilian professor, who serves as the committee coordinator; two foreign professors from different countries; and a technical coordinator.

[5] Each ANA has the autonomy to determine the duration of the visit, according to local legislation and regulations.

The evaluation produces a preliminary report—based on the documentation submitted by the applying program—and a final report based on the on-site verification. The official document recognized by RANA is the Accreditation Resolution, a public record that contains evaluation details and the final opinion issued by the higher body that grants accreditation to the program.

4 EXPECTED PROFILE OF THE EVALUATOR PROFESSIONAL

The Arcu-Sul System's Manual of Procedures clearly emphasizes that teaching experience, academic management background, and familiarity with the technical aspects of evaluation are highly valued attributes for peer evaluators. Similarly, proficiency in foreign languages and the ability to work collaboratively are considered important facilitating factors in the evaluation process. Additionally, personal qualities such as patience and respect are regarded as essential to ensuring a productive and cooperative environment during the evaluation week. In line with this perspective, training sessions at both national and regional levels are designed to highlight and reinforce these key competencies and values.

The Manual of Procedures of the System (Mercosur Education Sector, 2023, p. 13) emphasizes that:

> Peer Evaluators are distinguished experts from the academic and university community or the professional field, with a recognized trajectory in teaching, research, and academic management equivalent to that of the program under accreditation. [...] According to the guidelines defined by RANA for the ARCU-SUR System, in order to be included in the Registry of Peers, candidates must be university professors with the highest academic standing in their country, capable of communicating in the official languages of MERCOSUR, and have participated in training activities established at the national and regional levels by the ARCU-SUR System.

In our region (Latin America), there are university professors with high academic qualifications, which provides fertile ground for forming qualified peer evaluators.

There are also other, more specific characteristics expected of an evaluator, such as: at least ten years of teaching experience; a minimum academic qualification of a master's degree; proven experience in academic management; participation in evaluation processes; and active involvement in research. The current pool of evaluators within the system reveals that these criteria are not uniformly met by all members. Some evaluators are more focused on teaching, others have greater experience in administrative roles, and still others are engaged in various professional fields in which their academic training plays a significant role. This diversity has been seen as a positive feature, as it encourages the exchange of perspectives and contributes to the core objective of the evaluation process: integration.

Proficiency in the working languages of Mercosur—Portuguese and Spanish—is also a requirement. This may be one of the greatest challenges faced by peer evaluators when assessing the quality of a program. Analyzing institutional documentation written in another language—often filled with technical jargon and abbreviations—requires considerable effort. Even with the support of translation tools, professors frequently express uncertainty regarding the accuracy of the information. During site visits, communication among peers can be facilitated through the use of simplified vocabulary. However, in interviews and meetings, a foreign evaluator who is not proficient in the local language must rely on the national peer to interpret and draw evaluative conclusions. A common observation from foreign professors who have participated in evaluations in Brazil is the regret of not mastering the local language, as it prevents them from fully understanding the nuances of what is being said.

Teamwork during Arcu-Sul evaluations depends heavily on the human capacity of professors to adapt. The site visit schedule is intensive from the first to the last day, and the technical coordinator plays a crucial role in helping the team adhere to the timeline. Each member is expected to demonstrate a high level of discipline while remaining open to dialogue, particularly during the preparation and discussion of the final report. Punctuality, organization, and availability are essential.

Physical condition may also influence the ideal evaluator profile. Travel to the institution's location can be exhausting, as can the tours of the facilities and the time required to complete a comprehensive evaluation report. In addition, foreign evaluators often face unfamiliar food habits, and accommodation may not always be comfortable. For this reason, system coordinators recommend that evaluators review logistical requirements in advance to avoid surprises and minimize potential difficulties for the team.

As previously mentioned, the system undergoes constant self-assessment in order to optimize its operations and achieve the excellence desired in assessing undergraduate program quality. Therefore, evaluators who exhibit behavior that does not align with the expected profile for Arcu-Sul evaluations are given lower priority in future assignments. During the Regional Workshop for the Training of Peers and Technical Staff of the ARCUSUR System, held in August 2013 in Bogotá, Colombia, the member countries agreed on the need to assess the evaluator's profile.

