

THE PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Rethinking Higher Education in Latin America Countries

MORENO VALLEJO Jaime Rodrigo, PhD in Economics, labor and production. Pablo de Olavide University in Seville, Spain. Master's degree in International Relations and Communication. Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Management. Queen Margaret University, United Kingdom. Slippery Rock University United States. Pennsylvania State Government. Advisor to the Mayor of Pasto - Colombia. Advisor University of Nariño, Pasto, Colombia. PhD – Full time position Technical University of the North Ibarra - Ecuador. jmoreno@utn.edu.ec - FACAE +573168427570.

Higher education in developing countries is characterised by expansion, resource scarcity, increased competition, accountability to more stakeholders and the growing complexity of knowledge. At the same time, most developing countries have adopted policies that are in favour of increasing higher education as a free vital right for example the public policy into higher education in Ecuador, as a means of redressing past imbalances and providing national economies with the high-level skilled manpower required to enhance economic development and to alleviate poverty.

The Final Report of the World Conference on Higher Education in the 21st Century, Vision and Action, highlights the capacity of higher education to "transform and promote change and the progress of society" (UNESCO, 1998, p.20). Consequently, countries with their national governments and their higher education institutions work to fulfill this global purpose, by improving quality.

The problem of research is posed with the following question based on an analysis of the current literature and trends that allow us identify 'the problem'. Thus it is prudent to pose the following research question: What methodological strategies contribute to the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education, as a contribution to regional development? And as a research hypothesis at this stage it can be inferred that the methodological tools of the quality assurance of higher education contribute directly to regional development.

Taking all this into account, the general objective of the research is to analyze and propose methodological strategies for the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education, as a contribution to regional development and identify the contemporary scope of the reform of Córdoba in relation to the principles of autonomy, cogovernment, gratuity and access, academic freedom and university extension that includes all Universities cross over Latin America into democracy and education.

The specific objectives are:

- Analyze the normative and conceptual context of the assurance of the quality of higher education for Latin America Universities; and to formulate methodological strategies to continually improve the quality of higher education and its contribution to regional development.
- Approach the different scenarios of the Latin American higher education system in the process of regional integration.
- Systematize the advances developed around the public policy of higher education focus on social pertinence and academic relevance
- Analyze the elements of articulation between diversity and interculturality around the democratization of education.
- Analyze the quality assurance systems and arrangements to improve the quality in Latin American Universities as an answer to build a path of integration.

The research will examine a theoretical framework. In doing this, the research contributes to the development of a conceptual framework allowing us to explain why those methodological strategies will improve the quality of higher education. Following this, the research will develop a study that allow the universities have a management model according to the social requirements through the development international cooperation strategies between universities in Latin America and Europe.

Education serves as a fundamental and critical building block to further promote and encourage political, social and economic development within the context of regional development. The establishment of democratic institutions as well as free and open markets, both critical to regional development efforts, require an informed and educated populace. In many Latin American countries political participation is often restricted by a multitude of factors. Not all citizens have equal access to the political process and one of the major factors affecting this include lack of access to institutions of higher education, because an educated populace facilitates the institutionalization of democracy. Education is critical and key to both regional and, ultimately, national economic development strategies.

A key component to any notion of democracy and fundamental building block of democratic theory is the centrality of participation to the democratic process and the importance of having an educated citizenry to facilitate this process. This seemingly self evident truth can be a driving force in the promotion of community and political participation. Access to Institutions of higher education can faster encourage and support community and political organizations because in this way innovation and promotion are encouraged in defense of democratic processes in institutions built on the notion of trust in reciprocity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main concepts to analyze in this research, will be directly interrelated, are described below; giving special importance to the fact that the current theoretical and normative approaches in Colombia, Ecuador, and the world, for continuous improvement and the assurance of quality, are based on principles that must be adopted by the leading human talent and ascribed to the institutions of higher education to be successful in this process it is evident that the failure to achieve the purposes of quality assurance, is due to the absence or weak application of one or more of the following principles:

PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY - INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ISO 9000 (Organización Internacional de Normalización -ISO-, 2015a, pp. 3–10).

PRINCIPLES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA.

VALORATIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE NATIONAL ACCREDITATION COUNCIL (Consejo Nacional de Acreditación, 2013b, p. 9)

- a) Universality.
- b) Integrity.
- c) Equity.
- d) Responsibility.
- e) Coherence.
- f) Transparency.
- g) Relevance.
- h) Efficiency.
- i) Sustainability.

PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY - INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ISO 9000 (Organización Internacional de Normalización -ISO-, 2015a, pp. 3–10).

- a) Focus on the client.
- b) Leadership.
- c) Commitment of the people.
- d) Focus on processes.
- e) Improvement.
- f) Decision making based on evidence.
- g) Relationship management.