To determine whether an evaluator meets the appropriate profile, several factors are taken into account: their attitude toward the work, their interactions with colleagues, their ability to work collaboratively, their flexibility in adapting to varying conditions, their effort to understand the language of others and to communicate effectively, and their adherence to the agreed-upon schedule, among others. This analysis supports the decision on whether the evaluator satisfies the system's expectations or presents challenges that would not warrant their continued

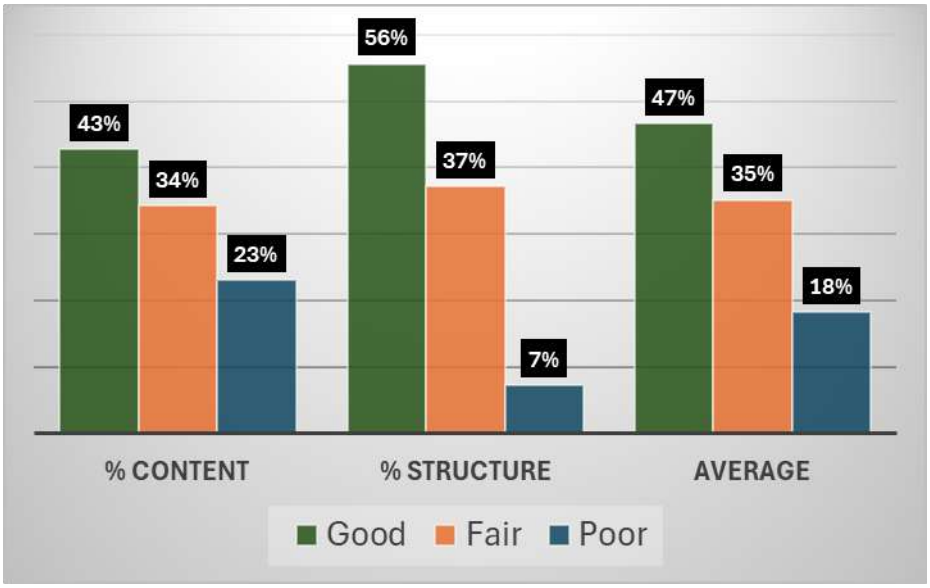
participation. The assessment is based on observations made by both the technical coordinator and the host institution.

Evaluators are trained through regional workshops established by RANA and organized by one or more member countries. Continuous training is also provided through the guidance of the technical coordinator, in-person meetings, distance-learning modules, and procedures established by the respective National Agencies. In addition, training efforts are supported by electronic platforms such as Moodle, which are accessible via personalized login credentials assigned to each evaluator.

The training of peer evaluators within each member country remains a work in progress. To date, there has been no standardization regarding the topics covered, nor sufficient emphasis on sensitive aspects such as the contextualization of the institution under evaluation, the program's engagement with its regional community, or the problematic tendency to compare the evaluated institution with the evaluator's home institution.

The drafting of evaluation reports remains one of the greatest challenges for the agencies responsible for ensuring the quality of the evaluation process. A study commissioned by Inep, which analyzed all Accreditation Resolutions issued between 2010 and 2020 (404 documents), revealed various inconsistencies in the site visit reports—both in terms of content and alignment with the structural guidelines defined by RANA—highlighting weaknesses in the process. This analysis enabled the network to take informed action to address the identified issues.

Figure 1 – Quality analysis of Accreditation Resolutions from 2010 to 2020



Source: Prepared by the authors.

It was found that 57% of reports were considered inadequate in terms of content due to omissions and inconsistencies. Additionally, in 44% of cases, the national agencies responsible for producing the Accreditation Resolutions did not adhere to the structure defined by RANA. These findings demanded corrective action from all involved national agencies.

However, the most severe criticism targets the superiority complex displayed by some evaluators. An air of inspection, arrogance, or even harassment—sometimes observed during on-site evaluations—causes significant harm to the process, including a loss of credibility in the system. As this is a matter of human behavior, often tied to low self-esteem and a constant need for external validation, it prevents these individuals from issuing independent judgments. Given the complexity of this behavioral issue, training programs are not always effective in addressing and mitigating its damaging effects.

Evaluators are expected to embody the guiding principles of Arcu-Sul, as outlined in the 2021–2025 Action Plan of the Mercosur Educational Sector [n.p.]:

a) Trust, to strengthen bonds between countries and foster confidence in future joint activities and programs;

b) Respect and consensus, in the pursuit of understanding and mutual benefit;

c) Solidarity, to ensure the continuity of actions even in the face of adverse situations in any member country; and

d) Cooperation, considering differences and promoting exchange, technical assistance, and collaboration.

Based on empirical analysis of evaluators' performance in the field, the following table details a few episodes related to the profile of these evaluators.

Analytic Table 1 – Analysis of evaluator performance

Observation	Analysis
Evaluation #1: Evaluator 1 demonstrated a slow pace in document analysis and exceeded the responsibilities of their role as a team member by adopting an authoritative stance more akin to that of a supervisor. Evaluator 2 expressed dissatisfaction with the logistical arrangements, requested special accommodations for their return travel, and showed limited engagement with the assigned tasks. Their execution of both preliminary and on-site activities was rushed and lacked thoroughness. Additionally, they scheduled a personal commitment during the evaluation visit, resulting in an extended absence. Evaluator 3, who had prior experience with another evaluation, appeared visibly unsettled by the	The general characteristic of this committee was a lack of integration among members. There was no attempt to build good relationships, and disagreements increased until the final day. The technical coordinator had to devote much of their time to mediating tensions, which compromised their logistical and guidance responsibilities.

coordinator's conduct. Although they completed their tasks within the expected timeframe, their work was superficial and lacked depth.	
Evaluation #2: Evaluator 1 felt insecure because they were younger than their peers and thus struggled to lead, despite being highly competent in the subject area and experienced in national evaluations. They demonstrated qualities that contributed greatly to the evaluation: quick data entry, fluency in Portuguese[6], and effort to communicate with Spanish-speaking colleagues. During the system data entry, they made several improvement suggestions to the technical coordinator. Evaluators 2 and 3 were evaluating in Brazil for the first time, both highly dedicated and impressed by the institution.	One of the only negative points in this evaluation was the excessive time spent in discussions (lack of synthesis ability), which delayed completion of the evaluation form.
Evaluation #3: Evaluator 1 lacked proficiency in Portuguese, requiring the technical coordinator to revise the entire report. Evaluators 2 and 3 were more experienced than the coordinator; however, they respected their role, which fostered a collaborative atmosphere.	The national peer's lack of Portuguese proficiency is a critical issue that may lead to exclusion from the Evaluator Pool.
Evaluation #4: Evaluator 1 was participating in their first Arcu-Sul evaluation but demonstrated subject matter expertise, strong teamwork skills, and non-imposing leadership. Evaluators 2 and 3 were experienced, but one raised concern by venturing out alone during breaks. On one occasion, they got lost, and a search was needed to find them in the city.	This incident jeopardized the process due to the potential for a team member accident. It underscores the importance of evaluators following the technical coordinator's instructions.
Evaluation #5: Evaluator 1 created several issues: took breaks every 30 minutes, declared inability to work in a team, was slow in filling out the evaluation form, failed to engage with colleagues, and made unilateral decisions. Evaluators 2 and 3 had no knowledge of Portuguese, preventing them from actively participating in interviews and document analysis. Additionally, one lacked basic computer skills, further isolating them.	The technical coordinator had to intervene decisively to maintain minimal control over the evaluation. Surprisingly, the national evaluator was a highly respected academic in their field, demonstrating that being an excellent professor does not automatically make one a suitable Arcu-Sul evaluator.
Evaluation #6: Evaluator 1 had a strong academic background as a professor and doctoral advisor. From the start, however, they showed signs of anxiety and an authoritarian attitude, disrupting organizational efforts. They marginalized the technical coordinator, excluded them from committee meetings, and withheld access to the draft site visit report. Evaluators 2 and 3 (foreign) deferred to evaluator 1, who had an advantage in language skills due to Latin origins.	The evaluation resulted in a poor-quality report, marked by inconsistencies between the recommendation and justification, lack of clarity, and numerous grammatical errors. This was the culmination of a process that ignored basic principles such as mutual respect and adherence to Arcu-Sul procedures.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

[6] Unfortunately, not all Brazilian teachers have a good command of Portuguese grammar or spelling.