PRINCIPLES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM (Presidencia de la República de Ecuador, 2010, p. 7)

Art. 12.- Principles of the System.- The Higher Education System will be governed by the principles of responsible autonomy, co-government, equality of opportunities, quality, relevance, integrality and self-determination for the production of thought and knowledge within the framework of the dialogue of knowledge, universal thinking and global technological scientific production.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Javier Delgadillo Macias (Delgadillo, 2001, p.1), "Regional development is a concept inherent in the transformation of the regions. A process and an end in the tasks of administration and promotion of the growth and welfare of the country. As a concept, it refers to a process of qualitative and quantitative changes at the economic, political, social, environmental, technological and territorial levels that take place within the political-administrative units of the territory. "

In this research regional development will be observed, based on a general analysis of the policies in which higher education institutions should directly influence, through the exercise of their mission functions, legally defined by the state.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

For the purposes of this research, the concept of continuous improvement is the fundamental purpose of the management and quality assurance systems that are implemented in higher education institutions in order to comply with the applicable national regulations, they will be defined as the capacity to increase in a recurrent way over time, the level of performance of the indicators defined by the institutions and the academic programs to satisfy the social needs and meet the quality conditions and the accreditation or certification guidelines established by the control entities of higher education.

Since 1987, the International Organization for Standardization -ISO- and to date, has published the international quality standards with greater acceptance worldwide. In doing this, the organisation promotes the implementation and certification of quality management systems (QMS), based on the principles of the management of the quality contained in the ISO 9000 standard (International Organization for Standardization - ISO-, 2015a), as previously detailed in this paper; and required for effective management of its components: Context of the organization, leadership, planning, support, operations, performance evaluation and improvement. All these components have been taken as a theoretical reference for the creation of other applicable standards in different sectors and countries, as is the case of Colombia in which the ISO 9001 standard was adapted (ISO, 2015), to apply it in a mandatory way to entities of the public sector, including public higher education institutions, through the adaptation called: Technical Quality Standard for Public Management -NTCGP 1000 (ICONTEC, 2009).

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Starting in the nineties, the countries in Latin America, pioneers together with New Zealand worldwide, initiated processes of creation and implementation of systems and agencies of evaluation and accreditation for the recognition of high quality of Higher Education Institutions and of the programs offered by them. The aforementioned in view of the role that higher education in the region must play in the formation of advanced human capital by constituting: An essential component of the growth and competitiveness of nations, as a decisive factor in expanding the opportunities of people in the region, labor market and favoring social mobility, as well as playing a key role for the functioning of the institutions that make democratic governance possible and the development of countries, (CINDA, 2012 as cited in Navarro, 2017, page 23).

The implementation of quality assurance processes responds to the specific needs and realities of each national higher education system, and in general, to "a common denomination for a variety of mechanisms tending to control, guarantee and promote the quality of institutions of higher education "CINDA (2012), based on the interaction and information of different actors involved in the educational process. (Navarro, 2017, p.23)

Educational quality means developing an organizational culture oriented towards evaluation, continuous improvement and innovation, both in the program and in the institution, which implies the deployment of policies, strategic programs, projects, actions and resources that are integrated into development plans, promote the fulfillment of missionary statements and an ideal of excellence with active participation of the institutional community. For this to be a strategic priority as proposed by Guzmán (2011), it is necessary that each institution has an adequate organizational structure, processes and mechanisms that make permanent monitoring of the pertinence, efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the academic programs, of the faculties and of the institution, within the framework of a process of self-regulation, whose visible expression before the society and the academic world is the temporary accreditation and its continuous renewal.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LATIN AMERICA

In coherence with international approaches, in Latin America as well as in Europe, each country has models and quality assurance mechanism, according to what is stated in the report of Models and mechanisms of quality assurance in Latin America (CINDA, 2012 cited in Navarro, 2017, page 23). This research will set out the models and mechanism for quality assurance, implemented in 12 countries in Latin America and four European countries, describing the country, the agencies, the dependency, the purpose, the character, the procedure and the level, as well as the degree of implementation of the quality assurance system, which can be: established, in the initial phase and in the process of formation; within which it is identified that the assurance of the quality of higher education depends on state control; Colombia is classified in countries that have an established quality assurance system, along with Portugal, Spain, Chile, Mexico and Costa Rica; and to Ecuador in those that are in the initial phase, along with Panama, Uruguay, Brazil and Peru.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN COLOMBIA

In Colombia, according to the accreditation guidelines for undergraduate programs (Consejo nacional de acreditación, 2013b), "the concept of quality applied to the public good of higher education refers to the synthesis of characteristics that allow recognizing a specific academic program or an institution of a certain type and make a judgment about the relative distance between the way in that institution or in that academic program that service is provided and the optimum that corresponds to its nature. To approach this optimum, the National Accreditation Council has defined a set of general characteristics, from which the judgments on the quality of institutions and academic programs are issued. "It is observed that from the reference of international referents, for Colombia, it is preponderant that higher education contributes to regional development and that, it works around two concepts, academic relevance and social pertinence, which will be discussed in this paper.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ECUADOR

In the case of Ecuador, the assurance of Quality is established in the Organic Law of Higher Education, chapter 1 of the principle of quality,

Art. 93.- Principle of quality.- The principle of quality consists in the constant and systematic search for excellence, relevance, optimal production, transmission of knowledge and development of thought through self-criticism, external criticism and permanent improvement. Art.