5 EVALUATION BY THE TECHNICAL COORDINATOR

Data from Inep provide insights gathered by technical coordinators regarding several general aspects of the expected behavior of evaluators. For this article, information was extracted from 32 evaluation teams that operated in Brazil between 2023 and 2024, focusing on the following criteria: foreign language proficiency, computer literacy, teamwork ability, and adherence to procedures. In addition, technical coordinators' notes for some committees also included information about proactivity, punctuality, and empathy. The following charts show the average scores of the three evaluators in each committee (with 5 being the highest possible score). Table 3 – Performance analysis of 32 peer evaluator committees that operated in Brazil between 2023 and 2024

Committee Code	Foreign Language Proficiency	Computer Skills	Teamwork Ability	Adherence to Procedures	Proactivity	Punctuality	Empathy
Average	3,73	4,60	4,73	4,85	4,51	4,69	4,87
#1	3,67	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#2	3,67	3,67	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#3	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...	...	...
#4	3,67	5,00	5,00	5,00	4,00	5,00	5,00
#5	3,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#6	3,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#7	2,33	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#8	3,67	5,00	4,33	5,00	4,33	4,33	5,00
#9	3,67	4,33	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#10	3,67	4,33	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#11	5,00	5,00	3,67	3,67	5,00	5,00	3,67
#12	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#13	4,33	5,00	5,00	5,00	4,33	5,00	5,00
#14	1,00	3,67	4,33	5,00	3,00	...	4,33
#15	5,00	4,33	5,00	5,00	...	...	...
#16	3,00	3,00	3,67	4,33	1,00	2,00	4,00
#17	3,00	3,67	3,67	3,67	3,67	3,67	5,00
#18	2,33	5,00	3,00	5,00	...	...	...
#19	3,67	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...
#20	3,67	5,00	5,00	4,33	...	...	...
#21	4,33	3,67	5,00	5,00	5,00	4,33	5,00
#22	3,00	3,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
#23	3,00	4,33	5,00	5,00	...	...	...
#24	3,67	5,00	5,00	4,33	5,00	5,00	5,00
#25	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...	...	...
#26	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...	5,00
#27	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...	5,00
#28	3,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...	5,00
#29	3,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...	...
#30	3,00	4,33	5,00	5,00	...	...	...
#31	5,00	5,00	3,67	5,00	3,00	...	5,00
#32	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	...	...	5,00

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from Inep.

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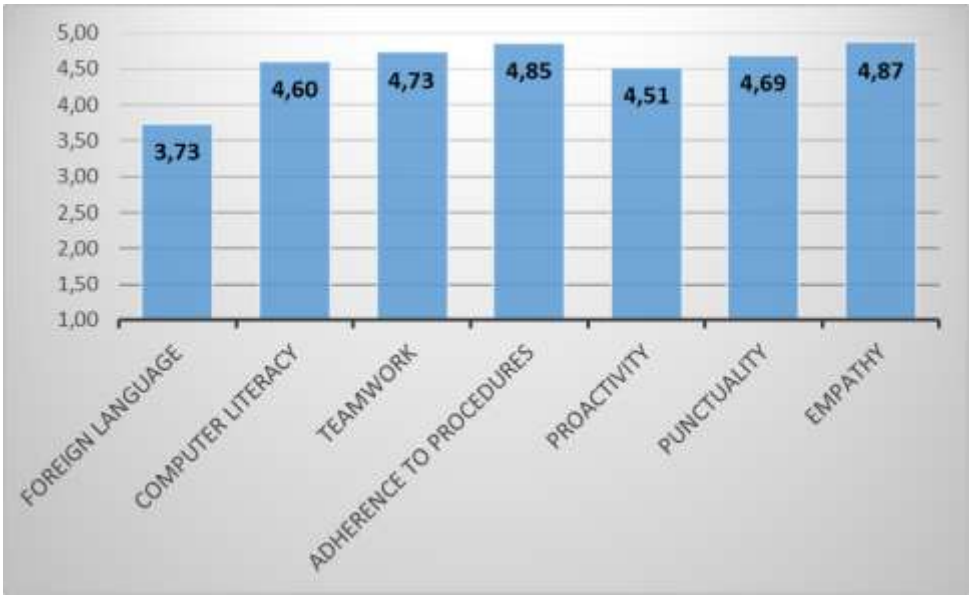
From the table above, the following observations can be made:

a) Only 28% of the committees achieved the highest score for foreign language proficiency. Note that fluency was not required—only the ability to communicate with peers;
b) In the computer literacy criterion, most committees received the highest score. Only 34% scored below 5;
c) Regarding teamwork, only 7 committees did not reach the ideal performance level;
d) In almost all committees, adherence to procedures was rated as excellent. It can be concluded that strong teamwork contributes to compliance with the guidelines provided during training;
e) Proactivity was assessed in only 24 committees. Of those, 71% received the highest rating. This criterion is likely harder for technical coordinators to assess, due to the short interaction time during the visit and the fact that foreign evaluators often participate remotely via videoconference;
f) Similarly, punctuality was recorded in only 18 committees. One committee stood out with a very low rating, which is cause for concern. Indeed, this same committee scored poorly in all aspects (3.00; 3.00; 3.67; 4.33; 1.00; 2.00; 4.00), resulting in the lowest overall average in the sample (3.00); and
g) Regarding empathy, 20 out of 23 committees received the highest rating. Only 3 committees scored between 3.67 and 4.

If we were to rank the criteria based on average performance, the order would be: #1 Empathy (4.87); #2 Adherence to procedures (4.85); #3 Teamwork (4.73); #4 Punctuality (4.69); #5 Computer literacy (4.60); #6 Proactivity (4.51); #7 Foreign language communication skills (3.73).

Figure 2 – Average committee scores by evaluation criterion



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from Inep.

6 CONCLUSION

Although the data show that, in many of the criteria mentioned above, evaluators received satisfactory ratings, the Network of National Accreditation Agencies (RANA) cannot forgo its duty to ensure the highest possible quality in evaluations. This also means rigorously and fully meeting all the components of the desired evaluator profile. In other words, the goal must be to pursue the ideal profile, not just an average level of performance—even if this is challenging.

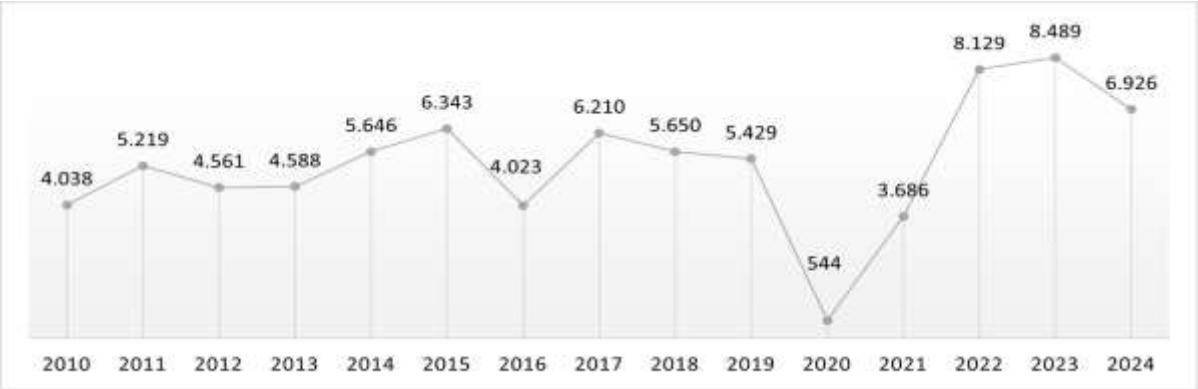
One might fear the conclusion that no evaluator could embody all the characteristics desired or described by Stufflebeam (2014) and other prominent authors. However, what these authors argue is that good evaluations always depend on good evaluators, and that identifying and training them must be a non-negotiable goal of all processes committed to the utility, feasibility, accuracy, propriety, and accountability of evaluations, as established by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation.

Focusing specifically on the Arcu-Sul peer evaluator, the competencies laid out in the Manual of Procedures, combined with the virtues outlined in this article, are gradually helping to build a body of evaluators truly capable of assessing the quality of undergraduate programs in our Latin region.

Since 2012, numerous Arcu-Sul evaluations have taken place in Brazil. Naturally, the initial experiences were more difficult, as this was an entirely new activity for Inep, which at the time had a newly hired team of civil servants from a recent public service exam. Internationalization was not a priority for the agency, given the vast amount of work it was already doing at the national level.

Assuming responsibility for Arcu-Sul, however, turned out to be more a matter of adapting existing procedures than creating new ones. With regard to the central theme of this article—the evaluator profile—Inep was already facing the challenge of improving the quality of its national evaluator pool under Sinaes.

Figure 3 – Number of evaluations completed per year by Sinaes



Source: e-MEC/Inep

Between 2010 and 2019, Sinaes recorded an average of 5,000 evaluations per year, all conducted in person. This required the mobilization of thousands of evaluators (two per course evaluation and three per institutional evaluation). With the health crisis caused by COVID-19, in-person activities were suspended, and only 10% of the planned evaluations for 2020 were carried out.

With the implementation of virtual evaluations in 2021, it became possible to resume the backlogged processes. This new methodology led Inep to develop new training for evaluators, now including topics related to virtual environments and ethics in remote work.

Thus, it is important to maintain a sense of proportion between Brazil's national system and Arcu-Sul. As previously mentioned, the number of undergraduate programs in Brazil is far greater than in the other countries of the Latin American bloc. Brazil's evaluator pool currently includes around 6,000 members, and ensuring the ideal profile among them requires far more effort due to the impracticality of close individual monitoring.

The ability to analyze Arcu-Sul evaluator performance has brought valuable insights for national planning. By identifying strengths and weaknesses among peer evaluators, the training provided to national evaluators can be improved—even if only through sample-based supervision of their performance.

The cohesion developed over the years among RANA's member agencies has ensured a process of continuous improvement in the training of peer evaluators. Training, once conducted entirely in person, has become virtual, with the creation of theoretical and practical learning environments involving exercises and synchronous activities. This has expanded access to training for a greater number of candidates from different countries.

Recently, RANA implemented a hybrid evaluation model, in which the national evaluator and the technical coordinator are physically present at the institution, while foreign peers participate remotely. This has significantly reduced costs and eliminated logistical difficulties.

While this initiative offers several advantages, it also introduces new challenges, such as the need for an evaluator profile that includes sufficient technological skills to conduct virtual visits, access digital folders, participate in virtual meetings, work on shared documents, and communicate clearly.

Therefore, we recognize that the ideal evaluator profile is also dynamic, and requires a willingness to adapt to change. However, some fundamental characteristics remain constant for international evaluators: academic experience, knowledge of evaluation processes, resilience, respect, and ethics.

In light of the extensive literature—and the common ground among authors on the essential attributes of evaluators—and based on the practical experience of

implementing Arcu-Sul and analyzing evaluation reports, it is possible to conclude that an evaluator's effectiveness depends on multiple factors, including their personal and cultural traits. It may be possible to develop an extremely detailed training course, covering many different scenarios and offering feedback based on simulations. This could help shape a potentially ideal profile, assuming we discount the complications of unethical behavior, and still leaves room for the critical final element of training: in loco experience.

Finally, it is worth discussing the suggestion that certain characteristics are particularly important for Arcu-Sul peer evaluators—especially those proposed in this article. Improving the evaluation process requires an approach that considers cultural differences and guarantees respect for local contexts, in the spirit of inculturation.

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Authors' contributions

Dilvo Ilvo Ristoff — worked mainly on developing the methodology, constructing the summary, writing the English version of the summary, indicating specialized literature, substantiating the statements throughout the text, paying attention to textual formality and making various writing improvements.

Rogério Dentello — collaborated with th preparation of the initial proposal for the article, in the investigation process based on data collection and observation, in the capture of data from Inep and Arcu-Sul, in the research on the performance of evaluators, in the historical survey of the Arcu-Sul system and in the creation of tables, figures and charts.

Translated by:
Rogério Dentello
E-mail: rogerio@dentello.com.br