96.- Quality assurance. - The Quality Assurance of Higher Education is constituted by the set of actions carried out by institutions linked to this sector, in order to guarantee efficient and effective management, Applicable to careers, academic programs, institutions of higher education and also to the councils or bodies of evaluators and accreditors. (Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador, 2010, page 17).

ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

According to the analysis of international and especially national theoretical and normative precepts, the concept of "academic relevance" is worked, to identify the contributions to regional development, from the impact that academic programs and institutions of higher education make on the community scientific of its discipline, of other disciplines and concretely in the application of said academic aspects in the context.

For the purposes of this research, academic relevance is fundamentally defined based on the guidelines for accreditation of undergraduate academic programs (Consejo Nacional de Acreditación, 2013b, p.20), considering the aspects to be evaluated related to characteristic number three. Understanding that the academic relevance of an academic program and an institution, should be demonstrated from the alignment and contribution to the trends and lines of development of the discipline or profession at the local, regional, national and international levels, updating and relevance of the curriculum according to the needs of the environment; the changes in the curriculum, resulting from experiences related to the analysis and proposed solutions to the problems of the context, among other aspects that will be described more concretely in the development of this research in articulation with the social pertinence.

SOCIAL PERTINENCE

Consistent with the purpose of this research, social pertinence is conceptualized as a priority, revisiting the guidelines for accreditation of undergraduate academic programs (Consejo Nacional de Acreditación, 2013b, p. 11), as "the capacity of the institution and its program to respond to the needs of the environment. Needs to which the institution or the academic program does not respond passively, but proactively, with actions to transform the context in which it operates, within the framework of the values that inspire the institution and define it". In equal measure, the aspects to be evaluated related to characteristic number three of said guidelines will be taken into account. This concept is complemented by the concept of pertinence, given by (García, 2002, p.4), who defines it as "the degree of contribution or intervention of the universities in the solution of the needs or demands of society, in their technical and social dimensions, current and future, the contributions and the way these educational institutions are felt, studied, and perceived by society, in an interaction that takes the environment as its object of study in order to identify problems, propose solutions and participate in them, from a reflective position that allows to maintain in force the principles inherent to its condition of university, worthy of respect and that deserves the support of the community".

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As a contribution to the processes of continuous improvement and accreditation, and with the objective of providing publicly accredited quality services, nationally and internationally, the programs and Institutions of Higher Education have adopted international standards for the discipline of each area of the knowledge, endorsed by prestigious associations and universities; as well as technical standards that contribute to the specialized management of different topics that must be integrated strategically. Some of the International Technical Standards of greater application are the following:

- NTC ISO 9001 - Quality Management Systems (International Organization for Standardization -ISO-, 2015b)
- NTC ISO 14001 - Environmental Management Systems. Requirements with Guidance for its Use (ICONTEC, 2015).
- Standard 18001 - Occupational Health and Safety Management (OHSAS, 2007) which will soon be replaced by the ISO 45001 standard, which is being revised by the ISO.

- NTC ISO 17025 - General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories (International Organization for Standardization -ISO-, 2005).
- NTC ISO 26000 - Corporate Social Responsibility (International Organization for Standardization -ISO-, 2010)
- NTC ISO 31000 - Risk Management. Principles and Guidelines (ICONTEC, 2011).

INTERNAL RULES AND PLANS OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Considering the concepts and norms applied in each country, the institutions define the institutional educational project, the strategic development plan and the internal rules that will make it possible to fulfill its mission in the context.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This research will involve the revision of papers, thesis, research related to higher Education, quality assurance; development plans and objectives, competitiveness indicators and the validity of the principles that motivated the Reform of Córdoba in 1918 commitments of higher education to society.

Analysis of information in the contexts:

- Macro -International
- Meso -National
- Micro -of Higher Education Institutions

PROGRESS PLAN FOR THE PROPOSED POSTDOC PROJECT.

Analyze the validity of the principles that motivated the Reform of Córdoba in 1918.
Commitments of higher education to society.
Reform agendas for the 21st century.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Articulation of higher education: basic education and media with tertiary education.
Quality assessment and assurance: international regimes and national needs.
Gender equity in higher education.
Online and distance education: advantages and disadvantages of this modality

SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND INTERCULTURALITY

Cultural diversity, inclusion and public policies.
Native peoples, cultures and higher education.
Specific regimes to regulate intercultural higher education.

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES OF RECOGNIZED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE REGION.

Access to higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean.
Financing and sustainability of Universities in the region.
The new challenges that democratic governance and the knowledge society pose to universities.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP, TECHNOLOGICAL TECHNICAL TRAINING AND PRODUCTIVE SECTOR

Articulation of higher education with the productive sector.
Experience of entrepreneurship projects.
Advantages of technical and technological training for the development.

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